

THE

# REAL THING

REAL LIFE  
IN  
FAKE CITIES

A DOCUMENTARY BY  
BENOIT FELICI

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2018 OUTSPOKEN. OUTSTANDING.

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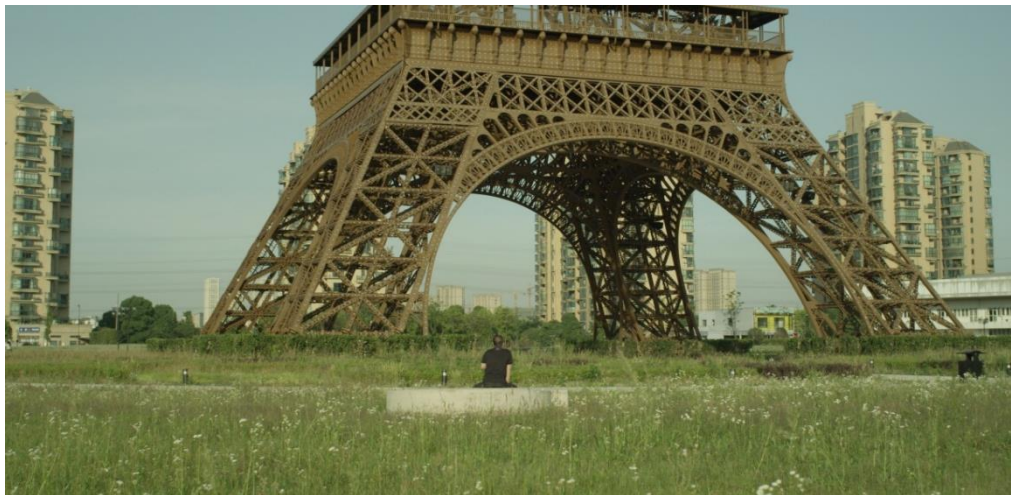
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www.THEREALTHING.FILM



SET OUT, EXPLORE EVERY COAST,  
AND SEEK THIS CITY,  
THE KHAN SAYS TO MARCO POLO.  
THEN COME BACK AND TELL ME  
IF MY DREAM CORRESPONDS  
TO REALITY

ITALO CALVINO,  
INVISIBLE CITIES





Paris, the Taj Mahal, Venice, the Vatican.

All these monuments and many more have replicas scattered around the globe. Not just simple copies, these constructions are “mirrors” in which a certain image of the world is reflected.

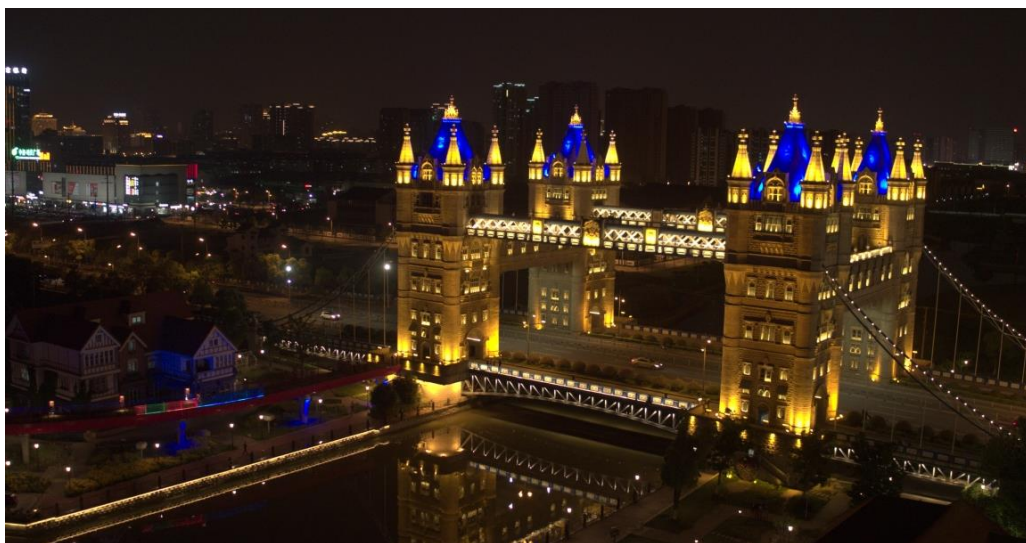
WHY DO THESE PLACES EXIST?

WHO MAKES THEM, WHO THINKS THEM UP?

AND WHAT STORIES ARE BORN WITHIN,

WHERE SOME CHOOSE TO LIVE?

**THE REAL THING** is a journey into a copy of our world.





**N**owadays, people can live in the Doge's Palace of Venice in China, pray in a larger copy of St. Peter's Basilica in West Africa, or be buried in a much smaller replica of India's Taj Mahal.

THE REAL THING investigates these and other replicas of the world's most famous landmarks in order to understand why they were built, and how they are inhabited.

Doppelgängers are as ancient as the history of architecture, but today's copies have changed in both scale and purpose. Entire cities and monuments are being rebuilt thousands of miles away from their models, and often turned into residential areas. They are not remakes of Las Vegas or Disneyland, but places where people live real lives, where they raise their children.

Our journey takes us to brand new European-style neighborhoods built for the Chinese middle-class. To a tomb that a retired postman modelled for his wife and himself on the world's largest symbol of eternal love. To a massive replica of the Vatican in Ivory Coast, whose architect predicted the new Rome would be African. Along the way, we meet the people who bring these places to life: investors, architects, guides, and residents.

THERE IS ACTUALLY  
NO UNREALITY HERE,  
IT'S ALL REAL,  
BUT SOME OF IT  
IS REAL FAKE

ANTHONY  
MACKAY  
**ARCHITECT**

Between lucrative investments, architectural piracy, and modern tourism, each of these places expresses an aspect of how cities are shaped by globalization. They bear witness to shifting cultural frontiers. They appear as “mirages” in which fiction and reality contaminate each other.

WHEN OTHERS BUILD  
SIMULACRA  
OF OUR CITIES  
AND LANDSCAPES,  
WE EUROPEANS  
THINK THAT IT  
GOES TOO FAR.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS  
STASZAK  
GEOGRAPHER

Are these replicas heralds of a world of closed borders, where tourists will safely travel without moving? Are they really about cultural exchange, as real estate executives say? And what do they tell us about their mostly European models, which are also transformed by mass tourism?

To decipher the purpose and the meaning of these familiar yet strange-looking places, the film combines “expert” voices – a photographer’s, a geographer’s, an historian’s – with those of the inhabitants themselves. Why did they join the “inner diaspora” of city dwellers, living in Shanghai and London at the same time?

The director’s questions are returned to the audience. Some might react with apprehension to new forms of “relocation”, applied this time not to companies and factories, but to entire cities and monuments. Others will find the replicas entertaining, yet wonder what their own life would be if transposed in the copy of another culture. All will be confronted to a form of visual shock: these fakes certainly make the “global village” look real – or even surreal.





As we meet these characters and places, THE REAL THING draws us into an extraordinary exploration of a dream-like world composed of copycats. A world of familiar appearances and unexpected encounters, where real and fake constantly overlap.

The film takes advantage of the *trompe-l'oeil* effect of the original and the copy to invite the audience on a game of perception. Not either entirely “here”, nor truly “there”, their notions of space and distance are constantly put into question. Benoit Felici uses these places, and the screen that reflects them, as “mirrors” – though not of the original models, but of ourselves.

## THE MIDDLE KINGDOM HAS RECENTLY TRANSFORMED ITSELF INTO THE CENTER THAT CONTAINS THE WORLD

BIANCA  
BOSKER  
AUTHOR  
PHOTOGRAPHER



## CHARACTERS

Christie HANGZHOU, CHINA

I don't think architecture can influence people. But people transform architecture. Here it looks like Paris. But the people here, their habits, are nothing like Paris.



Father Stan YAMO USSOUKRO, IVORY COAST

The first time I saw Our Lady of Peace I couldn't believe such a thing could exist. With time, the basilica has found a place in the hearts of the Ivorian people.



Xiaowei SUZHOU, CHINA

Taking photos near London Tower bridge is like capturing a souvenir. It represents a journey or a dream that never really happened.



Faizul DIBAI, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

This is no Taj Mahal. It is a memory of love, a palace of love. I made my own copy. Because I love my wife the same way that Shah Jahan loved his.





## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



**Benoit Felici** is a French-Italian filmmaker graduated from the Zelig film school in Italy.

Maybe because almost all of his closest relatives are architects, Benoit's films often look at how we inhabit places and how they change with time and our cultural uses.

His previous film "Unfinished Italy" was a journey into the remains of incomplete buildings and infrastructure, scattered throughout rural Italy, and which had turned into ruins. The film received 15 international awards (Documenta Madrid, Premiers Plans d'Angers) and was screened widely in the international film festivals circuit.

In THE REAL THING, Benoit follows the path that led him to "Unfinished Italy" and brings his reflection to a new focus: the world's architectural replicas, the reality of life in fake surroundings.

In 2013 Benoit Felici received the Foundation Lagardère's Excellence Grant as a documentary author.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

### THE REAL THING

Documentary, 54', ARTE France / Artline Films, 2018

### THE REAL THING VR

Documentary, 15', ARTE France / Artline Films / DVgroup, 2018  
Co-directed by Mathias Chelebourg

### PREMIER VOTE

Documentary, 26', France 3, 2017

### GRÈCE, UNE VIE SANS VOIX

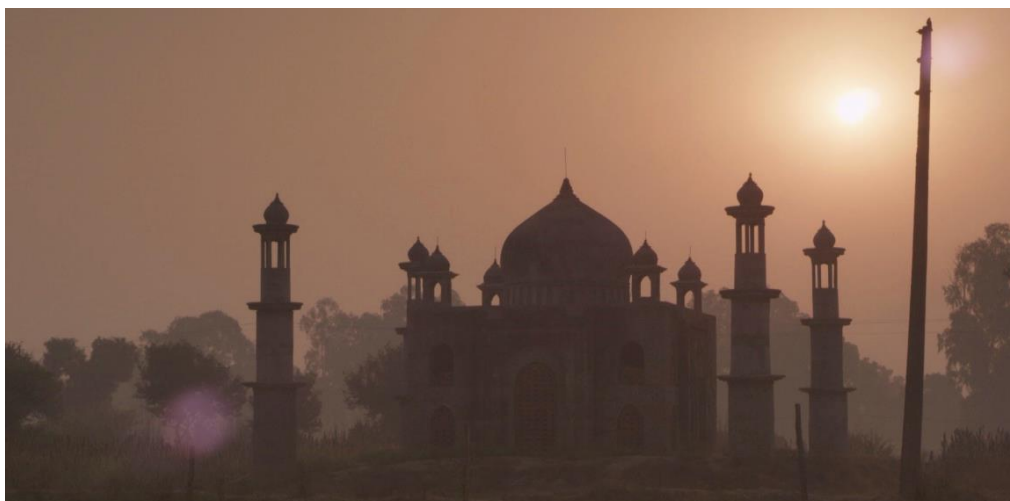
Short documentary, France-Greece, 2013

### UNFINISHED ITALY

Documentary, 35', Italy, 2010

70 selections in festivals; main awards:

- Premiers plans d'Angers, 2011
- Best Italian documentary award at RIFF Roma, 2011
- Best short international documentary award, Documenta Madrid, 2011
- First prize at Les Écrans Documentaires, 2011
- Mention Spéciale CNC, Best Italian short film, 2011
- Best Italian documentary award at Festival Sediciorto, 2011
- First prize at FIFE Environmental Film Festival, Paris, 2012



## PRODUCERS' BIOGRAPHY

### Benjamin LANDSBERGER

Benjamin Landsberger has been working with Artline Films as a producer since 2003, primarily on international documentary coproductions on the arts, history and current affairs. He has co-authored several feature documentaries including "Clockwork Climate" (ARTE, distrib. PBS), "The Rise of the Gulf" (ARTE/2M, distrib. ZED), "The Black Sun of Hiroshima" (France 3/NHK, distrib. FTD). As delegate for a network of producers, he launched the first French-speaking online platform for non-fiction, FILM-DOCUMENTAIRE.FR. A former student of Sciences-Po Paris and the London School of Economics, Benjamin graduated in Political Philosophy (IEP of Paris).

### Olivier MILLE

Born in 1957, Olivier Mille is producer and film director. He obtained a PhD in Philosophy at the University of Paris-Sorbonne, and taught cinema studies and literature at the University of Basel (Switzerland) for 7 years. In 1986, he founded the production company Artline Films. Since then, he has worked as both a film director and film producer. He has directed 20 documentaries and produced over 150 films in collaboration with major French and foreign broadcasters. He has been a member of several film commissions (CNC, Procirep) and president of the International Festival of Audiovisual Programmes (FIPA).

## RECENT ARTLINE FILMS PRODUCTIONS

**Hitchcock-Truffaut** (80') Kent Jones | ARTE France, Cohen Media Group, Ciné+  
Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2015

**Snapshots of Russia** (4x26') Alexander Abaturon | ARTE France  
Official Selection, FIFA Montréal 2017

**DIY Country** (80', 55') Antony Butts | ARTE France  
Official Selection, Hot Docs 2016

**Hitler's Champions** (100') Jean-Christophe Rosé | France 3, Planète+, RTS, TV5Monde



## PRODUCTION NOTES

Benoit Felici, in his previous award-winning documentary "Unfinished Italy", had already explored a parallel world, revealing all its strangeness. The remains of incomplete buildings and infrastructure, scattered throughout rural Italy, that had turned into ruins. The blocks of concrete were marked by the passing of time, like the antique remains of a failed civilisation.

Among them, some of the film's characters evolved as if they were the very last inhabitants of this "unfinished" world. Benoit's filmmaking had turned a feature of Italian landscapes - with politics, the mafia and corruption in the background - into a universal story, that questions the inherent relation of architecture to time.

With his new project THE REAL THING, Benoit has followed the path that led him to "Unfinished to Italy", and brought his reflexion to a new scale.

Architectural copycats have already been the focus of several films and many journalistic works. However, to date, none have attempted to explain how the largest copies, from monuments to entire cities, have in recent years become a worldwide phenomenon.

If China is clearly the largest producer of monumental replicas, countless copycats can be found in the Americas, the Middle East, or even Africa. And many have been turned into residential areas where locals have chosen to live or work.



Shot over 2 years in 7 countries, THE REAL THING relies on cutting-edge 4K RED cinematography and aerial photography to enhance the perception of architecture, thus offering an exceptionally detailed visual account of the copycats explored throughout the story. Extensive shooting time on location has enabled us to gain extensive access to both our main characters' daily lives, and to their environment.

The film is coproduced by ARTLINE FILMS together with ARTE (France/Germany), and with the participation of YLE (Finland), RDI (Canada), RSI (Switzerland), Ceska TV (Czech Rep.), MBC Al Arabiya (UAE), Sky NZ (New Zealand), Odisea (Spain).

For the development of this project, Benoit received an "Excellence Grant" from the Lagardère Foundation (France). The film is also supported by IDM (South Tyrol), the Architecture department of the French Ministry of Culture, CNC, and Procirep (France). It was selected and pitched at IDFA (2014 Round Table pitches), Docs Barcelona (2015), Berlinale ("Talents" session), Hot Docs Forum (2017).





## THE REAL THING VR

Together with the 54-minute documentary, Artline Films and ARTE France have coproduced with DVgroup a **15-minute VR experience** codirected by Benoit Felici and Mathias Chelebourg.

As VR technology leads the way to virtual tourism, copycat cities compete to offer a genuine experience of immobile travel. This VR documentary combines both to enhance a whole new feeling of ubiquity. Driven by their eyes' movements, users travel from Paris to London and Venice without leaving China, **walking the thin line between reality and virtuality**. They meet the cities' inhabitants, who guide them in the parallel world where they have chosen to live.

The film has been entirely shot and produced in 8K, combined with high-resolution 3D-scanning of the 3 locations, to achieve a stunningly immersive experience.



## PARTNERS

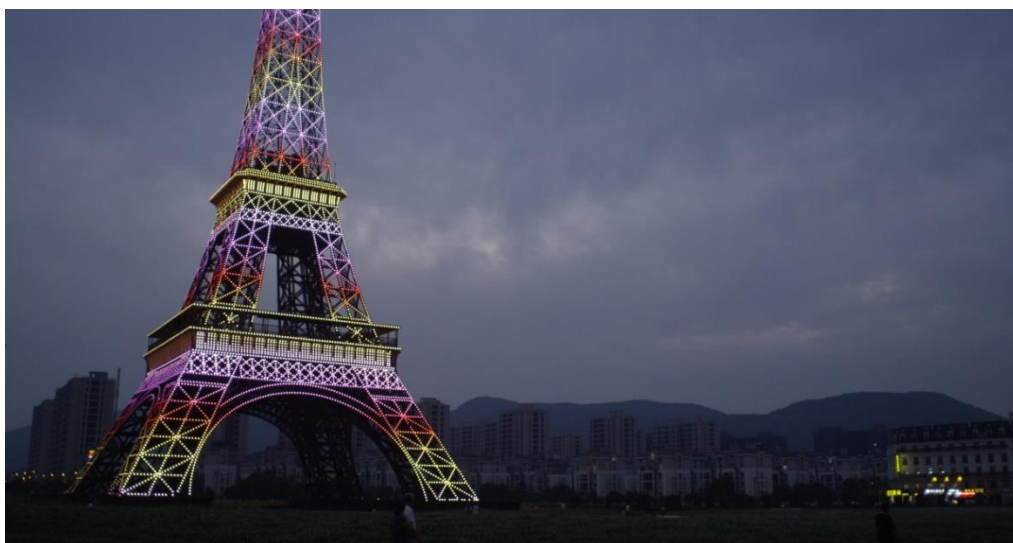


South Tyrol's film funding program has operated as a financing and service partner for film and television productions since 2011. Founded as a department of the BLS Business Location Südtirol Alto Adige, the Film Fund & Commission is since 2016 a part of the newly created South Tyrolean organization IDM Südtirol - Alto Adige, whose areas of responsibility include the promotion of film in the province, among others. Every year the film fund makes 5 million Euro available for production and development funding. One criterion for the awarding of funds is the economic territorial effect: it must be at least 150% of the requested funding.

In addition to film support in this narrower sense, IDM's mandate also includes the following areas of responsibility: production and location services for projects that will be filmed in South Tyrol, promotion of South Tyrol as a film location both at home and abroad, and the development of South Tyrol as a film location from a professional point of view.







Format	54' / 4K
Original languages	English, Chinese, French, Hindi
Main locations	Hangzhou, Suzhou, Shanghai (China), Yamoussoukro, Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Dibai, Uttar Pradesh (India), Paris (France)
Website	<a href="http://www.therealthing.film">www.therealthing.film</a>
Country of production	France
French title	ARCHIFAUX
First broadcast	ARTE (France, Germany), June 2018
Logline	Countless replicas of iconic monuments are built all around the globe. Real life in fake cities, "The Real Thing" is a journey into a copy of our world.

## CREDITS

A film by	Benoit Felici
Editor	Sophie Brunet
Cinematography	Bastian Esser

Music	Pablo Pico
Grading	Florian Geiser
Sound editing & mix	Stefano Grosso
Graphics	Francesco Fioretto
Executive producer	Benjamin Landsberger
Production manager	Philipp Griess
Line producers	Li Xiaobin, David Borenstein
Production assistant	Judith Matheron
Production team	Katya Panova, Cécile Croizat, Delphine Pineau
Administration	Cinéciel / Laura Cavaciutti, Claude Roy
Trainees	Émilie Carré, Elliott Baillon
Second camera	Alessandro d'Emilia
Sound	Benjamin Vossler
Additional editing	Emanuela Macchniz, Antoine Favre
Assistant editors	Maëlle Henry, Etienne Pintelon
Technical facilities	Artline Films, Cine Chromatix, PhotoCineRent
Fixer	Audrey Coral
Translations	Ma Ke, Li Min-Yu, Swati Kirtane, Suzanne Lemay, Lydie Chang-Bertrix, Regan Kramer
Archive	Photos by Bianca Bosker Private collections All rights reserved
Additional music	Martin Wheeler  "Gnossienne n°1" (E. Satie) interpreted by Duplessy & the 3 Violins of the World (P) Absilone  « La vie en rose... Indian » (E. Piaf / Louiguy) interpreted by Pascal Héni © Sony ATV / Ed. Beuscher Arpège (P) BelieveDigital

Coproduced by     Artline Films  
                             Olivier Mille, Victoire Buff

ARTE France  
Society and Culture Unit  
Fabrice Puchault  
Commissioning editor  
Mark Edwards  
Administrator  
Françoise Tsitsichvili  
Postproduction supervisor  
Rachel Anquetil

in association with   YLE  
                             RDI Radio-Canada  
                             MBC Al-Arabiya  
                             Ceska TV  
                             RSI  
                             Sky NZ  
                             AMC Networks Odisea

with support from    IDM South Tyrol  
                             Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée  
  
                             PROCIREP – Société des Producteurs, ANGOA  
  
                             Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication  
                             Direction générale des patrimoines  
                             Service de l'architecture

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