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Natan

Citation for published version:

Cairns, D & Duane, P, Natan, 2013, Digital or Visual Products, Dublin Film Festival, Dublin, Ireland; Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh, UK; IndieCork, Cork, Ireland.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

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NATAN is a 65 minute long documentary film by David Cairns & Paul Duane. It originated from an article by Cairns which Duane suggested expanding. Funding came from the ReelArts scheme of the Irish Arts Council. Research trips to Paris enabled the true story of Bernard Natan, a Romanian émigré who became the leading producer in France, before his forced bankruptcy, imprisonment for fraud and ultimately murder in Auschwitz, to be told in unprecedented detail.

Film experts such as Lenny Borger and Serge Bromberg were interviewed. The last surviving actor to have appeared in a Pathe-Natan production was traced and interviewed also. Natan's grand-daughters contributed their words, and their archives. Pathe opened its doors to allow their history to be explored.

To bring to life the rumours and lies which swirled around this controversial figure, a stylised approach was taken. This part of the story is more like an experimental film, with a papier mache mask made from newsprint used to embody "the false Natan," and rear projected backgrounds to conjure a vision of a vanished Paris.

Binding all this together, along with location shots of the scenes the story took place in, now either abandoned or repurposed, a voice-over was recorded in the first person, a kind of ghost of the dead subject. The aim all along was to uncover the truth using fictional methods, and to haunt the audience with a tale from the past. All that can now be done for Natan is simply to restore his reputation, and allow the real man to be remembered rather than the effigy erected by his enemies, which has stood in his place for generations.