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EDITION



September 29 - October 4th, 2026

NEW YORK KURDISH FILM FESTIVAL



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TH
EDITION

NEW YORK KURDISH FILM FESTIVAL

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In Memory of Mozaffar Shafeie

(1956–2026)



The first time Mozaffar Shafeie went to the cinema, he was five years old. His uncle brought him to see a film in his hometown of Mahabad. By the time he stepped back into daylight, he had already made the decision that would define his life: he would be an actor. Even sixty-five years later that sense of wonder never left him.

Born on April 26, 1956, into the prominent Shafeie and Ghaderi families of Mahabad, Mozaffar discovered theater at school and quickly found his calling as a storyteller. After moving to London in 1973, he studied theater at Darrington College of Arts, then embarked on an extraordinary career spanning theater, television, film, radio, and other cultural work. Mozaffar became a leading cultural figure of the Kurdish community in Britain. In 1986, he co-founded the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London and became a driving force behind many of its artistic and cultural activities. He believed deeply that culture was essential to preserving identity, and through theater, festivals, satire, and storytelling, he celebrated Kurdish heritage while making it accessible to wider audiences.

His artistic career crossed borders and spanned mediums. In 1990 he became the first Kurdish actor to perform at Britain's Royal National Theater, a landmark later recognized in *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*. He appeared in theater, radio, television, and cinema, including *House of Saddam*, *Triage*, and *Son of the Pink Panther*, while also becoming widely known to Persian-speaking audiences through his work with BBC Persian.

Wherever he lived, Mahabad, Tehran, London, Tokyo, Washington, or Erbil, Mozaffar built communities through art. He admired every form of artistic expression and celebrated actors, musicians, singers, dancers, writers, and painters with equal enthusiasm. He believed that every cultural achievement should open a door for the next generation of Kurdish artists.

In 2023, after eight years of life in Washington DC, Mozaffar and his family moved to Erbil where he hoped to build a national theater worthy of Kurdistan's rich artistic heritage. That dream reflected the spirit that had guided his life: to create, to connect, and to make space for others.

Mozaffar was a natural raconteur, a man of warmth and authentic charm who cared deeply about his family, friends, and community. Even during the hardest months of his illness, he preferred to speak about tomorrow's plans rather than today's illness. He passed away in hospital on August 4, 2026, surrounded by his family. Although his life spanned countries, cultures, languages, and artistic forms, his purpose remained constant: to build community through art and to keep Kurdish culture alive, vibrant, and open to the world.

We remember him with gratitude, admiration, and love.



New York Kurdish Cultural Center

Founded in 2017, the New York Kurdish Film Festival has been under the umbrella organization New York Kurdish Cultural Center. The center has been established as a non-profit organization since 2021 to cultivate and support events related to Kurdish history, cinema, language, music, traditions, culture, and life rooted in the Middle East, along the Zagros and Taurus mountains, covering parts of North, South, East and Western parts of Kurdistan.

New York Kurdish Cultural Center develops programs for preserving and advancing Kurdish culture which is not only a matter of self-expression but a crucial part of the Kurdish freedom struggle. By creating events, screenings, and exhibitions in New York City, we aim to strengthen our diaspora community and provide a safe space for Kurdish Americans from diverse communities of origin to reclaim, celebrate, and advance their shared cultural traditions, to find common ground and build friendships.

As New Yorkers, the board and volunteers of the New York Kurdish Cultural Center invite every citizen in the city to celebrate Kurdish culture as a part of their right to the city.

Festival
Directors'
Letters

Xeyal Qertel:

For ten years, the New York Kurdish Film Festival has transformed a cinema in the East Village into a homeland of stories. Each Kurdish filmmaker brings a story, and together those stories illuminate the silver screen of Village East by Angelika. Every fall that cinema becomes a meeting place where Kurdish memory, language, and identity find a home far from Kurdistan.



Kurds feel acknowledged and see their national treasures on display right here in New York City. Over the course of six days, audiences travel across Kurdistan without ever leaving New York. They take a bus to visit their parents in Amed; they drive from Silêmanî to Hewlêr to attend a wedding; they fall in love with their neighbors; they ride on a motorcycle disguised as an elderly woman wearing binocular glasses to take their stork to a veterinarian in Sine. Every step taken, every word spoken on the screen propels our audiences into a time capsule, where longing for family, homeland, and the beauty of Kurdistan becomes a little more bearable. It all happens right here, in the world's artistic capital, within the four walls of a cinema in the East Village.

NYKFF brings indigenous, deeply human stories and weaves them together like our aunts spinning wool into yarn, dyeing it with natural root colors, and weaving it into a *cacim* (a traditional woven carpet in Dersim region). These films embrace us the way *cacims* adorn the walls of Kurdish homes, bringing beauty, warmth, memory, and belonging. They transcend our feelings, reminding us that cinema is not only a form of art but also a vessel for memory, resistance, and hope. Every frame preserves a voice, a landscape, or a fragment of a culture that refuses to disappear.

Every year NYKFF welcomes hundreds of audience members whose culture is larger than life and whose stories deserve to be heard. There are jokes that only Kurds laugh at, and seemingly ordinary scenes bring tears to Kurdish eyes only. But these films also invite non-Kurdish audiences into our world, revealing that the most local stories often carry the most universal emotions. Like a *çerçî* carrying goods from village to village, we arrive in New York carrying stories instead of merchandise, enriching the city's cultural landscape one film at a time.

For ten years, NYKFF has been more than a film festival. It has been a meeting place between memory and future, homeland and diaspora, Kurdish stories and the world. We hope that, as you turn these pages and watch these films, you too will become part of that journey.

Aram Hasan Abdullah:

Several years ago, when my film was selected for screening at the New York Kurdish Film Festival, I never imagined that one day I would become part of the team behind the festival. At that time, I was simply a filmmaker bringing a story to share. Later, I had the privilege of serving as a jury member, and today, as co-director of the New York Kurdish Film Festival, I continue this journey with the same passion, gratitude, and sense of responsibility.



For me, NYKFF is much more than a film festival. It is a cultural home, a shared responsibility, and a place where Kurdish cinema brings people together. Over the past ten years, the festival has remained committed to creating a space where filmmakers, artists, and audiences from different parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora can meet, exchange ideas, and celebrate the diversity of Kurdish stories.

One of the values I deeply appreciate about NYKFF is its independence. The festival has consistently protected its artistic and organizational independence, remaining free from political parties, governments, and ideological agendas. This independence allows us to evaluate films based on their artistic vision, honesty, and storytelling, while welcoming voices from across Kurdistan with equal respect.

Cinema has a unique ability to connect people, whereas politics can sometimes create distance. Over the years, NYKFF has worked to build connections between filmmakers, generations, communities, and audiences around the world. Every screening, conversation, and encounter has been another opportunity to listen, understand, and come together through cinema.

My own journey within the festival reflects this spirit. I entered as a filmmaker, returned as a juror, and today have the honor of serving as co-director. I see this journey as part of a larger community built through trust, collaboration, and a shared love of cinema. As we celebrate our tenth edition, I am grateful to every filmmaker, volunteer, partner, supporter, and audience member who has contributed to this journey.

Our first ten years are only the beginning. As long as there are Kurdish stories waiting to be told, voices waiting to be heard, and artists determined to create, NYKFF will remain an independent, inclusive, and welcoming home for Kurdish cinema.

With gratitude and respect.



Program Designers' Forewords



Şener Özmen:

In 2026 the 10th edition of the New York Kurdish Film Festival (NYKFF), which is held under the auspices of the New York Kurdish Cultural Center (NYKKC), opens a new door in the waves of discussion, evaluation, reading of films, with the contribution of two distinguished academics and theorists of Kurdish cinema: Bahar Şimşek Day and Engin Sustam.

Another feature of this edition—the most interesting—is the common decision to expand the festival's boundaries to include several independent international films. Hitherto the range had been limited to the Kurdish filmmakers, or films about Kurds.

Cinema has developed into one of the most important forms of expression that flourishes in the Kurdish struggle for survival, against the oppression of the states that have occupied Kurdish lands. The very obstacles that Kurdish cinema faces, just as Kurdish contemporary art and literature do, from Ehmedê Xanî to the present day, have made the struggle ever more meaningful for generations of Kurds. Over the past twenty-five years, Kurdish filmmakers, producers, and directors, both within the country and in the diaspora, have managed this most influential global art form in an interesting way, both in terms of international visibility and in terms of creation, despite the fundamental problems of financing, censorship, prohibitions, and distribution networks.

Today, thanks to their persistence, we can talk about a proper Kurdish cinema. One of the most important aspects of this international visibility is undoubtedly the growth, improvement, and diversification of Kurdish film festivals.



Films by Kurdish directors have been screened at prestigious festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Toronto, and Sundance. Kurdish film festivals that can compete with other world film festivals have been established in South Kurdistan, especially in Duhok and Silêmanî, and they in North Kurdistan. In the diaspora, Kurdish directors have strengthened Kurdish cinema with their work and ideas in Kurdistan North, South, East, and West. The number and quality of documentaries alone is remarkable.

Using the opportunities provided by digital technologies and artificial intelligence, Kurdish filmmakers and cinephiles have been able to make great films with little funding. Recently directors such as Behmen Qubadî, Hiner Selim, Kazim Öz, Şewket Emin Korkî, Mano Xelîl, Ali Kemal Çinar, Aram Dildar, Erol Mîntaş, Bilal Korkut, Ayşe Polat, Solin Yûsiv, Rûken Tekes, Berke Baş, and many others have come to the fore. In the academy, writings about the development of Kurdish cinema have been enriched. The well-known Kurdish sociologist Engin Sustam, who writes multifaceted studies of contemporary Kurdish art, transformed the discourse around Kurdish cinema and diversified its academic study.

Ten years from its inception, the NYKFF has become more vibrant, stronger, and more effective. Its style, activities, and programs are accepted as an international example, and Kurdish directors elsewhere model new Kurdish film festivals on the example of the NYKFF.

In this edition, several films stand out. Karla Murthy's *Gas Station Attendant*, about immigration to America; Hemen Khaleî's *Singing Wings* about the journey and struggle of a young woman; Darine Hotait's *Tallahassee*, about the journey between dreams and visions of the homeland, Esin Akgül's documentary *Who Am I? (Kî me Ez?)* about the life of our greatest poet Cegerxwîn, Shilan Saadi's *Night and Fog in Kurdistan*, and, Edris Mahmoudian's *Limo Knew Everything* all made me look in a different way and with a different eyes—at life, and at my own life, and at theirs.

Engin Sustam:



How can the history of Kurdish cinema be written in the absence of a national film archive? How are we to understand a cinematic tradition that has evolved without the institutional framework of a state, under the condition of *bêwelat*—statelessness? Like Kurdish literature and linguistic scholarship, Kurdish cinema has found major sites of institutionalisation in the diaspora. The diversity of cinematic practices emerging across Kurdish regions reflects the plurality of political, linguistic, and cultural experiences that have shaped this transnational cinema.

In this context, film festivals do far more than preserve cultural memory; they constitute critical spaces for the production of decolonial knowledge and the transmission of Kurdish counter-memory. It is therefore no coincidence that many of the principal sites for the production, circulation, and recognition of Kurdish cinema have emerged in the diaspora centers of New York, London, Paris and Berlin.

With the notable exception of South Kurdistan, where important regional initiatives have developed, the collective memory of Kurdish cinema continues to be sustained largely through diasporic institutions. The films of Yılmaz Güney, Shawkat Amin Korki, Bahman Ghobadi, Hisham Zaman, Soleen Yusef, Hiner Saleem, Jano Rosebani, Sevinaz Eydi, Mano Khalil, Kazım Öz, Ayşe Polat, Lisa Calan, Wiam Simav Bedirxan, and Ali Kemal Çınar constitute a cinematic tradition that has flourished across multiple geographies while challenging dominant narratives of nationhood, identity, and exile.

Kurdish diaspora film festivals function as living archives—open museums in which fragmented histories, long obscured by regimes of invisibility, are reconstructed and reimagined. Kurdish cinema thus emerges both as an aesthetic and as a political practice of resistance, grounded in the conviction that filmmaking is the production not merely of images but of a mode of existence.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary, the New York Kurdish Film Festival has established itself as one of the leading institutions dedicated to Kurdish cinema in the United States and internationally. Since its foundation by the New York Kurdish Cultural Center in 2017, it has played a pivotal role in the global circulation of Kurdish films while fostering dialogue among filmmakers, artists, scholars, and audiences.

Beyond its role as an exhibition venue, the festival has become a forum where cinema, critical reflection, and artistic practice converge, strengthening transnational networks of collaboration and solidarity across the Kurdish diaspora.

The 10th edition, organized by the founder and co-director Xeyal Qertel and co-director Aram Hassan Abdullah, with Janet Biehl as festival secretary, is being memorialized by this anniversary catalogue featuring essays by Şener Özmen, Bahar Şimşek, and Engin Sustam. As the NYKFF enters its second decade, it reaffirms that Kurdish cinema is not simply the expression of a stateless people but a transnational artistic practice that continually reimagines memory, belonging, and freedom through the moving image.



jury Members

Feature Fiction Selection Committee



Özgür Amed

AUTHOR

Özgür Amed, born in Diyarbakır, is the author of two books: *Who Ate the Kidney* (2018) and *Kurdish Works* (2011). For two years, he taught film grammar at the Cegerxwin City Conservatory in Diyarbakır. He has led long-term training programs on film analysis in several cities, and he has served as a jury member for numerous national and international film festivals. He researches cinema, memory, humor, and political thought, writing articles that have been published in diverse periodicals.



Bangen Ali

PRODUCER AND ACTOR

Bangen Ali holds a BA in cinema from Salahaddin University. He worked as a producer and production manager in feature films including *Memories on the Stone* (2013) by Shawkat Amin Korki, *Semyan* (2015) by Muhammed Jano, and *The Triangle of Death* by Adnan Osman, and for the TV series *Ax u tax* for Waar TV. He appeared as an actor in *Milan Protocol* (2017) by Peter Ott and *Rain Bride* (2022) by Hussein Hassan. He serves as vice president of the Duhok International Film Festival.



Nadia Darwish

FILMMAKER

Nadia Darwish, born in 1996 in Serekaniye, joined the Rojava Film Commune in 2015. She directed the documentary *Jinwar*, about a women-only village where women build independence and solidarity. The film has been screened at numerous international film festivals, including NYKFF, and received several awards and honors. She served as assistant director for *Kobani*, *Berbu*, *Heval Brako*, and *Heval Keke Min*, as well as for the drama series *Evîna Kurd*. She is an administrator at the Rojava International Film Festival and is currently working on postproduction for her debut feature film.

Short Fiction Selection Committee



Arad Hassanzadeh

Arad Hassanzadeh studied dramatic literature at Tehran Central University. Since 2013, he has taught film technique at the College of Fine Arts at Salahaddin University in Hêwler (Erbil), filmmaking at the University of Silêmanî, and media at Cihan University. He is actively involved in film and drama production in Hêwler. He has translated several books and conducted research on film editing, photography, and filmmaking techniques.



Kovan Hussein

Kovan Hussein holds a PhD in media and cultural evolution from the University of Silêmanî and a master's degree in film studies from the University of Sussex (UK). is a media scholar and practitioner with over two decades of industry experience, serving as a television producer, news editor, presenter, and film critic. Since 2014, he has lectured and taught courses in film theory, media genres, television production, visual culture, and marketing. His scholarly work includes critical research on media representation, identity in film, Kurdish media discourse, and cross-cultural film reception.



Akam Rezaee

Akam Rezaee is a visionary Kurdish-American filmmaker and VFX supervisor whose career has been defined by bold artistry.. His creative journey began at 16, when he directed and produced two captivating short films with a close friend. In the music industry, he directed and produced more than twenty innovative music videos for prominent Kurdish artists. He then made the leap to Hollywood where, aAs a skilled VFX Artist, he brings visual effects to life, blending cutting-edge technology with cinematic artistry. His versatility in filmmaking spans cinematography, editing, directing, and color grading. He has collaborated with major studios and platforms such as Netflix, Sony, Showtime, and Apple+.

Documentary Selection Committee



Mizgin Arslan

Mizgin Arslan, born in a Kurdish village in Mardin, worked for six years as a journalist, then moved into filmmaking. She holds an MA in digital documentary from Royal Holloway, University of London, as well as qualifications in therapeutic arts, child counselling, and trauma-informed practice. Based in London, she works as a child therapist while directing and producing documentary work that explores womanhood, displacement, and family through political and historical lenses. Her documentaries *A Fatal Dress Polygamy* and *I Flew You Stayed* have received multiple awards and international recognition. She is currently developing her second feature documentary, *My Mothers' Tale*, with support from the Sundance Institute.



Azad Azizyan

FILMMAKER

Azad Azizyan is a Kurdish-American documentary filmmaker and editor whose work pushes the boundaries of nonfiction through hybrid forms. Blending documentary and experimental approaches, he explores memory, fragmentation, and temporality. His work has screened at film festivals across the United States and internationally.



Ekrem Heydo

DIRECTOR

Ekrem Heydo, born in 1973 in Serêkaniyé, Rojava, studied camera and editing in Hanover, Germany, then directing at the Ruhr Academy for the Arts in Dortmund. He has lived and worked in Berlin since 2006. His first documentary, *Halabja—The Lost Children*, won several international awards. For his second film, *My Paradise* (2016), he returned to Serêkaniyé. *A Bridge for Rojava* is his new documentary.

Student Film & Mobile Phone Film Selection Committee



Midya Raoof Begard

Midya Raoof Begard is an actress. She earned bachelor's degree in acting at the Academy of Fine Arts-Baghdad, then a master's degree at the University of Copenhagen. She researches "Image Analysis in the Age of Technology," on which she lectured at the University of Silêmanî and the Institute of Fine Arts



Yasir Irmak

Yasir Irmak, born in Hamburg, Germany, studied business administration and completed a master's degree in European Union Studies, graduating as a European Union specialist. He currently works in the field of information technology. He currently serves as director of the Hamburg Kurdish Film Festival, which he co-founded. Together with Kurdish filmmakers, he also co-founded Hamburg's Avakino Film Collective, a platform dedicated to supporting independent and Kurdish cinema. He has produced several short films. Through his work, he seeks to promote and develop independent filmmaking and Kurdish cinema.



Sarina Panahideh

Sarina Panahideh is a Kurdish actress, choreographer, theater director, and multidisciplinary performer based in Berlin. Originally from Iran, she has been active on stage since the age of five. She has worked internationally, with performances and productions in Europe, Iran, and Iraq. She has appeared in leading roles in several award-winning short films. Her performances have received recognition at international film festivals.

She combines acting with theater and dance to create visually powerful and emotionally compelling performances. She brings her multifaceted performance abilities to videos exploring themes of identity, women's rights, freedom, and social justice. These works have been featured in international media including BBC, DW, ARTE, Rudaw, and Avatoday.

Experimental Film Selection Committee



Pedram Baldari

Pedram Baldari, born in Sine, Rojhelat, is an interdisciplinary artist and scholar working across installation, sound, sculpture, performance, social practice, and curatorial initiatives.. His work has been presented internationally at venues including the Victoria & Albert Museum, Documenta 13, the Walker Art Center, the Weisman Art Museum, and the Modulus Biennale. He has received fellowships and awards from the MacDowell Foundation (NEA Awardee), Delfina Foundation, Jerome Foundation, and the University of Michigan. He is an assistant professor at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.



Sherko Abbas

Sherko Abbas is a Kurdish-Iraqi artist and filmmaker based between London and Silêmanî. His multidisciplinary practice spans film, installation, performance, sound, and sculpture, exploring memory, conflict, and the politics of representation. He holds an MFA from Goldsmiths, University of London. Through moving image and archival research, his work examines how personal and collective memory shape contemporary life in Iraq.



Pınar Öğrenci

Pınar Öğrenci, born in 1973 in Van, is a Kurdish artist and filmmaker, based in Berlin. Her first documentary film *Gurbet Is a Home Now* (2020) won a special jury prize at Documentarist İstanbul in 2021. Her film and video works have been exhibited at documenta fifteen (2022), Venice Biennial (2024), Manifesta 16 (2026), Harvard Museum (2026), Berlinische Galerie (2023), and many other institutions. She participated in the Vision du Reel Film Festival (2023), the İstanbul Film Festival (2021-2-3), and Filmfest München (2021).

Animation Film Selection Committee



Baran M. Reihani

DIRECTOR | ANIMATOR

Baran M. Reihani, born in 1985 in Mahabad, holds a master's degree in animation. She has more than 17 years of experience as an animation director, animator, character designer, and storyboard and animatic artist. She has directed several short animations and children's animated series and currently leads an animation team at Zarok TV.



Semiha Yıldız

Semiha Yıldız, born in 1994 in Şırnak, studied computer education and technology at İnönü University, where she developed a passion for animation. Since 2016, she has worked as an animator at Zarok TV. Her first animated film, *Cudiyê Miradan*, received multiple awards for its creative storytelling. She is the podcast editor for Botan International and co-founded Your Frame Company. She is currently working on her next animation.



Hazhar Mohammed

Hazhar Mohammed attended the College of Fine Arts at the University of Silêmanî. Skilled in character design, he directed the 3D animated films *Ahol*, *Qaetul*, and *Maxolan*. He lives in Silêmanî, where he co-founded the Nergz Animation Studio.

Spotlight on
a Kurdish Filmmaker:
Yılmaz Güney

Yol

(The Road, 1982)



Kurdish cinema has long been discussed in terms of its financial and political deprivations. Others see it as a national cinema without a state or a 'father'. This year, in an attempt to claim the history of Kurdish cinema, the New York Kurdish Film Festival announces the creation of a new "Spotlight on Kurdish Directors" section.

And the first Kurdish director to receive this spotlight is, appropriately enough, Yılmaz Güney, The Palme d'Or-winning film *Yol* (*The Road*, 1982), which was written by Güney, filmed by Şerif Gören due to Güney's imprisonment in Turkey, and later edited by Güney in Europe.

Ulus Baker once defined *Yol* as the carrier of a unique experience: "Every one watching the films was in a state of trance and the state of trance was the film itself—places and lands, trains and prison, buses and cities." The film is in Kurdish and Turkish languages with English subtitles.

Screening of *The Road* for the 10th edition traces the place New York offers for the audience of Kurdish films.



Feature Documentary

Singing Wings

Hemen Khaledi, 73 min, Kurdish, Georgia & Rojhilati Kurdistan, 2025

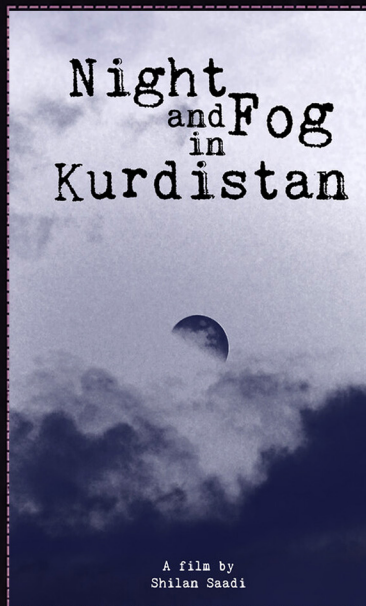


Being deprived of a settled film industry, Kurdish films have primarily been discussed through an imagined Kurdish nation whose ethnicity, languages and religion could not go beyond the imagination of colonial subjects. *Singing Wings* stands for an attempt to use the means of genre to recognize and celebrate the heteronomous references of Kurdish culture to nature and animals while documenting a heterosexual love story.

In a Kurdish village, 78-year-old Khadijeh comes across an injured stork and tries to heal it before its flock migrates. She is also worried about her daughter migrating to Britain. Her nearly 100-year-old husband, Majid, is unhappy with Khadijeh's divided attention and wants to release the stork. However, Khadijeh is determined to care for the stork until it fully recovers. Will both the stork and Khadijeh's daughter take flight?

Night and Fog in Kurdistan

Shilan Saadi, 85 min, Kurdish, Bakur and Bashuri Kurdistan et al., 2025



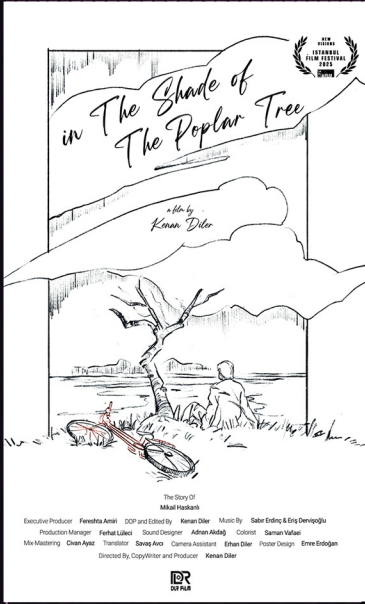
A dance of Kurdish languages, the impossible love between Kurmancî and Soranî, is now on the screen through a Kurdish woman's lenses. Narrating the survival of Êzidi woman as a travelling story between countries and continents, the director's use of personal shots and drawings opens a new path for Kurdish storytelling beyond conventions.

Night and Fog in Kurdistan follows seven teenage Yazidi girls who survived the 2014 ISIS genocide. It traces their five-year journey from refugee camps in Turkey to resettlement in Europe, showing the effects of genocide, displacement, and the challenges of migration. The film uses an innovative mixture of methods—illustration, graphics, maps, archival research, self-storytelling, and first-person perspectives—allowing the girls to share their own experiences of survival and adaptation.

It documents the lasting trauma of genocide, the gendered and intersectional impacts of displacement, and the resilience of these young women as they turn their cameras on themselves, sharing their survival and growth.

In the Shade of Poplar Tree

Kenan Diler, 64 min, Kurdish & Turkish, Bakuri Kurdistan, 2025



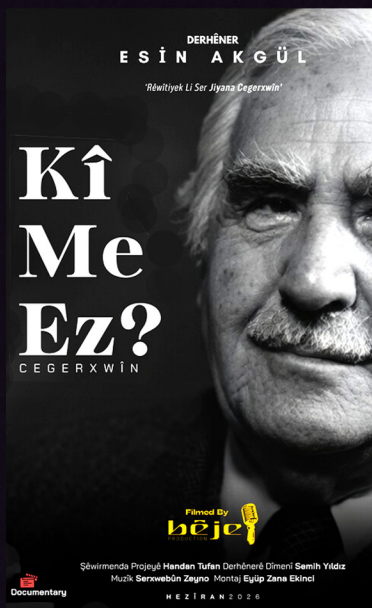
On the border of insanity, how would language speak to its subjects? What would be the gender politics of a stateless language which has been under colonial occupation for so long? The narrative of Mikail in the shades of poplar tree invites its audience to recognize the intersection of colonial violence and patriarchal violence within Kurdish society in urban spaces.

Mikail grew up in a strictly traditional family with a schizophrenic father. His mother has been his father's second wife since the age of 14 and suffers under that patriarchal structure. Mikail fled that situation, and now at 37, he runs an unusual café called Eskici. There, looking like a madman or a dervish, he creates the world where he wants to live, attracting people with his style but also frightening them.

He dreams of opening a boutique hotel on the shore of Lake Van where his mother can live in peace and forget all she went through. The documentary examines the effects of a patriarchal, nationalist-conservative society and family on a person's life and psychology.

Who Am I?

Esin Akgül, 66 min, Kurdish, Netherlands and Bakuri Kurdistan, 2025.



The founder of Kurdish literature, one may call Cegerxwîn, has never been so present on the screen. Esin Akgül's documentary, which blends conventional techniques with AI technologies is one of the Kurdish films that will dig into the memory of forgotten words of Kurdish languages. How many of us knew the word "kêmbay" before this film brought it to light?

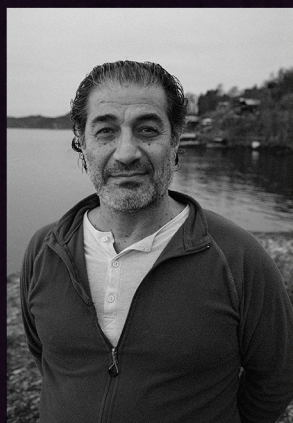
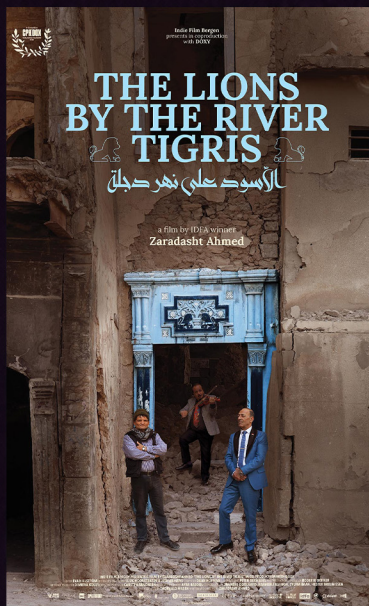
It blends archival materials and firsthand accounts to tell the story of the Kurdish poet and man of letters Cegerxwîn. Born during the Ottoman era, in the village of Hesar in Batman province, the boy grows up under grueling conditions—then loses his parents. His displacement and poverty left a profound mark on his heart and mind.

Who am I? integrates historical documents, archival photographs and footage, and interviews with family members. Fellow poets, writers, historians, and individuals who knew him personally provide insights. Cegerxwîn was not just a poet but a symbol of resistance, of the Kurdish language, and of a nation's collective memory.

To this day, his legacy continues to thrive within Kurdish society. He remains forever alive in the hearts of the people.

The Lions by the River Tigris

Zaradasht Ahmed, 90 min, Arabic, Iraq, 2025



A documentary of poetry, geographic signs, or annotations? The cultural genocide under the rule of ISIS in the historical zones of Mesopotamia has widely been covered in the news and by historians. The plentitude of the images of constructions are challenged by the director's motivated gaze into the act of deconstruction as an extension of genocide. How would the rug under our feet carry our tears?

In Mosul, a city devastated during the battle for liberation from Islamic State, the fight to heal and preserve its identity, culture, and art is not over. Three men refuse to let Mosul remain in ruins. A city with 8,000 years of history struggles to reclaim its soul through those who refuse to let it fade into oblivion.



Short Documentary

Youthful Wrinkles

Zevîn Ebas, 10 min, Kurdish, Rojava, 2025

On the outskirts of Amuda,
80-year-old Khulfa refuses to
surrender to the passage of
time. She and her 75-year-old
husband, Mihemed, sustain
themselves by preserving
traditional crafts.



Safoora

Perviz Rostemi, 19 min, Kurdish, Rojhilati Kurdistan, 2025

In the ritual culture of the Hawraman (Kurdistan Oramanata), Safoora is a legendary female figure. The Anahita of her time, she was a goddess of water, fertility, and healing..

Safoora Khatun demanded that every year in the month of Gulan (Ordibehesht), the women of the village hold a ceremony to heal the sick and bring rain.





Feature Fiction

My Uncle Jens

Brwa Vahabpour, 98 min,
Norwegian & Kurdish, Norway, 2025



Urban experience of Kurdishness has never been seen so Norwegian! Vahabpour's cinematic promise salutes the elements of ridiculousness in the films of Hiner Saleem and presents an irony of the communication between home and exile, Kurdistan and Norway. From Iranian Kurdistan to Oslo, the story of many Kurds has an answer for all.

Norwegian teacher Akam lives a comfortable life in Oslo, until his uncle from Iran comes on an unexpected visit. Akam feels obliged to offer accommodation for 2 nights. But the immodest uncle soon makes it clear he has no plans to go home.



Before the Night

Ali Kemal Çınar, 60 min,
Kurdish, Bakuri Kurdistan, 2022



Known with his independent and low-budget films, Ali Kemal Çınar's narration of Amed captures the conflict in the second half of the 2010s. Being a woman realizes itself in art and queer love under military attack. May statelessness prevent Kurdish art from finding its language?

Before the Night depicts life under a state of emergency through the eyes of three different protagonists. Gulbîn, a young artist living with her family, strives to find her place in life while attempting to paint a portrait of her mother, inspired by Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* (commonly known as *Whistler's Mother*). Her mother, who poses for her daughter, makes a futile effort to shield their home from the sounds of war and conflict. Meanwhile, the father—whose health is steadily declining—attempts to revive memories of the city's past through the photographs he has taken.





Short Fiction

Home Made

Rojda Ezgi Oral, 15 min,
Kurdish & Turkish,
Bakuri Kurdistan, 2024

Assyrian children of Kurdistan
have been targeted by nationalists.
We see the Turkish national
education system through the gaze
of a kid, who brought food
to the class.

In Mardin, Syriac schoolboy
Gabriel and his friends prepare
for the school's Local Goods Week.
Showcasing their cultural heritage,
their project leads to unexpected
consequences in the school's
authoritarian atmosphere.



File No.1

Sonya Jalil, 19 min,
Kurdish,
Bashuri Kurdistan, 2024

The magnitude of the Halabja massacre is still largely unknown. Hiro is a 45-year-old woman who was injured by chemical weapons during the 1988 attack in Halabja. That catastrophe had a lasting impact on her life and health, as well as on hundreds of other victims.



The Dead End

Shko j Aziz, 9 min,
English,
UK, 2026

The intersection of gender and ethnicity forms the narrative of *The Dead End*, and announces a new place for the hope of women in exile.

A woman flees her abusive husband, seeking refuge in the long-abandoned house where she grew up—a place once filled with safety, now heavy with memory. The film lingers in ambiguity, leaving her fate uncertain, while quietly affirming that even in the darkest moments, there is the possibility of hope—and help waiting beyond the silence.



A Different Perspective

Sharo Shorsh, 9 min,
Kurdish,
Bashuri Kurdistan, 2025

Halkawt is a 45-year-old isolated writer. What he sees through the living room window might be reality, or fantasy.

A Kurdish interpretation of Rear Window, this film plays tricks on visual perception while highlighting mental distress and solitude.



The Cold

Adar Baran, 15 min,
Kurdish, Bakuri Kurdistan, 2021

Two nameless protagonists, a pregnant woman and her husband, are trying to cross the border in a frosty geography.

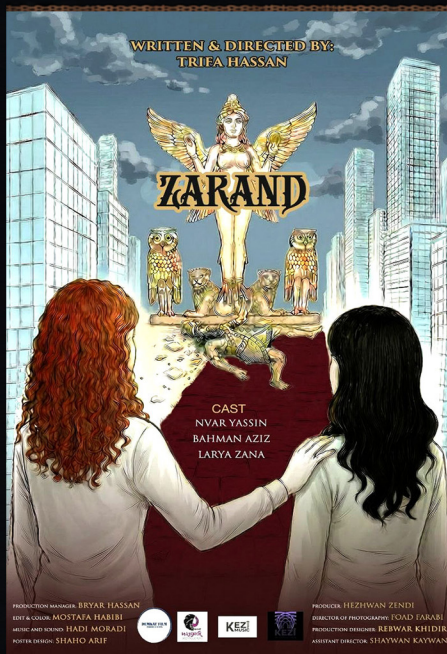
Migration is always forced, and migration journeys often lead to tragedy. Even when migrants arrive safely at their destination, they lose something on the way. In this story, two nameless protagonists, a pregnant woman and her husband, try to cross the border in a frosty geography.



Zarand

Trifa Ibrahim Hassan,
13 min,
Kurdish,
Bashuri Kurdistan, 2026

Banaz was five years old when she was circumcised. Now 25, she is a talented student in the painting department at the College of Fine Arts. She is preparing for an art exhibition of her paintings. A wealthy man's offer to sponsor the exhibition does not come out of altruism.



Warden

Sabah Mohammadi, 15 min,
Persian,
Rojhilati Kurdistan, 2026

This film is about a woman's survival and resilience. Zivar is waiting for the audience to have an answer for her dilemma.

Zivar, a middle-aged woman, is the supervisor of a student dormitory. She wants to do her best to keep the girls safe, but one of the girls in the dormitory does not accept her moral characteristics. When the student returns late to the dorm, Zivar reacts harshly and then seeks a solution.



Afrat

Siavash Vaziri, 6 min,
Kurdish,
Rojhalatî Kurdistan, 2025

This single word, woman encapsulates in this short film: to give voice to a powerful, unspoken, and often painful aspect of a young girl's transition into womanhood within a patriarchal society.

The story juxtaposes a public, male-centric ritual with a deeply private female experience, exposing a profound cultural dissonance.





Animation





Student Films

Victim

Noor Omer, 17min,
Kurdish,
Bashuri Kurdistan, 2026

A narrative focuses on women's central role in the future of the world. *Victim* explores how early marriage and female illiteracy act as catalysts for societal collapse, proving that when you deprive a woman of her education, an entire generation pays the price.



Interview with the Devil

Hama Sardar Sami,
20 min, English,
Iceland, 2025

Body, art, and murder are the key points of the short film by Hama Sardar Sami. In a haunting Icelandic setting, a brilliant but disturbed serial killer creates grotesque works of “art” using human bodies, throwing the small, tight-knit population into chaos and fear.



Guðrún
Danielsdóttir

Abraham
Jacob Franklinsson

Stefnir
Áli Benediktsson

INTERVIEW WITH THE DEVIL

a HAMA SARDAR film



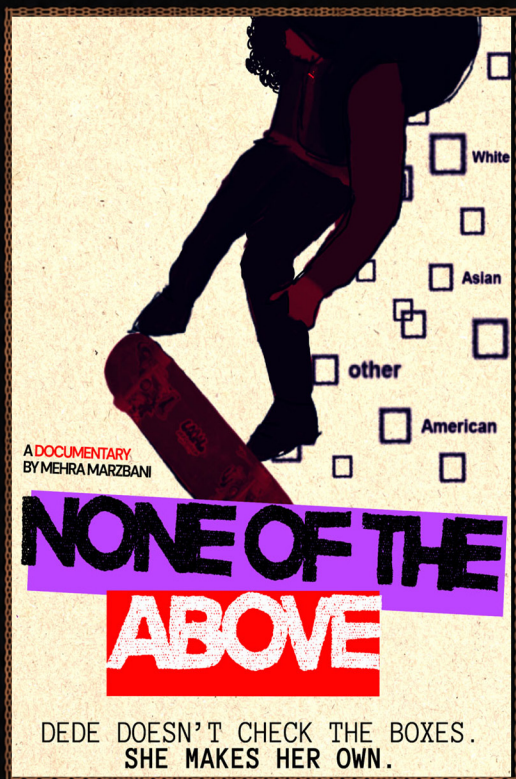
ART DIRECTOR: MIKKI A. HUSSIGEN EDIT: ALI SARABGHAN RECORDING ENGINEER: SIAMANDI HALLGREN MUSIC: GUSTAVOS WANGELIS CHATZIOPOULOS
COSTUME DESIGNER: MOHAMMED SAMI SET DESIGNER: GUÐMUNDUR ISAK-JONSSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RALPHUR STEFANSSON
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JOHANN HANNESSON PRODUCED BY: KVIKMYNDATAEKNI



None of the Above

Mehra Marzbani, 11 min,
English, 2026, USA

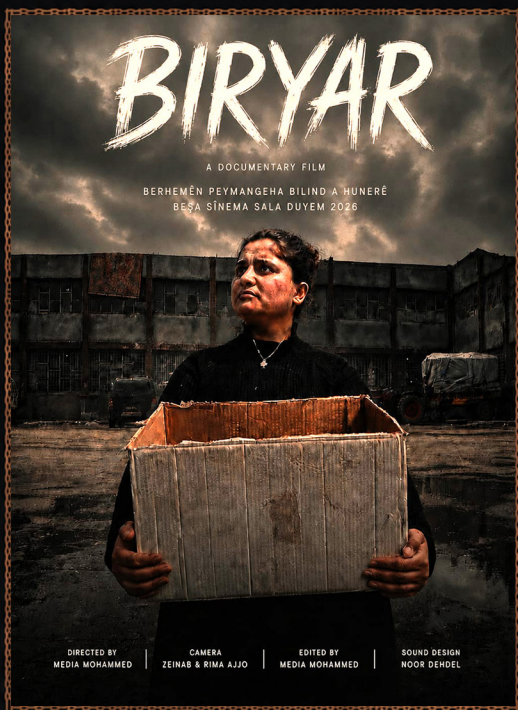
When Dede realizes there's no 'Kurdish' box to check on a school form, she embarks on an ambitious journey with fellow students and faculty to build her own.



Decision

Mediya Mohammad, 9min,
Kurdish,
Rojavayi Kurdistan, 2025

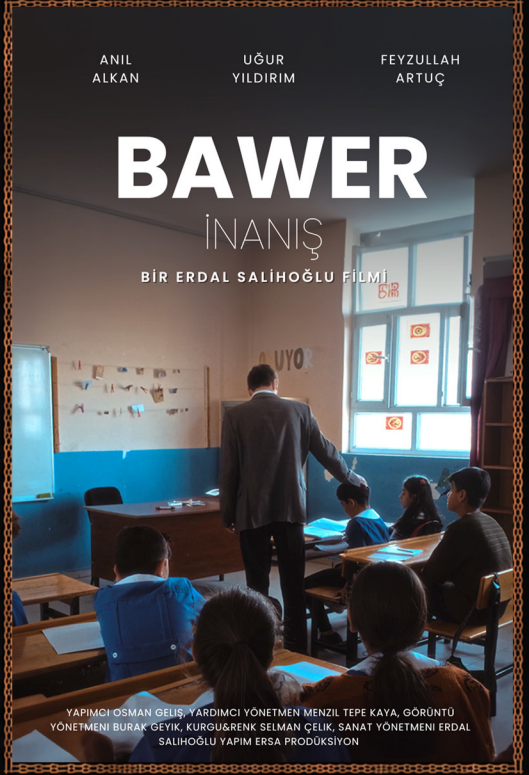
This film explores a young woman's dilemma whether to return to her homeland city, Afrin, which has been facing attacks for more than a decade.



The Belief

Erdal Salihoglu,
40min, English and
Kurdish et all,
Bakuri Kurdistan, 2024

Metin, a teacher, arrives in
a village in Şırnak, in Bakuri
Kurdistan as part of his
compulsory service. The
Kurdish pupils and Turkish
teacher hit linguistic and
cultural barriers.





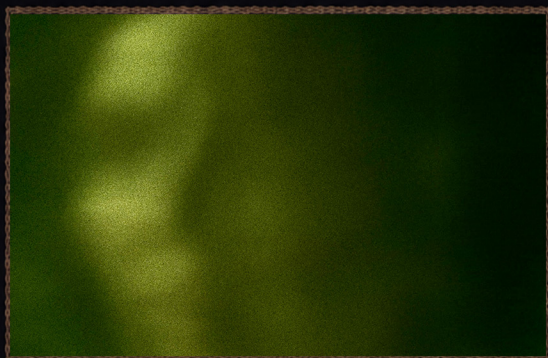
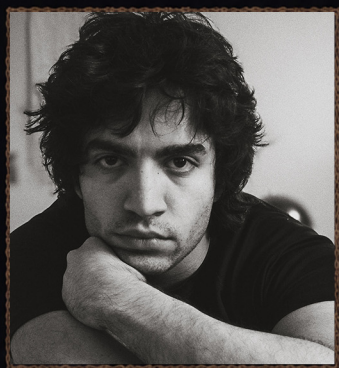
Experimental

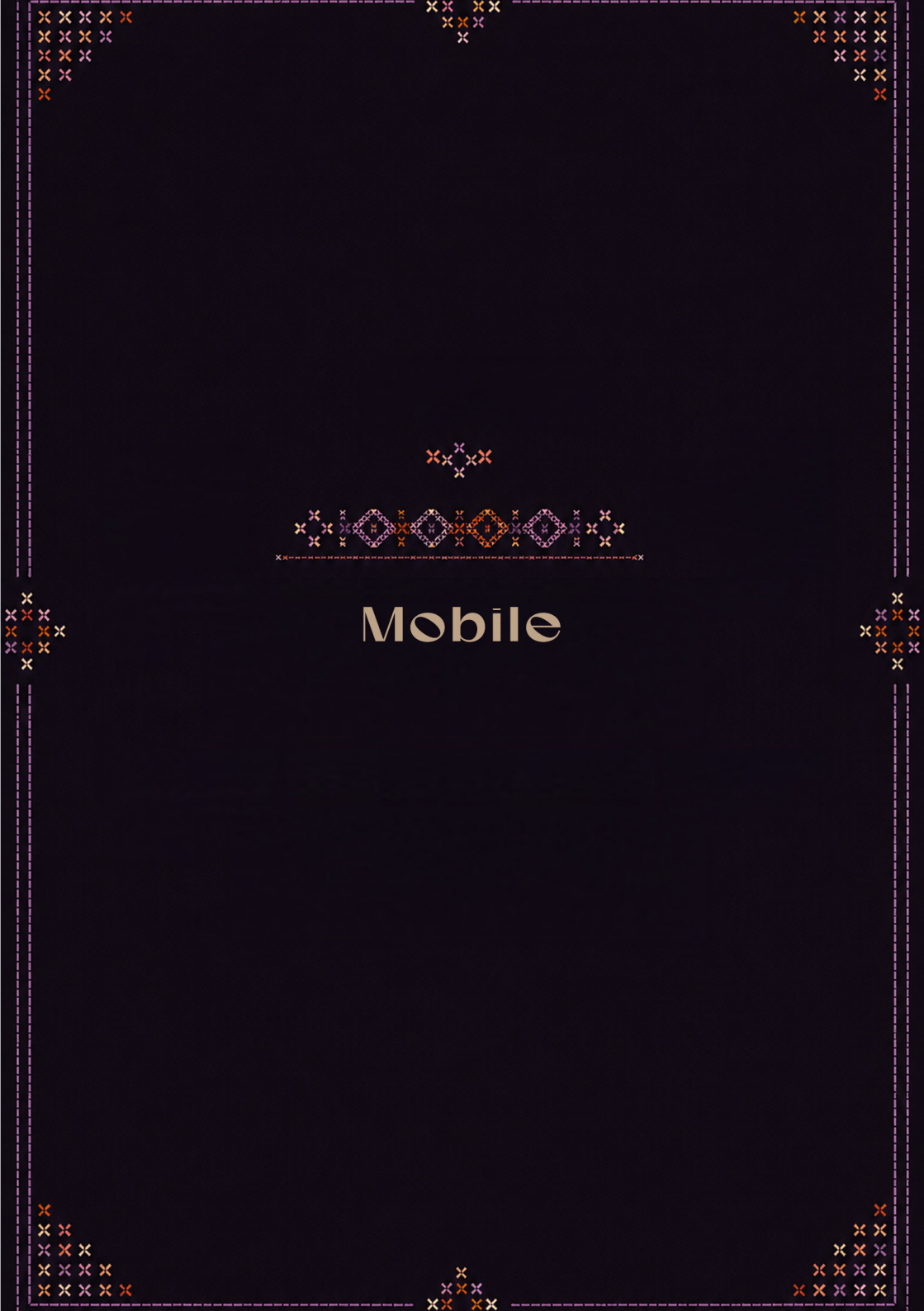


All Those Things He was Never Sure About

Mir Mengi, 12 min,
Zazaki, Bakuri Kurdistan, 2025

This film, in one of the world's endangered languages, grapples with the traditional norms of marriage from a gender perspective. Following an incident in the garden, the wife discovers a scar on her husband's back that she did not notice before. The newly discovered scar leads to questions that were never asked.





Mobile

No Signal

Hevar Omar, 12min,
Kurdish,
Rojhilati Kurdistan, 2025

This mobile film illustrates
how urban living depresses
some and their adventures
to look for alternatives.
Is there hope?





Jina Aminî

Screenings



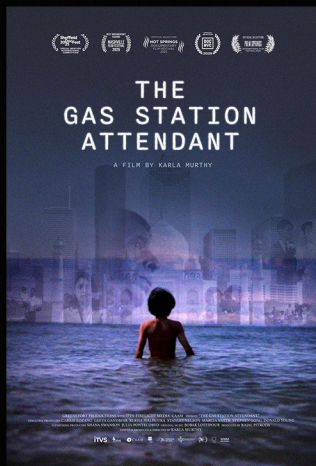


Jina (Mahsa) Aminî has been one of the reference points for anyone who wants to understand the women's fight for freedom beyond the global West. The protest started in Rojhelat following her death in custody, leading feminist all around the world to gather around "Jin Jiyan Azadi". The New York Kurdish Film Festival is remembering Jina Aminî with special screenings of *Tallahassee* and *The Gas Station Attendant* devoted to her name.

A cinematic play on the pieces of memory and places through the earliest -one may say- toy of a doll house! *Tallahassee* (2021) by Darine Hotait, as one of the first screenings of Jina Mahsa Aminî section of New York Kurdish Film Festival follows the question of what would be the carrier of a new life for a child? What could we learn from the imagination of a child, whose dreams are more present than the reality surrounding us? The transition between realities immanent to the experience of diaspora is at the spotlight in Kurdish and Arabic.

On the day of her release from a psychiatric facility, Mira returns to her mother's home in Brooklyn for her grandmother's birthday. But when she arrives, she discovers that her sister has told the family that she was on a trip to Florida. This portrayal of a young woman's re-entry into the world offers a glimpse into struggles around mental illness, an issue often silenced and pathologized in Arab culture.





The second screening for Jina Aminî is the autobiographical, non-narrative film *The Gas Station Attendant* (2025), by Karla Murthy. This film is one of the carriers of heterogenous elements of Kurdish cinema by the director's focus on the universal themes of immigration, financial insecurity and criminalized lives under the rule of new forms of capitalism. Choosing a gas station as its spatial pivot, the documentary brings forward the American experience of Kurdish immigrants through a personal story.



As a boy, the filmmaker's father, H. N. Shantha Murthy, ran away from home to escape the extreme poverty of his Indian village. He traveled the country in search of work. By chance, at a hotel in Delhi, he encountered an American couple visiting from Houston, Texas. He moved there with them and worked as a gas station attendant in Texas, struggling to make a living.

While telling his story, weaving together home videos and phone conversations, the filmmaker reflects on her own experiences as the daughter of immigrants (her mother is from the Philippines), trying to build a life in New York City. The film is an intimate love letter—a meditation on a complicated father-daughter relationship and a poignant tribute to the immigrant working class. Says Murthy, “I made this film to remind us of our humanity, how the power of kindness can change a person’s life, and to express our love for each other while we can.”

✕ ✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕✕ ✕





✿ Events ✿





✧ Panels ✧



✧ “Where is Kurdistan?”, Mehra Marzbani and Azad Azizyan ✧



This panel invites us to examine the lived reality of Kurdish students, Kurdish immigrants, and other unrepresented nations in the diaspora who struggle to find their identity, homeland, and language represented in official systems. Together, panelists Mehra Marzbani and Azad Azizyan and the audience will explore what it means to be unseen, why representation matters, and how we can create greater recognition and belonging.



✧ “Who Owns the Past”, Lukman Al-Faily and Xeyal Qertel ✧



This panel explores the courageous efforts of local residents who stood up against the looting and destruction of historic heritage. Joined by the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations in New York and moderator Xeyal Qertel, the discussion will consider the importance of protecting historic buildings, artifacts, and cultural memory—and the role communities and institutions can play in preserving them for future generations. The conversation will conclude with an opportunity for audience questions and engagement.

Festival Schedule

Tues, SEPT 29

DAY ONE

6 pm	Door Opens
6.30-7.15 pm	Reception, Kurdish food sponsored by Akdeniz Restaurant
7.15-7.20 pm	Kurdish national anthem
7.20-7.30 pm	Welcoming Remarks: Xeyal Qertel, Founder & Co-Director
7.30-7.40 pm	Message from Dr. Heval Abubakir, the Governor of Suleimani, South of Kurdistan
7.40-8 pm	Live music: <i>Cihan Celik</i>
8-8.20 pm	DJ Durry
8.20 - 9.35 pm	Film: <i>Singing Wings</i>
9.35 - 10 pm	Social mingling & wrap up

Wed, SEPT 30

DAY TWO

6-6.40 pm	Film: <i>The Belief</i>
6.40-7 pm	Film: <i>Limo knew everything</i> ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
7.20 - 7.35 pm	Film: <i>None of the above</i>
7.35 - 7.55 pm	Q&A Filmmaker Mehra Marzbani & Host: Azad Azizyan
7.55-8.30 pm	Panel: <i>Where is Kurdistan?</i> This panel invites us to examine the lived reality of Kurdish students and immigrants in the diaspora who struggle to find their identity, homeland, and language represented in official systems. Together, panelists Mehra Marzbani and Azad Azizyan and audience will explore what it means to be unseen, why representation matters, and how we can create greater recognition and belonging.
8.30-8.45 pm	Film: <i>The Cold</i>
8.45-9 PM	Film: <i>No Signal</i>

Thrs, OCT 1

DAY THREE

6-7.30 PM	Film: <i>Lions by the River Tigris</i>
7.30-8 PM	Conversation with Ambassador Lukman Al-Faily, Who Owns the Past Moderator: Xeyal Qertel. The conversation explores the courageous efforts of local residents who stood up against the looting and destruction of historic heritage. Joined by the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, the discussion will consider the importance of protecting historic buildings, artifacts, and cultural memory—and the role communities and institutions can play in preserving them for future generations. The conversation will conclude with an opportunity for audience questions and engagement. ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
8.20-8.35 pm	Film: <i>Home Made</i>
8.40-8.55 pm	Film: <i>File No.1</i>

Friday, OCT 2

DAY FOUR

3-3.22 pm	Film: <i>Tallahassee</i> - JINA AMINI DAYS
3.25-3.55 pm	Q&A - Filmmaker Darine Hotait, Host: Shilan Saadi ⌘ 15 min break ⌘
4.10-5.15 pm	Film: <i>Who Am I?</i> ⌘ 15 min break ⌘
5.30-6.35 pm	Film: <i>In the Shade of the Poplar Tree</i> ⌘ 15 min break ⌘
6:50-8.15 pm	Film: <i>Night and Fog in Kurdistan</i>
8.15-8.45 pm	Q&A Filmmaker Shilan Saadi & Host: Azad Azizyan ⌘ 15 min break ⌘
9-9.10 pm	Film: <i>Victim</i>
9.10-9.20 pm	Film: <i>The Dead End</i>
9.20-9.35 pm	Film: <i>Zarand</i>
9.35-9.45 pm	Film: <i>Afrat</i>
9.45-9.55 pm	Film: <i>Different Perspective</i>

Sat, OCT 3

DAY FIVE

3-4.25 pm	Film: <i>The Gas Station Attendant</i> - JINA AMINI DAYS
4.30-5 pm	Q&A, filmmaker Karla Murthy & Apo Bazidi ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
5.20-6.20 pm	Panel: Film funding, industry, and networking Moderators: Beyan Saleh & Ron Butler Participants: Apo Bazidi, Ekrem Heydo, Mori Heydo, Mir Mengi, Umut Yilmaz, Shilan Saadi, Salih Arif ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
6.40-7.45 pm	Film: <i>Before the Night</i> ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
8.05-8.45 pm	Panel: Findings on survey and residency program on Kurdish cinema
8.45-8.55 pm	Film: <i>Decision</i>
8.55-9.05 pm	Film: <i>Youthful Wrinkles</i>
9.05-9.20 pm	Film: <i>Fountain</i>
9.20-9.40 pm	Film: <i>Interview with the Devil</i>
9.40-9.55 pm	Film: <i>Warden</i>

Sun, OCT 4

DAY SIX

3-5 pm	Film: <i>Yol</i> - SPOTLIGHT ON KURDISH FILMMAKERS ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
5.20-5.35 pm	Film: <i>All Those Things He was Never Sure About</i>
5.35-6.05 pm	Q&A Filmmaker Mir Mengi & Host: Pinar Ogrenci ⌘ 20 min break ⌘
6.25-8.05 pm	Film: <i>My uncle Jens</i> 1 hr 38 min
8.05-8.35 pm	Q&A, Filmmaker Brwa Vahabpour & Host: Halime Akturk
8.35-9 pm	Live Music: <i>Cihan Celik</i>

All screenings and events take place at
VILLAGE EAST BY ANGELIKA

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