

ADRIAN PIRVU PRESENTS IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH  
EEN VAN DE JONGENS, PERENNIAL LENS AND JEANNE DOVHYCH

# DON'T ASK ME IF I KILLED

A FILM BY HELENA MAKSYM



DAS KLEINE  
FERNSEHSPIEL

NL FILM  
FONDS



fonds

NL FILM  
INCENTIVE

Netherlands  
Film Fund  
Production

INSTITUTUL  
CULTURAL  
ROMÂN

EURO  
DOC



EEN VAN DE  
JONGENS



1st  
HAND  
FILMS

## **SPECS**

**Length:** 104' 5"

**Format:** 2K

**Aspect ratio:** 16:9 (letterbox 2.39:1)

**Sound:** 5.1 & stereo

**Screening copies:** DCP, 2k file

**Spoken languages:** Ukrainian, English, russian

**Available subtitles:** English

**Countries of production:** Romania, Netherlands, Germany, Ukraine

**World Premiere:** June 8th 2026, Docudays UA, Kyiv

**International premiere:** TBA

**Broadcast date:** TBA

## **ONLINE**

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/donotaskmeifikilled/>

## **PREVIEW LINK**

Available on request from Adrian Pirvu at [adishor.pirvu@gmail.com](mailto:adishor.pirvu@gmail.com)  
and Esther van Messel at [esther.van.messel@firsthandfilms.com](mailto:esther.van.messel@firsthandfilms.com)





## LOGLINE

When Russia's invasion shatters her world, Ukrainian filmmaker Helena Maksyom lays down her camera only to pick up a rifle — and then both. Across a thousand days at war, she films the moral unraveling of ordinary people forced to kill, and the fragile fight to keep a soul intact when violence becomes daily life.

## SYNOPSIS

Don't ask me if I Killed is Helena Maksyom's personal record of the war in Ukraine, filmed over more than a thousand days. When the invasion began, she was a filmmaker with no experience of combat. She volunteered, learned to treat the wounded, learned to fight, and, over time, became an officer leading others through the same fire that first consumed her.

Helena films when she can — between missions, during training, in the waiting that defines life at the front. The camera becomes both shield and witness. Through it she captures not the spectacle of battle but the texture of surviving it: the faces of those beside her, the exhaustion, the rare moments of laughter, and the quiet that follows loss.

The war repeats itself in cycles — new recruits, new fronts, new graves — and with each return to the line Helena grows harder and more lucid. Her bond with her mother, glimpsed during short leaves home, becomes a fragile thread to the world she once knew.

Through her eyes, Don't Ask Me If I Killed becomes a meditation on endurance and moral gravity — on what remains of a person when the world forces them to fight in order to protect what they love. It is a film born from exhaustion and tenderness, a record of how humanity endures in the most inhuman of times.





## DIRECTOR

Helena Maksyom is a Ukrainian documentary filmmaker and reserve officer of the National Guard of Ukraine. She graduated with honors from the National Aviation University in Kyiv with a Master's degree in Ecology and Environmental Protection, and has worked across media and film as a journalist, translator, writer, project manager, cinematographer, and director. Her feature documentary debut, *Everything Will Not Be Fine* (2020), co-directed with Adrian Pîrvu, premiered internationally at IDFA and received multiple awards, including Best Ukrainian Feature Film and Best Director at the Odesa International Film Festival, as well as further international prizes and nominations, including at the Romanian Film Awards.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Maksyom volunteered in evacuations and humanitarian operations before enlisting in the National Guard in 2022. She served on active duty until 2025, reaching the rank of Captain, and took part in several key military campaigns, including the liberation of the Kharkiv region, operations in the Luhansk region, and battles around Bakhmut and Pokrovsk. Alongside her military service, she continued to document the war from within. She is an alumna of the international documentary program ESoDoc and continues to work at the intersection of cinema, testimony, and lived historical experience.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I don't know if it is the right thing to write a personal note about this film. But for me, it began with a question that does not leave me: how and why I survived, when so many — strong, luminous, full of life — did not.

I have come to understand something about the 'how,' and it is not easy to carry — that we stood side by side, equally exposed, and still, I am the one who returned. The 'why' remains unanswered.

Making this film became one way of staying in conversation with those who are no longer here — of holding their presence not in moments of violence, but in the fragile, quiet intervals where life still insists on itself. Perhaps this is also a way of continuing to listen.

## IN MEDIA

DER STANDARD - AUSTRIA

**"Soldier and filmmaker Helena Maksyom: "My goal is to survive"**

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000140638876/mein-ziel-ist-es-zu-ueberleben-soldatin-und-filmmacherin-helena>

LIBERTATEA - ROMANIA

**"The new life of a gentle woman who is now fighting in Ukraine and filming a documentary."**

<https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/exclusiv-viata-noua-a-unei-femei-blande-care-acum-lupta-in-ucraina-si-filmeaza-un-documentar-cand-a-vazut-copii-dezmembrati-si-jucarii-acoperite-de-sange-s-a-oferit-voluntar-in-garda-natio-4506068>

UKRAINER - UKRAINE

**"Culture at war: Helena Maksyom - Documenting war experience"**

<https://www.ukrainer.net/kultura-pivden/>







## PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

I met Helena Maksyom in 2015 when she was helping me research a documentary about the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. She had no filmmaking experience at the time, but she had something harder to teach: an instinct for people, a genuine curiosity about the world, and a complete inability to be dishonest. We ended up making a film together.

When the full-scale invasion began in 2022, Helena was developing a new project. She abandoned it and went to the front. I was not surprised. Taking action in the face of injustice is not a decision for her, it is a reflex. What did surprise me, though it probably shouldn't have, was that she kept filming. Not the war. The people in it.

Together with our co-producers in the Netherlands, Germany and Ukraine, I worked on this film across three and a half years largely at a distance, receiving footage from places none of us could go, trusting a director we could not sit next to in an edit suite. What arrived was extraordinary, and also very Helena: patient, honest, full of tenderness for people under unbearable pressure. Every choice in this film is an act of respect toward the people in it. Even the music is born from the war, the closing song was written by a soldier recovering from a coma, a fellow fighter whose words carry the same weight as everything else Helena filmed and endured. She made a promise to the soldiers she served with that the world would see this film and understand what they went through. I made my own version of that promise when I committed to this project. Don't Ask Me If I Killed is both of us keeping it.

Adrian Pirvu, Producer

## CREW LIST

|                          |                                                                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Director                 | HELENA MAKSYM                                                             |
| Producers                | ADRIAN PIRVU RENKO DOUZE YASMIN C. RAMS<br>JEANNE DOVHYCH HASSE VAN NUNEN |
| Executive Producer       | ESTHER VAN MESSEL                                                         |
| Associate Producer       | DEA GJINOVCI                                                              |
| ZDF Editorial            | JÖRG SCHNEIDER ZDF                                                        |
| Production Management    | CATHARINA TREBER                                                          |
| Editors                  | SVITLANA ZALOGA HELENA MAKSYM<br>AUGUSTINE HUIJSSER                       |
| Cinematography           | HELENA MAKSYM                                                             |
| Color Grading            | JOEL SAHULEKA                                                             |
| Sound Designer           | TIM VAN PEPPEN                                                            |
| Dialogue and Foley Mixer | VLADIMIR RAKIC                                                            |
| Re-Recording Mixer       | TIM VAN PEPPEN                                                            |
| Line Producer            | NOA DEFESCHE                                                              |
| Music                    | ROMAN HAMAN                                                               |

DON'T ASK ME IF I KILLED is a film by HELENA MAKSYM produced by ADRIAN PIRVU, EEN VAN DE JONGENS, PERENNIAL LENS and JEANNE DOVHYCH coproduced by ZDF - DAS KLEINE FERNSEHSPIEL supported by NL FILM FUND, NL FILM PRODUCTION INCENTIVE, THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY FUND FOR UKRAINIAN FILMS, NL LITERATURE FUND, VFUND and THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE.





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