

GRAND PRIX
SELECTION
"★★★★! REMARKABLE!
Genuinely beautiful and haunting."

-Michael Wilmington, CHICAGO TRIBUNE

(THE BEST FILM OF THE YEAR, FIPRESCI INT'L FEDERATION OF FILM CRITICS)

DISTANT

A FILM BY NURI BILGE CEYLAN



NEW YORKER FILMS

'DISTANT' RELATIVES

The gulf between two cousins contains a powerful story

EW Grade: A

Reviewed by Lisa Schwarzbaum

Watch enough foreign-language films in which haphazardly shaven men sit motionless holding lit cigarettes for long stretches while strangers pass by, and silence begins to acquire its own cultural color palette. The frequently wordless melancholy of the haunting Turkish drama "Distant" -- Grand Prix winner at the 2003 Cannes film festival -- is a blend of European and Asian sensibilities, jaded sophistication, and practical naïveté as complex as the continent-spanning country itself. And for emphasis, writer-director Nuri Bilge Ceylan ("Clouds of May") tells of the unbridgeable distances that isolate two men, distant relatives, temporarily sharing an Istanbul flat.

The gloomy host (Muzaffer Özdemir) is a successful photographer disillusioned about work (he neglects his artistic ideals for commerce) and women (divorced, he retreats to porn videos and casual sex). The timid guest (Mehmet Emin Toprak) is a country cousin who leaves his village after the local factory closes and comes to Istanbul hoping to get a job on a ship. (The actors also shared a Cannes acting award; Toprak died in a car accident shortly after filming was completed.)

The characters couldn't be more different on the face of it - or more alike in their mutual inability to connect with other yearning humans. And Ceylan, who also served as cinematographer, frames the affecting, unstudied performances in gorgeously chosen shots and nonevents that sometimes teeter on the edge of comedy before knocking us breathless with their emotional power.

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WORTHY LIFE LESSONS FROM A TURKISH ODD COUPLE

Lonely in Istanbul

★★★1/2

Reviewed by V.A. Musetto

If "Starsky & Hutch" is your idea of art, keep your distance from "Distant," the droll new movie from maverick Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

If, on the other hand, you're searching for something that will remain with you long after leaving the theater, run, don't walk, to "Distant."

It won three prizes at last year's Istanbul Film Festival and two more at Cannes before screening to glowing reviews at the non-competitive New York Film Festival.

Employing little dialogue and long, static takes, "Distant" focuses on Mahmut, a melancholic Istanbul photographer who spends most of his time plopped in front of the TV watching porn tapes, with time out for Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker" (which has much in common with "Distant").

Occasionally, a woman - she might be a prostitute, but that is never made clear - pops into his apartment for sex.

His well-ordered life is thrown into shambles when Yusuf, a distant relative from a remote village, comes to visit while he looks for work on the Istanbul waterfront.

Friction ensues: Mahmut (Muzaffer Ozdemir), who can't wait for his visitor to leave, is fastidious; Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak), who isn't budging, is a slob.

In conventional terms, not much happens in "Distant" (a.k.a. "Uzak").

Mahmut visits his ailing mother. Yusuf stalks a woman who lives near his unwilling host. The height of action comes when Mahmut captures a pesky mouse in a trap.

But "Distant" has much to say about solitude and friendship and just plain coping with life.

Ceylan has a keen eye for small details, which make "Distant" all the more compelling.

The acting is superb - in fact, Ozdemir and Toprak shared the best-actor prize in Cannes, although Toprak died in a car accident shortly before the festival.

Bilge did his own photography, and his camera beautifully records the wondrous beauty of snowy Istanbul. Introducing the film in that city, Ceylan, 44, said he would be happy if "Distant" made enough money so he could make another one.

Not only has "Distant" done that, it has put Ceylan on the international film map.

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"Comparing movies to paintings has become a cliché, but it's unavoidable with a film like this one. It's important that you see this visually sumptuous movie on the big screen. For all its understated character comedy and sharp psychological insight, what truly distinguishes 'Distant' is its formal brilliance." -Mike D'Angelo, Time Out New York