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FILM SPECIAL **Berlinale 07** - Our Tips / Fifteen
Berlin Directors on the Berlin Film Hype / Funny Film Businesses

INTERVIEWS: Vladimir Kaminer: Next Mayor of Berlin? /
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Funny film business

FROM BLOOD TO FAMILY DOCUMENTARIES, SHREWD BERLIN

ENTREPRENEURS ARE FILLING SOME UNUSUAL NICHEs IN THE FILM INDUSTRY



BIOPICS AND FAMILY FLICKS //////////////////////////////////////

The room is sparsely decorated. A computer desk with dust-guards covering various keyboards occupies one corner, while a rolled-up blue screen hangs over the wall with windows looking onto Stubbenkammerstrasse, a typical Prenzlauer Berg street, and the location of film company Vitascope. A big desk and a few chairs sit in the middle of the room, and aside from a piece of flipchart paper relating to film technique, the only decoration that adorns the walls are two posters of equal size, one covered in lines and dots of green paint and pencil, the other presenting a similar pattern in red.

'That's my daughter's first artwork,' says Joachim Mühleisen, 34, as he walks into the room, coffee mug in hand. 'She drew it a few days ago,' the Vitascope cofounder announces proudly. 'She's 17 months old. So my wife helped a bit.'

It's this love for his family that gave Mühleisen the idea for one of his and his business partner's, Sascha Quednau, current professions: filming life portraits.

Mühleisen and Quednau, both film studies majors from the Freie Universität, formed Vitascope ('contemplating life') in 2003, after Mühleisen went to the south of Germany to visit his dying grandmother and there decided to record a biography about her life. This experience made him realize how much he learned and how much this portrait now means to his family. 'Why not provide this opportunity for others?' he thought.

Since then, Vitascope has filmed about 30 life portraits varying between 20 and 50 minutes in length. Each consists of two to three days of on-site shooting - interviews with the protagonist, filming of sites with personal significance - and about a week of editing; the price for one varies between 1000 and 1500 euros.

Most of the portraits are made at the request of younger people wanting to document the life of an older family member to whom they feel a particular attachment.

'There is an urge now for young people in Germany to want to know about the war generation in a personal way,' says Mühleisen. 'They look within the portraits for orientation. When they see how much their grandmother or grandfather overcame, they realize they can manage just fine.'

Mühleisen says he and Quednau, both Berliners, have learned much about the city from each biography. 'Seeing history be placed in such a personal context - I love it!' One woman chose a tiny cemetery as one of the shooting locations for her life portrait. 'All three of her former husbands had been buried there meters away from each other,' says Mühleisen. 'It was amazing, her entire love life laid there at our feet.'

A highlight for Vitascope was the shooting of the portrait of 89-year-old Rochus Misch, a junior member of Hitler's permanent staff during the latter part of World War II. 'He told us that when he got mar-

ried in 1943, Hitler gave him six bottles of expensive wine,' says Mühleisen. 'Instead of drinking the wine, he dug it in the ground, afraid that he might lose the bottles during the war.' Misch, who was captured by Russians at the end of the war and later lived on East Berlin without being allowed to go back to his old home in the West, forgot about the wine. 'But when we did the interview [in 2005], he remembered that the wine must still be buried somewhere,' says Mühleisen. 'We went back to where he thought the wine was - in a garden now belonging to another family. We dug with him in hopes of finding the bottles, videotaping everything.' Ultimately they did not find the wine but did manage to leave the family's garden in total disarray. 'They thought we were crazy.'

Currently, the Vitascope team is working on the life portrait of a social worker. They have also created an innovative project known as bastardfilms, in which they place everyday people - so far, mostly friends - into well-known movie scenes from cinema favorites, such as *The Godfather* or *Interview with a Vampire*.

In addition, they teach one-time weekend classes on low-budget filmmaking and editing at the Free Film Academy, as well as a four-month-long weekly course at the Volkshochschule. Either option costs 150 euros. -Senka Hadzimiratovic

For more information or sample work, visit www.vitascope.de or call 4005 7639.