

Kurdish films featured at !f in Istanbul

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Last year's popular section 'The Opening' continues at this year's !f AFM International Independent Film Festival. The section features four Kurdish movies, one classic and three contemporary films on love, loss, conflict and what it means to be a woman during wartime.

Four Kurdish films, one classic movie and three contemporary ones on love, loss, conflict and what it means to be a woman during wartime, are being screened at this year's !f AFM International Independent Film Festival.

The films make up a special section called "The Opening," which debuted at last year's festival to a popular response.

"We are motivated by a belief in the power of film to tell very human stories. People need to hear each other, and to get to know one another, to make a lasting peace possible," festival co-director Serra Ciliv said of the selection of films to be screened under the category.

"We showed a selection of Kurdish films for the first time last year under the heading 'The Opening,' which referred to the government's efforts by the same name to resolve a long-standing, tragic conflict in the mainly Kurdish Southeast," Ciliv said.

While the government's effort appears to have stalled, the festival organizers are "keen to keep the momentum going and so continue this year with a new selection of Kurdish titles," Ciliv said. "This time our theme is about the 'other side' of this conflict."

The category brings to Istanbul audiences a selected number of films from Kurdish cinema, a very young cinema that is still trying to find its voice.

"Last year, there were films from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Europe, with a reaction from the audience that was incredible," said Ciliv. "The screenings were packed and audiences took every opportunity to interact with the filmmakers. This strengthened our belief in the power of mutual discussion. Hopefully we can build on that this year."

This year's selection features a classic nearly a century old, a dark fairy tale set in the violent Kandil Mountains and two films that take intimate looks at women who have chosen to join the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The four films in "The Opening" category will each be screened only once during the festival.

Iranian director Taha Karimi's "The Kandil Mountains" (Kwystani Qandil) takes as its backdrop these mountains that have claimed tens of thousands of lives from Iran, Turkey and Iraq. Soldiers from these three countries have been fighting the PKK for years, with hopes of reconciliation a distant fantasy. The film features three men, Shamal o'Prayers, Rasool o'Tears and Eyeneddin o'Daff, searching for their beloved Nesreen, who was lost many years ago. This is a film about love and loss in the time of war.

Women in wartime

"The Women of Mount Ararat" (Les Femmes du Mont Ararat) takes a look at the conflict in Southeast Anatolia and the PKK from a refreshingly unique viewpoint. The protagonists of the film are six female PKK fighters who have taken the mountains as a place of refuge and freedom. Here, in the Southeast,

many women are faced with extra oppression through traditions that imprison them in a mentality not much advanced from the Middle Ages, with violence often being used to “correct” them. The women in this unique all-female unit are not your typical “Steel Magnolias,” as they are constantly on the move on top of the mountains. French director Erwann Briand’s camera takes us into their private moments and intimate conversations, giving a harrowing look at the realities of war from the women’s perspective.

Dutch director Annegriet Wietsma directs her camera at another woman at the heart of the conflict. “Sozdar, She Who Lives Her Promise” (Sözdar, Sözüünü Yaşayan Kadın) is the story of Nuriye Kesbir, who, years ago, refused to be married off at the age of 12. She later joined the PKK, and 30 years later became a notorious leader of the organization. Wietsma follows Kesbir on a journey from a Dutch prison to the unforgiving mountains of northern Iraq. The film is a frank and gripping portrayal of a woman of no apologies, giving a look at her life and her motives. You don’t have to approve of, understand or agree with Kesbir to become fascinated by her.

The last selection in the group, “Zare,” a silent black-and-white classic from 1926 by Armenian cinema pioneer Hamo Beknazaryan, was is the first film to portray Kurds on screen. The film is a tragic love story between a Kurdish girl and a shepherd living in the same Kurdish village in the Lachin region during the time when the Russian Tsarist regime was about to collapse. Nearly a century old, the film will be screened with musical accompaniment by the Kurdish artist Tara Jaff.

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Sources

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