



# NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

Directed by Jason Kohn  
World Premiere - Berlinale Speciale 2022

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS:**

Hidden from public view, a war is raging inside the diamond industry. When filmmaker Jason Kohn (*Manda Bala*, *Love Means Zero*) infiltrates this highly secretive world, he uncovers a vast, far reaching conspiracy that threatens the value of every diamond ever mined. Featuring some of the most colorful and powerful industry insiders, *Nothing Lasts Forever* launches us deep inside a criminal investigation, daring to deconstruct and dissect the diamond and reconsider the creation of value itself.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS:**

Traversing the globe, filmmaker Jason Kohn (*Manda Bala*, *Love Means Zero*) journeys across America, Botswana, China and India on a high-stakes quest to investigate the deeply held myth that diamonds — the ultimate symbol of committed love — are indeed forever. In his travels, he

befriends a besieged gemologist who is trying to warn the world that lab-grown diamonds are being mixed with mined, natural diamonds, but the industry he's trying to save refuses to listen. Featuring an unforgettable cast of characters, from disruptors to miners, mixers and middlemen, *Nothing Lasts Forever* delves to the heart of what is real and what is fake, calculating the high cost of exposing the truth inside an industry built on secrecy.

## **Q&A WITH DIRECTOR JASON KOHN**

### ***What drew you to the world of diamonds?***

My grandfather had a small store on 46th Street in Manhattan, right around the corner from the Diamond District on 47th Street, and growing up, I used to work there on weekends. Coming from a family of Brazilian Jews who immigrated to New York, there was always a deep connection to the old-world community of Jewish diamond dealers and cutters in the neighborhood. I think because of that connection, my family deeply believed in the diamond as the ultimate symbol of value. It was a big deal that my mother had diamond earrings, and nobody took the subject of diamonds for granted.

### ***When did you start thinking about this story in particular?***

There was a "Primetime Live" episode in 1993 with Chris Wallace that I watched as a child, with my mother. I still remember the experience so vividly; together we watched a program that clearly showed how common diamonds were, we even discussed it at length, and yet for years after, my mother never lost faith in the value and preciousness of the few diamonds she owned and cherished as rare and special objects. This dissonance struck me then, and I don't think it's ever faded.

### ***When did you first become aware of synthetic diamonds?***

Back in 2003, I read a *Wired* article about synthetic diamonds. Although today I can see how hyperbolically it portrayed the threat of synthetic diamonds, the author made a very compelling argument that the diamond industry was all but finished. In fact, I was so convinced that man-made diamonds would extinguish the natural diamonds industry that I didn't believe there was an interesting movie to be made on the topic - I couldn't locate the conflict. For years I waited for the industry to dissolve, but what I didn't understand was that the natural diamond industry was going to fight back.

### ***How did you become aware of your central subject, Dusan Simic?***

At some point after reading the *Wired* article, I created a Google Alert for synthetic diamonds and in 2013, an article came up by the Serbian gemologist Dusan Simic. To my knowledge, he was the first person to discover and write about the fact that synthetic diamonds had leaked into the natural diamond supply chain. That was when the story became interesting to me. Here was this scientist, a "gemologist," who was tasked with differentiating two identical objects! To me, he was a Blade Runner. There was also this Jurassic Park "life-will-find-a-way" feeling about the diamonds themselves; the toothpaste wasn't going back in the tube.

***What was the state of the industry in 2013, when you began this movie?***

The needle had not moved at all since 2003. Synthetic diamonds were available, but thanks to deft marketing initiatives from the natural industry, most people had no idea they existed, or if they did, just considered them fake. Plus, no journalists covered Dusan's discovery, so he was essentially Chicken Little, trying to warn the industry that the sky was falling, and he was being ignored. That was the beginning of the movie as it exists today.

***Describe the legwork you did to bring on the rogue's gallery of characters in this film.***

Since there was a secret marketing war being waged against man-made stones, nobody inside the "natural" industry would talk about synthetics. I believe the attitude was, "if we don't talk about it, it will go away." This made access nearly impossible for years. Dusan was the only person who would go on the record, or agree to be interviewed.

While making the film, though, Dusan and I became fast friends, and I traveled with him on trips to China, India, and most importantly, to the annual diamond convention in Las Vegas. Eventually, I think people in the industry just started to recognize me from going to the trade show, and that credibility allowed me to form relationships with a network of dealers and manufacturers. It took five or six years of attending the convention before I was able to gain access to people like Martin Rapaport and Steven Lussier. In all, it took just over ten years to make the film because access was so difficult.

***Describe the David & Goliath-like dynamic between Dusan Simic and Martin Rapaport.***

From the beginning Dusan was trying to warn the industry what was happening. He had developed a very sophisticated method of synthetic diamond identification, which was expensive, not automated, but very thorough. And the industry said, very flatly, we don't need this. They ignored a potential solution to a very real problem.

***At what point in time did you realize there was a larger, more suspenseful story here?***

Around 2015, I started to hear from sources inside the industry that mixing was beginning to be a concern. At the time, a collective of natural diamond miners and manufacturers hired a prominent consulting firm to investigate where these synthetic diamonds were originating, and how big a problem this was. The industry knew the diamonds were being mixed, but nobody knew the scale of the problem. Dusan had experience working with the largest factories in China that mostly produced industrial (non-jewelry) diamonds, and he knew that those same factories had recently started making gem-quality stones. We went to one of those factories in China, and although I don't think of the film as "journalistic," I believe that we ended up solving and essentially "breaking" the story of where all the small stones flooding the market were coming from. Although these numbers are nearly impossible to know for sure, the high estimate is that about 20 percent of smaller diamonds are mixed.

***Aja Raden almost steals the movie as an industry truth teller. How did you find her?***

During our last trip to Las Vegas for the annual diamond show, we met a woman through Martin Rapaport who recommended Aja's book, *Stoned: Jewelry, Obsession, and How Desire Shapes the World*. My producing partner Amanda read her book and quickly realized the strength in Aja's voice, as well as her humor! I met her for coffee in Los Angeles and we got along immediately. She's just incredible, among the smartest people I've met, and agreed to do the interview at the 25th hour. She was actually the last person we shot, and we officially wrapped after her interview.

***The diamond conglomerate DeBeers created and has preserved the myth of the diamond and everything it has come to symbolize. How did you gain access to the organization?***

Starting the film, I had zero expectations that we would ever have the ability to speak with anyone at DeBeers, especially not a CEO like Stephen Lussier. In fact, in Aja's book, she dedicates a hilarious page-long footnote to her failed attempts to do the exact same thing, but after spending so many years making the film and developing relationships, we finally met someone with a direct connection. Stephen first agreed to meet Amanda and I at the Las Vegas diamond show, and surprisingly, we didn't feel like it took so much convincing, there was already a lot of trust built, but I also felt like it was our game to lose at that moment. I think the face-to-face contact with us in Vegas made all the difference, but the invitation to interview him in Botswana was something else entirely!

***Suspense is ramped up in the movie when Dusan Simic and Martin Rapaport have a sit-down at a diamond conference in Mumbai. How did you capture this riveting scene?***

It was one of those present-tense non-fiction moments that every filmmaker lives for. Dusan was invited to give a lecture at this prominent industry meeting regarding a sophisticated anti-mixing technology that he developed. All of the most powerful people in the business were attending, and when Martin approached Dusan after his speech, Heloisa Passos (my long-time filmmaking partner and cinematographer) seamlessly tracked Dusan off the stage and kept the camera rolling as he and Martin conferred. She was on a zoom lens, perfectly tracked Dusan and then closed in on their conversation, giving the scene a voyeuristic quality that was very important to the feeling of the moment.

***Describe the editing process. You're dealing with ten years and a lot of different narrative tangents and layers in the story.***

We started editing while still in production and the process took about 18 months, in the hands of two different editors who worked consecutively. More than the already arduous task of editing picture, music, setting a tone and style, they were instrumental in the writing process as well, but both in different ways. Our first editor, Jack Price, was mostly responsible for building Dusan's narrative, and his global investigation - his David & Goliath story. During this phase, I had thought that the entire film could be told solely from Dusan's perspective, as a detective story, but I hadn't yet conducted interviews with Martin Rapaport, Aja Raden or Stephen Lussier, who ended up being big parts of the film. When that footage came in, we began plugging in the new elements, and the story started changing significantly. Our second editor Paul Marchand identified something crucial: that Dusan is a detective inside the story, but he's not the detective pushing the entire story forward. Contrary to even my own initial intentions,

Paul realized that I was actually the investigator that tied all the characters together, and that realization changed how the story had to be told.

***How does this story serve as a metaphor for the times we are living through in its examination of fact versus fiction?***

I'd rather not dictate how an audience should interpret the ideas behind the story, but I can say that I was very much interested in questions of how "value" is created, the origins of value, and the role storytelling plays in those origins. Whether a story is "factual" or "fictional" is the difference between history and mythology, and I've always been fascinated by how stories (true or not) shape us and the world.

***This is also a story about salesmanship and marketing... has this topic always fascinated you?***

I am of the "merchant class." The family business was retail, and I've always identified with that world. I've also understood from the first time I tried making a movie that so much of the film business is sales; from literally getting a movie funded, to figuratively "selling" the reality of a narrative. It's a subject that has always felt very personal.

***What will shock viewers about this movie?***

I think it's incredible that over the ten years it took to make this movie, nobody has ever reported on the mixing of lab-grown and natural diamonds outside the industry. People know about it inside the trade, they whisper about it, but they don't really talk about it. There has been a tremendous threat to the integrity of the diamond industry, but the industry continues by virtue of this silence. Whether by choice or malice, people prefer the myth that diamonds are indeed forever.

## **CREW BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Jason Kohn (Director, Producer)**

Jason Kohn is an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Although born and raised in New York, his family's Brazilian roots led Jason to São Paulo, where he produced and directed his debut film MANDA BALA (SEND A BULLET). That film examined the connections between political corruption and violence in Brazil and won the 2007 Sundance Film Festival's Grand Jury and Best Cinematography awards. LOVE MEANS ZERO, Jason's second feature documentary, was about legendary tennis coach Nick Bollettieri and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2017. Jason's new film, NOTHING LASTS FOREVER, was over a decade in the making and investigates the criminal and philosophical controversies surrounding synthetic diamonds.

### **Amanda Branson Gill (Producer)**

Amanda Branson Gill is a documentary film producer and co-founder of Kilo Films. Her credits include Jason Kohn's forthcoming *Nothing Lasts Forever* (2022) and *Love Means Zero* (2017), David Schisgall's *The Oil War* (2020) and *Theo Who Lived* (2016), and Errol Morris's *The*

*Unknown Known* (2013) and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). In addition to producing films, Amanda serves on the board of the BlackStar Film Festival and the organizing committee of Hand in Hand.

**CREDITS**

DIRECTOR: Jason Kohn

PRODUCERS: Amanda Branson Gill, Jared Goldman

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Vinnie Malhotra

CO-PRODUCERS: Kimberley Hassett, Jonathan Gribetz

CINEMATOGRAPHER: Heloisa Passos

EDITORS: Paul Marchand & Jack Price

SOUND DESIGNER: Coll Anderson

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY: Logan Nelson

TRT: 87 Minutes