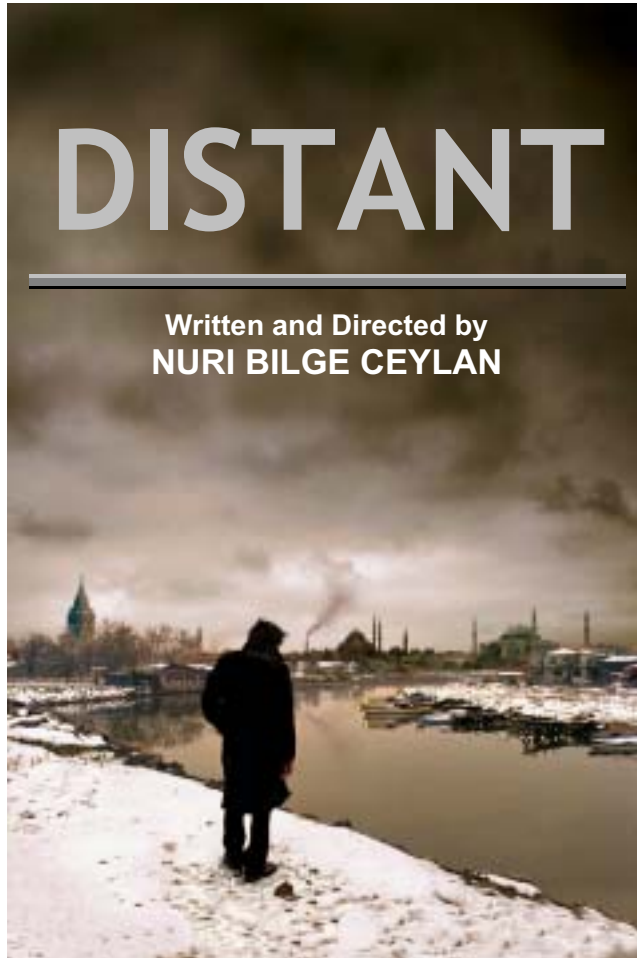




DISTANT

Written and Directed by
NURI BILGE CEYLAN



WINNER GRAND PRIX CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2003
WINNER BEST ACTOR CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2003
WINNER FIPRESCI – BEST FILM OF THE YEAR 2003

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DISTANT

Filmmakers

Director	Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Script	Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Cinematography	Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Assistant Cameraman	Turksoy Golebeyi
Art Director	Ebru Ceylan
Editor	Ayhan Ergürsel, Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Sound	Ismail Karadas.
Sound Mix	Erkan Aktas, Fono Film
Producer	Nuri Bilge Ceylan
Line Producer	Feridun Koc
Production Company	NBC Film

Cast

Muzaffer Özdemir	Mahmut
Mehmet Emin Toprak	Yusuf
Zuhal Gencer Erkaya	Nazan
Nazan Kirilmis	Lover
Feridun Koc	Janitor
Fatma Ceylan	Mother
Ebru Ceylan	Young girl

A New Yorker Films Release
www.NewYorkerFilms.com

Turkey, 2002

110 minutes, Color

In Turkish with English subtitles

1.85, Dolby Digital

SYNOPSIS

Mahmut is a relatively successful commercial photographer who has been struggling to come to terms with the growing gap between his artistic ideals and his professional obligations. His tedious workload, coupled with the lingering loss he still feels for his ex-wife (newly married and on the verge of leaving Istanbul for Canada), leaves Mahmut clinging to the melancholic and obsessive routines of his solitary life.

Without warning, Mahmut's distant relative Yusuf arrives in Istanbul determined to find a job aboard a ship so that he may fulfill his dream of traveling around the world. In need of a place to stay as he searches for work, Yusuf imposes himself on Mahmut, who resents the sudden intrusion, but nonetheless feels obliged to help his family. It doesn't take long for Yusuf to discover that the work he is looking for isn't available, but he manages to prolong his stay with Mahmut by formulating stories that would suggest otherwise. His hope waning, Yusuf resorts to spending his days drifting through the streets of Istanbul, slowly coming to the realization that without work he may soon need to return home. Mahmut tries to help by offering him a job as his assistant during a photography shoot, but the fix is temporary. As the two men struggle to make a connection, communication is slowly reduced to the bare minimum; and their time together must come to an end.

Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan wrote, directed, photographed, produced and co-edited this profoundly beautiful picture about detachment and isolation without allowing the austerity of his story to overwhelm the heartwarming, often comic, moments that permeate this award-winning film. Set in a wintry, contemporary Istanbul, the stunning cinematography was clearly instrumental in procuring the Grand Prix at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival, where Muzaffer Özdemir and Mehmet Emin Toprak also shared best actor honors for their remarkable performances.

“FROM HERE TO DISTANT”

By Pinar Ogunc, Turkish Time, May-June 2003

Nuri Bilge Ceylan is one of the most original names in the Turkish Film industry. He resembles a child playing silently in a corner of the house, and then emerging from the corner with a magnificent painting in his hand, surprising the whole neighborhood. “Kasaba (The Small Town)”, “Mayıs Sıkıntısı (Clouds of May)”, “Uzak” (Distant)... We started the chat with short sentences, and the conversation deepened. Ceylan is a candidate for the Golden Palm with his latest movie, “Distant”; he is such a person that if he were a painter, he would have painted differently, same if he were a shoemaker...

PINAR OGUNC: You do not give interviews frequently; do you not like talking about your movies?

NURI BILGE CEYLAN: The real danger is starting to repeat the same things, I guess, then a person gets bored with himself.

The same way you do not enjoy award ceremonies either?

No, the stage is not my ‘scene’. But of course awards advertise the movie. For example, someone who gets an award in the Cannes Film Festival can find a producer for his next movie very easily. There is also the issue of finance; it makes the person feel very comfortable for the next project. On the other hand, the awards are not holy judgment, if four or five people change in the jury the results also change. One must not exaggerate this event....

Is your biggest “gain” the awards you have won?

There are also some box office revenues, but foreign sales are the really important part. There are commercial sales, as well as sales to televisions. I can say that I have always made enough money to have some left for my next movie.

Recently, when you were accepting your “Best Director” and “Best Film” awards (Istanbul Film Festival), you mentioned that you donated part of the monetary award to two young short-film makers. Who are these people?

Last year, I was the only one selecting the winner in the short film competition that was organized by IFSAK (Association of Istanbul Photography and Movie Amateurs). After some deliberation, I did not select these two young people for the award of their movie. I thought they had some technical problems. They entered in the documentary category; their story was about a family that had to be split through no one’s fault. In time, this movie affected me deeply; it was very touching. I could not forget it even after one year. I felt guilty and asked for the movie from IFSAK again and liked it very much. That is why I wanted to share my award with them, to be a contribution for their next project. They found out through the newspapers and they thanked me. They were about to make a new movie and they had financial difficulties. So it looks like it was very timely.

In your movies most of the cast are your acquaintances, relatives, close friends. This must have advantages for sure, but are there any disadvantages on the set?

Of course there are. Firstly you can conduct a more systematic work with professional actors, your friends and relatives may be recalcitrant because of your closeness. I end up allowing things that I would not allow others to get away with. For example, just when we are getting ready to shoot, my mom would say, "I will not act now".

Working with professional actors does not seem to match your cinematic language. Are you always on the lookout, scouting for actors within your own circle? When you run out of your friends, will you "discover" someone new?

I truly want to discover. I am sensitive to people whose gestures and movements I find meaningful, like all other directors, I guess. For example, recently my sister was having her house renovated. She told me about the master workman doing the work; I wanted to meet him so I went immediately, and I was really impressed when I met him.

While you are bringing people from your life into the foreground of your movies, how autobiographical is, say, "Distant", your last movie?

Believe me when I say I do not know either. If I sit down and think about the scenes individually, perhaps I can discover some autobiographical events; there is a lot of it but it is difficult to differentiate. Lives of my friends, my own past, observations, feelings, they all come together and their sources are forgotten. Chehov used to do this, as well as Sait Faik. Both wrote about the lives of the people around them. They never contained very interesting issues. If we know how to look, life is very colorful; human scenery is the richest scenery in the world. Look at the next table, there is definitely a story there.

Do you like eavesdropping on people you do not know?

My favorite! I can even say that I enjoy it more than watching movies. Tragedies of my own life never make me cry, but my eyes water when I look at a mother and daughter walking together. It is more touching. Also I think people are more impressive from behind. I saw a person the other day, someone I never liked and I thought I never would; he was walking in front of me by coincidence one afternoon. The way his shoulders stooped, the way his head was held kind of crooked, was so touching that I forgave him for everything. People definitely look defenseless from behind. So you can watch them with a free conscience.

In 1989, your photographs were published in the Argos magazine as a series with the caption "Naked and the Sea". You wrote a foreword and you defined your purpose as "providing a new and bearable form to authenticity and trying to organize chaos". On the other hand you had a cautious approach that said "you may be indifferent to these, they may not concern you". Is this an entry sentence that goes well with your cinematic language as well?

Perhaps. Those sentences really smell of youth; now they feel a little exaggerated to me. It feels as if there is also a self-protecting instinct in that cautious stance. Let me say that I do not like assertive and exaggerated statements.

We know your mother, your father, a lot of details about your childhood places, about your life; we can even imagine sections from your life. But personally you say so few words yourself, about yourself, that we never can get close to Nuri Bilge Ceylan....

Truths are not revealed in interviews. An interviewee certainly behaves protectively. I am sure a more honest conversation will start when this tape recorder is turned off. Let me also say this; I try to be as honest as possible. Because I like reading interviews, I prefer the ones with a higher ratio of truth. I try not to lie as much as I can. Really, I am ready to expose my weaknesses when the time comes.

Is it easy to create a lie sitting in the director's chair?

I believe lies in movies can be caught very easily by a smart audience. In movies, dishonesty and mistakes are revealed very easily. One must think that the audience would catch everything and make a movie for an audience at least as smart as you are.

If independent cinema was born out of an understanding, a tradition, as well as out of necessity, why has it worked so slowly in Turkey?

There are too many people trying to do it; everyone I talk to has a script. Digital technology provides justice on production equality, even though it takes away a lot. There will be more people with scripts. People who cannot find in movies their perception of life, will have the desire to reflect their own world. Variety is borne out of this. Maybe there is a history to this that we do not know of. For example Yılmaz Güney felt that the existing cinema (then) did not meet the cinema of his dreams. I do not think it has a lot to do with money. I saw that everyone who reached that stage managed to somehow make a film. It has more to do with intentions. There is a myth as if making movies is very difficult. Unfortunately, people who make movies also encourage this myth, to have what they do be perceived as important. It is a separate thing to shoot good movies, but shooting movies is no big deal. It really is not difficult at all.

You manipulate the light, the darkness, filters, but you are also talking about a Chehov filter. What does the Chehov filter do to the image?

Oscar Wilde said, "Nature imitates art". Then he said, "but recently nature started resembling the landscape of the chorus". Really, when the artist offers a new appearance of the world, it looks contrary to the viewer at first. In time, nature starts changing shape under the influence of this work of art and we start looking at the trees, the outside world, our neighborhood with this view. You look differently at the people and real life after reading Chehov stories. Thanks to characters like Chehov, Sait Faik, even simple human

relations started looking very colorful to me. The Chehov filter is something like that. Sometimes a friend can also give you glasses like that.

Do you also dream with these filters? Are clouds, for example, huge and darker than everything else as in your movies?

I am very sorry to say that I remember very few dreams anymore. I dream, but I think I forget. Of course those gloomy skies always felt more meaningful to me. I did not want the sky to look white when I was a photographer. I like gloomy weather.

In “Distant”, being “from a small town” is a theme that is emphasized the most. One is moved by the feeling of meekness, about being from a small town in the big city. Is Turkey in a way “from the small town” of the world? In the “big city”, does the Turkish person, the Turkish movie, the Turkish music get that sense of meekness?

It is absolutely correct that Turkey is from the small town of the world. I started going to Europe when I was 17; the disparity of those places is startling. They also make you feel somehow the extent to which they view Turkey as the small town. I do not know how they view what we produce, but personally I do not feel meek. In the beginning I used to feel strange when I responded to questions about my movies abroad on a stage. There was a feeling of something missing, some sort of danger, but this has today gone away.

What do you think the Cannes Film Festival selection committee liked about “Distant”?

I cannot know that. The Cannes selection committee was familiar with my work. They were undecided as to whether to include “Clouds of May” in the competition and I chose the Berlin Film Festival then, because I could not wait for them to decide. Maybe their reason this time does have to do with “Distant”, maybe they did not want to have it snatched by Berlin again.

Are you nervous?

No, I am used to it. This is a good opportunity for selling this movie, we must prepare for it. Preparing brochures, renting mobile phones, thinking about subtitles...

Do you prepare answers to possible interview questions?

No, when I go to an interview I want my head to be clear, otherwise new ideas do not surface.

Is there anything new in this interview?

I think so; you delved into some things well. The same questions will get the same answers.

FILMOGRAPHIES

Nuri Bilge Ceylan was born in Istanbul, Turkey, 1959. After graduating from Engineering Department of Bosphorus University, he studied Filmmaking for two years at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul.

- 1995 - COCOON (Koza) Short film 35mm 20min. B&W
- 1997 - THE SMALL TOWN (Kasaba) 35mm 85min. B&W
- 2000 - CLOUDS OF MAY (Mayis Sikintisi) 130min. 35mm Color
- 2002 - DISTANT (Uzak) 110min. 35mm Color

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

- 2003 Cannes Film Festival
WINNER Grand Prix du Jury
WINNER Best Actor (Muzaffer Özdemir and Mehmet Emin Toprak)
- 2003 New York Film Festival
- 2003 Chicago Film Festival
- 2003 Telluride Film Festival
- 2003 WINNER FIPRESCI Grand Prix - Best Film of the year
- 2003 Cinemaya Film Festival, India
WINNER Best Film
- 2003 Cinemanila Film Festival, Philippines
WINNER Grand Prize (Lino Brocka Award)