

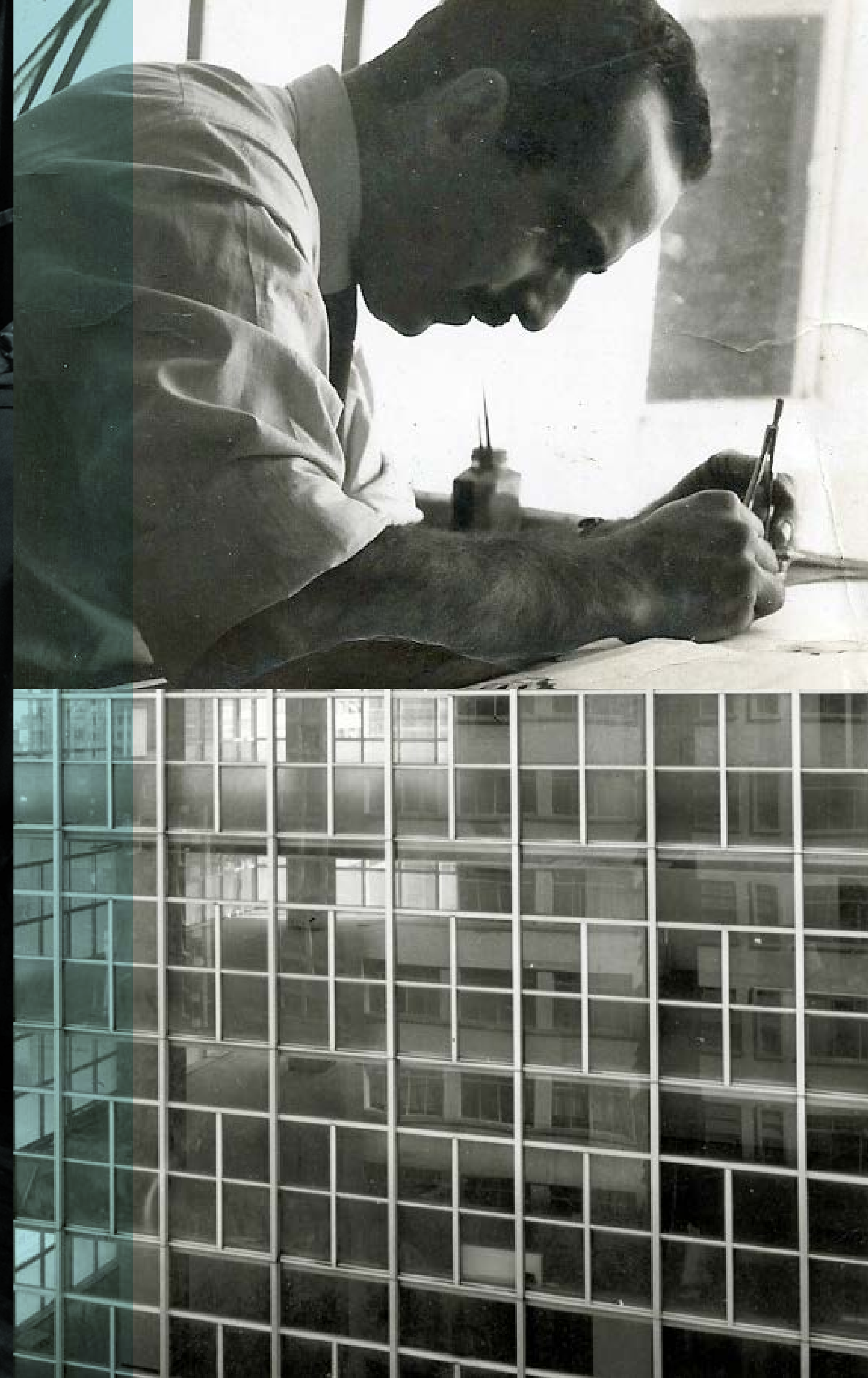
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SKIN OF GLASS

A FILM BY DENISE ZMEKHOL



SKIN OF GLASS is the story of São Paulo's tallest homeless occupation, a 24-story office tower that is a treasure of mid-20th century architecture and my late father's masterpiece. The film follows my journey to discover my father's threatened legacy as an artist as I confront the harsh reality of inequality destroying the city he loved.



THE STORY

The feature documentary SKIN OF GLASS is the story of São Paulo's tallest homeless occupation, a 24-story office tower that is a treasure of mid-20th century architecture and my late-father's masterpiece. Imagined in the 1960s, a time of hope and prosperity in Brazil, the building was constructed within the first months of a new dictatorship and for decades served as the federal police headquarters. In time, abandoned and empty, it became a decaying home for hundreds of impoverished immigrants and people living at the margins of society. I discovered the building in this state four decades after my father's death—2017. The shock of this discovery was a revelation; I had so much to learn about my father's life as a creative person and had so many questions about what had become of our country.

The film follows my journey to discover my father's threatened legacy as an artist as I confront the harsh reality of inequality destroying his beloved city. I am accompanied on my journey by people with a passionate connection to his work and the fate of the building—a mirror held up to our country reflecting periods of darkness and rebirth. When in 2018 a fire engulfs the building, we watch it collapse in an explosion of ash and debris. I must come to terms with the fact that the building my father designed to celebrate the future has come to a tragic end in a dystopian city that would have been unimaginable to him.

WHY THIS STORY? What began with a curiosity about my own family and home city quickly became a timely and important story about the impact of population explosion, displacement and homelessness, transforming every big city in the world. When my father's iconic building was destroyed by fire in May 2018 and the far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro was elected in October, the issues in the film grew in scope and international relevance.

São Paulo is one of the largest megacities in the world and the crises of extreme poverty, inequality and discrimination represent a cautionary tale for other urban areas around the world.

The city has a huge stock of unused and under-utilized structures and many factors combine to make it a hotbed for organizing around housing as a human right. In the wake of the fire, a crackdown on the occupation movement in the name of public safety ensued and many leaders have been arrested. Bolsonaro has warned that they will be treated as terrorists.



A tall, modern building with a grid-like facade of windows is the central focus. The building is covered in graffiti, including the word 'ART' and various symbols. To the right, a dark vertical sign with white text is visible. The background shows a dense urban landscape with other buildings under a cloudy sky. The image has a teal color cast.

“The glass walls have fallen. Your creation of hope and optimism gone—and what of the lives within?”



ARTISTIC APPROACH SKIN OF GLASS is a cinematic, poetic meditation, employing beautiful camerawork and sound design to build a searing portrait of a country in crisis. Through the personal story of a father and daughter and the environment of São Paulo, their lives, memories and dreams overlap. Noland Walker of ITVS has described the film as “My Architect meets City of God meets Man on Wire.”

In my lifelong journey to reconcile with the memory of my father, I have clung to the fragments of the physical world that bear his mark—from a worn letter to a skyscraper. The film allows me to explore the exterior and interior worlds where I feel a connection with him. I negotiate the intangible memories and the hard realities of the world I confront today through lyrical storytelling, from my conversation with my father across time to the dreamlike recreation of myself as a child swimming in the sea. The Pele de Vidro (Skin of Glass building) itself becomes a central character, an embodiment of my relationship with my father and my country, with a dramatic arc that is transformed by circumstance.

MY P.O.V. As a Brazilian-born independent filmmaker and an immigrant to the United States, I am eager to explore the changes in my home country and the world crisis of urbanization and far-right extremism. One issue I confront is the growth of an anti-immigrant sentiment around the world. There has been a profound shift since my father's era, when immigrants had opportunities to put their talents to work in Brazil.

Given the extreme polarization in Brazil, the U.S., and countries around the world, I am interested in creating a story that speaks across differences and does not seek to preach or antagonize. I aim to incorporate conflicting points of view and to present them equally, whether they be upper class architects who collaborated with the dictatorship or homeless squatters. It is critical in these times that our films connect with a broad audience without losing our political integrity and point of view, so we can create real change.



TEDWomen + POP-UP MAGAZINE It was such a gift to present the story of my film-in-the-making to a live audience. I shared the SKIN OF GLASS story with women from around the world at the [TEDWomen](#) conference in Palm Springs in December 2019. The theme of this year's gathering was BOLD + BRILLIANT.

In May, I was invited to join Pop-Up Magazine's spring tour 2019 with sold-out premiere events in seven cities that reached 10,000 people. Pop-Up is a beautiful "live magazine" evening that features writers, photographers, filmmakers, radio producers and illustrators performing true stories in mixed media with live music.

Columnist Leah Garchik wrote this in the San Francisco Chronicle:

"In an evening of high points, it's hard to pick the highest, but I won't forget Denise Zmekhol's 'Skin of Glass,' ... about a São Paulo skyscraper that was her architect father's masterpiece ... listening to this unfold, I was a child at bedtime, magically transported to a time and place that seemed at once foreign and familiar."



THE TEAM



PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR / DENISE ZMEKHOL is a Arab-Brazilian journalist, an award-winning producer and director of documentary films and media projects that span the globe. Her films, commercials, and innovative transmedia projects have been recognized for their elegant visual style and deft storytelling.

Her feature documentary *Children of the Amazon* was supported by the Independent Television Service and broadcast on PBS, as well as on European and Latin American television. Through captivating photos and interviews, *Children of the Amazon* tells the story of struggle and hope to protect the world's largest tropical rainforest and its inhabitants. The film won multiple awards at film festivals around the world. Denise co-produced and co-directed *Digital Journey*, an Emmy Award winning PBS series exploring emerging technologies in their social, environmental and cultural contexts. Recently, Denise co-directed *Bridge to the Future*, a short for PBS/TED Talks, and was co-producer on Amir Soltani's *Dogtown Redemption* that was exhibited on the PBS series Independent Lens.





CO-PRODUCER / RICHARD

O'CONNELL is an Emmy Award-winning creative producer, filmmaker, and educator. He has worked for 15 years at the Independent Television Service serving as Head of Production and later as Senior Producer of National Productions. During his time at ITVS, Richard oversaw the production and broadcast of over 600 films to PBS and national television series.



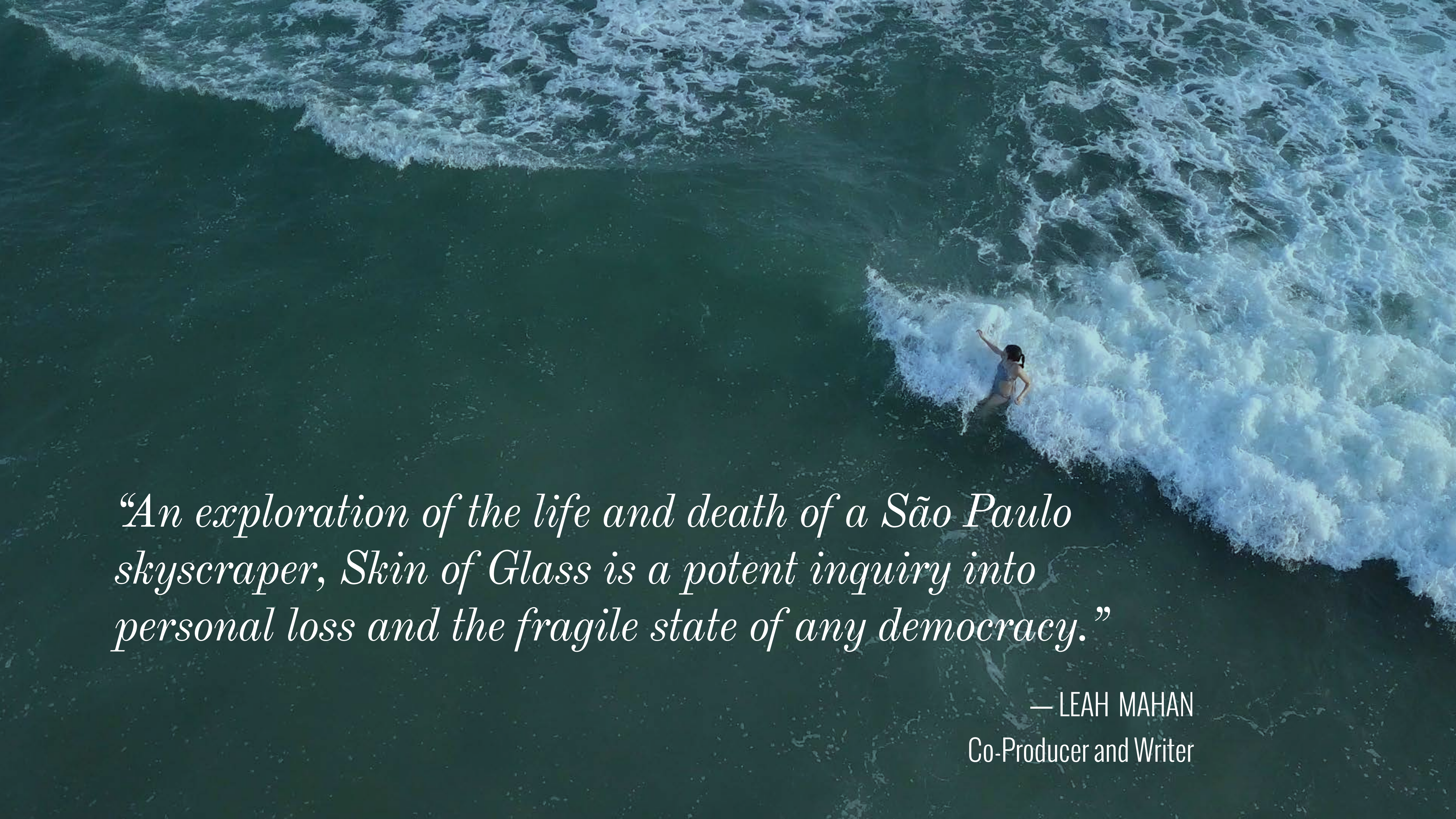
CO-PRODUCER AND WRITER / LEAH

MAHAN is a documentary filmmaker whose work has been nominated by the Directors Guild of America for Outstanding Directorial Achievement. Her films *Sweet Old Song* aired on the PBS series P.O.V. and *Come Hell or High Water: The Battle for Turkey Creek* aired on the PBS World series America ReFramed. Leah's work has been supported by Sundance, ITVS, Ford Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



CO-PRODUCER / AMIR SOLTANI is

an Iranian-American writer, journalist and human rights activist who has worked in media, nonprofits and philanthropy. His graphic novel, *Zahra's Paradise*, has become a global multi-media phenomenon has made publishing history as a real-time online graphic novel that appears in fifteen languages. Amir produced and co-directed *Dogtown Redemption* (PBS/Independent Lens).

An aerial photograph of a person surfing on a wave. The surfer is positioned in the center-right of the frame, riding the crest of a white, foamy wave that is breaking from the right side. The water is a deep, dark blue-green color. The overall scene is captured from a high angle, looking down at the ocean.

*“An exploration of the life and death of a São Paulo skyscraper, *Skin of Glass* is a potent inquiry into personal loss and the fragile state of any democracy.”*

— LEAH MAHAN
Co-Producer and Writer



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