

SOCIAL ANIMALS, MK PRODUCTIONS, QUIET, CINÉ-TAMARIS  
PRESENT



# TEHACHAPI

A FILM BY JR

2023 – FRANCE – ENGLISH – 92'

**mk2**  
FILMS

## **SYNOPSIS**

---

Over three years, French artist JR developed large-scale artworks in a maximum-security prison in California in collaboration with those incarcerated at the institution and the prison staff. The project shows the power of art as a tool for hope and transformation in an inherently violent carceral system.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

---

I have always been interested in jails. After all, jails are just walls and walls are my canvas. I did a project a few years ago in Rikers Island and it was a fascinating experience because nothing happens in a prison, and when those who are there are confronted with something new, it quickly becomes a highlight. They invest so much energy in it that it gets very emotional. A friend called me recently to say that I could be granted access to a jail in California. At first, I thought it would be too much paperwork and too many constraints, but luckily someone who participated in my project *The Chronicles of San Francisco* facilitated the process. So, with Google Earth, I browsed all the 35 Californian state prisons, and I chose Tehachapi without knowing it was a maximum-security prison ... I just thought that the yard and the surroundings would make a perfect image.

The idea was to meet with men working on rehabilitation, and to also engage formerly incarcerated men, their family members, as well as the prison staff and survivors of violent crimes.

When I got there, I understood that most of these men were incarcerated when they were teenagers between 13 and 20. I told them about my project and made it clear that I did not want to know what they had done. They had a trial, they have been sentenced and I am not their judge. Nevertheless, a couple of guys left because they felt that their presence would be embarrassing for their families or for the families of their victims.

I was asked not to approach the guys too closely because they are not comfortable with interactions, but when I got in, I couldn't refrain from looking at them in the eyes, shaking their hands, introducing myself, and asking their names. Just because that's what humans do. They were amazingly grateful for this; a number of them were in prison for life because of the three strikes law in California.

Some will be freed because the law has changed since they got in. During the process I was allowed to use my phone and I shared stories about the pasting on social media. I received reactions from everywhere, from their families, from victims, from critics, from people who were shocked by the swastika tattooed on the face of a man, etc. I shared them and we discussed.

The families of the inmates started replying on social media and for a brief moment there was a connection between the inside and the outside. When the artwork was pasted, we decided to wait for a couple of weeks so we could put together a platform for everyone to hear the stories. Why? Because we know that it is a sensitive subject and we wanted anyone to be able to listen to stories of hope and redemption, to hear testimonies that one doesn't normally get. Because what happened there when these men, their guards, and some victims all worked together on an art piece has to be seen. We wanted to share the process and embrace the complexity of human actions and feelings that we have witnessed. These men have been judged guilty when they were young; some were dragged into gangs and made heavy mistakes, and they have paid or are paying the price. They say that they have changed and they are ready to become active citizens, to give a meaning to their lives.

The final image was captured with a drone. It also features some formerly incarcerated men and victims who accepted to forgive and come inside the prison to paste the huge image composed of 338 strips of paper.

A few years ago, I started a journey called "Can art change the world?" It is still an open question. And with this project, I want to raise another question: "Can a man change?" Before answering yes or no, ask yourself the question: Did I change? Did I make mistakes, apologize, and amend? If I did, why couldn't they?

## ABOUT JR

---

JR has the largest art gallery in the world. From the slums of Brazil to the streets of New York, he exhibits freely around the world, catching the attention of people who are not typical museum visitors. JR collaborates with communities by taking portraits of every-day people, printing them large-scale, and wheat pasting the images in public spaces.

In 2011, he received the TED Prize, with which he created Inside Out, a global participatory art project that allows people worldwide to get their picture taken and paste it to support an idea and share their experience. As of July 2023, over 500,000 people from more than 152 countries have participated by creating their own installations or entering one of the gigantic photobooths.

Some of his projects include a TIME Magazine cover about Guns in America, a video mural including 1,200 people presented at SFMOMA, a collaboration with New York City Ballet, an Academy Award Nominated feature documentary co-directed with Nouvelle Vague legend Agnès Varda, a huge installation on the Pantheon in Paris, the pasting of a container ship, the pyramid of the Louvre, a monumental mural “à la Diego Rivera” in the suburbs of Paris, giant scaffolding installations at the 2016 Rio Olympics, an exhibition on the abandoned hospital of Ellis Island, two short films starring Robert De Niro, a social restaurant for homeless and refugees in Paris or a gigantic installation at the US-Mexico border fence.

The anonymity of JR and the absence of any explanation accompanying his huge portraits leave space for an encounter between the subject and the passer-by to reflect, thus forming the essence of his work.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

**2022** - THE PAST GOES FAST (*short*)

**2021** - PAPER & GLUE (*feature documentary*)

**2020** - OMELIA CONTADINA (*short*), *co-directed with Alice Rohrwacher*

**2017** - VISAGES VILLAGES (*feature documentary*), *co-directed with Agnès Varda*

**2017** - CHRONIQUES DE CLICHY MONTFERMEIL (*feature documentary*),  
*co-directed with Ladj Ly*

**2015** - ELLIS (*short*)

**2015** - THE STANDING MARCH (*short*)

**2014** - LES BOSQUETS (*short*)

**2013** - WRINKLES OF THE CITY, LA HABANA (*short*), *co-directed with José Parla*

**2011** - WOMEN ARE HEROES (*feature documentary*)

## TEHACHAPI CREW LIST

---

Director	JR
Producers	Rosalie Varda, Marc Azoulay, Marco Berrebi
Coproducers	Nathanaël Karmitz, Elisha Karmitz
Executive Producers	Sol Guy, Scott Budnick
Editors	Maxime Pozzi-Garcia, Sylvie Landra (ACE)
Photography	Roberto De Angelis, John Hunter Nolan, Tasha Van Zandt
Music	Enfant Sauvage
Sound	Eyal Levy, Yves-Marie Omnes, David Chaulier, Antoine Baudouin, Lucile Demarquet, Thierry Delor
Line Producers	Luana Saltiel, Pascal Metge
Art Director	Camille Pajot
Production Coordinator	Valentin Crépain
Camera Operators	Joshua Z. Weinstein, Sebastian Zeck, Eli Goldstein, Yoann de Montgrand
1st Camera Assistants	EJ Misco, Jim Apted, Lawrence Montemayor, Spencer Hemann, Andrew Gerety
2nd Camera Assistants	Chae "Mark" Hyun-Lim, Paul Tilden, Alex Wallace, Jeremiah Kent, Jeffrey Wright, Cal Etcheverry, Mounib Ben Abbes
Video Assistant	James Clark, Michael Balian
Dronepilots	Colin Rich, Caden McMahon
Drone Operators	Scott Carlson, Timothy Millard
Drone Assistant	Jesse Watson
Gimbal Stab.	Christian Swoboda

Digitech

Photo Technician

Photo Post-production

Sound Recordists

Mobile App Development

Interviewer

Audio Editing

Rick Rose

Drake Garber

Fabien Barrau

Brian Robinson, Tad Chamberlain, Jessie Marek, Arnaud Momencau, Jade Howard, Dennis Hamlin

Wolfgang Production UG, Alan Stenberg, Lenart Puselja, Matej Balantic

Eyal Levy

Anne-Marie Litak, Eleanor Bennet, Elori Kramer, Erik Benepe, Tyson Mooren, Wyatt Orme, Jessica Placzek

## CONTACTS

---

### INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Brooke Blumberg  
[blumberg@ssmandl.com](mailto:blumberg@ssmandl.com)



### INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director  
[fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com](mailto:fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com)

Olivier Barbier, Head of Acquisitions  
[olivier.barbier@mk2.com](mailto:olivier.barbier@mk2.com)

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales  
[quentin.bohanna@mk2.com](mailto:quentin.bohanna@mk2.com)

Elise Cochin, International Sales  
[elise.cochin@mk2.com](mailto:elise.cochin@mk2.com)

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager  
[anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com](mailto:anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com)

Visit our website [www.mk2films.com](http://www.mk2films.com)