



## WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA: PREVIEW

# Nezouh

### Nezouh

Director: Soudade Kaadan

Executive Producers: Yuan Zhang, Alaa Karkouti, Ben Coren, Daniel Battsek, Donna Gigliotti, Farhana Bhula, Lizzie Francke, Peter Luo  
Producers: Yu-Fai Suen, Soudade Kaadan, Marc Bordure

Associate Producers: Amira Kaadan, Yuxin Liu

Co-producers: Nancy Xu, Lizzy Yang Liu

Written by: Soudade Kaadan

Directors of Photography: Hélène Louvart, Burak Kanbir

Editors: Soudade Kaadan, Nelly Quettier

Production Designer: Osman Özcan

VFX: Ahmed Yousry

Key Grip and SFX: Serdal Ateş

Costume Designer: Selin Sözen

Music: Rob Lane, Rob Manning

Cast:

Hala Zein (*Zeina*)

Kinda Alloush (*Hala*)

Samer al Masri (*Motaz*)

Nizar Alani (*Amer*)

UK-Lebanon-France-Qatar 2022

103 mins

Digital

Courtesy of Modern Films

Woman with a Movie Camera is generously supported by Jane Stanton

+ Q&A with director Soudade Kaadan

### Soudade Kaadan on 'Nezouh'

*Nezouh is not a conventional film about Syrian refugees. How did you come up with this unique metaphorical approach?*

At the time I started writing *Nezouh*, there was a certain expectation as to how a Syrian film should look – it was mostly informative, with a first-degree narrative to explain and simplify the complexity of a Syrian war for a white Western audience. Most of the refugee films about Syria were either trying to present us as victims or heroes, in a black and white narrative. But of course, we are neither one nor the other, like any human being. In all my films, I wanted the audience to feel that Syrian refugees were their equals. The family in *Nezouh* could be any family around the world who is facing a dilemma of whether to stay or leave everything behind.

Lately, I've begun to believe that the more immersed a story is in the local reality, the more universal it suddenly becomes. Symbols, metaphors, and a tale-like approach elevate and transcend the local reality to the universal. That's why I chose the simple metaphor of a family house that endures changes in Damascus. In this city, houses are usually closed: the curtains try to hide the interiors from the neighbours. With the bombing, you could see, unfortunately, for the first time, open ceilings as open windows facing the sky and the stars. I wanted to show that not only the physical houses changed in Damascus, but also that the family's dynamic changed when Syrian women started to take the lead.

*What were the most important challenges in writing the script?*

Our challenge usually is finding financing for our films in Arabic language, not writing our films! I usually write as a writer-director based on an image I see, and it becomes the core of the film later. For *Nezouh*, I first saw a little girl looking at the stars from an opening in the ceiling. And then, the characters led me to their story. Later, the challenge became to balance personal stories, fictional plot, war reality and magic realism in a film. How to express war without the usual action bombing scenes we see in films with similar topics. How to show the danger approaching the house without seeing it. And how to discover the horror of war without being graphic.

Since the war in Syria was not a normal war, and since it lasted 10 years, normal people did find and invent ways to resist and survive the war reality by making daily life as normal as it could be. So, you see someone listening to music, enjoying those precious life moment while everything was destroyed around them. I wanted to show those most unique and cherished moments.

*The filmmaking is very rich and creative. What was your goal in cinematic terms?*

I tried to show visually three phases in the film: before the bomb, after the bomb and through the streets of the city. In the prologue of the film, before the bombing, we are in darkness, with a circular camera movement to show how they are trapped in this house. After the bombing, the light invades the house, the colours are more vibrant, and the camera movement is tilting up to the sky

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### **Silent Cinema: Pavement Butterfly**

Großstadtschmetterling + intro by BFI curator

#### **Bryony Dixon**

Sun 28 Apr 14:30

### **Families: The Boy and the Heron**

Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka

Sun 5 May 12:30; Sun 12 May 12:00;

Sun 26 May 12:30

### **Projecting the Archive: For Them That Trespass**

+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National

#### **Archive Curator**

Thu 9 May 18:10

### **African Odysseys: Restored: Bushman + intro**

with Journey Mercies director Tomisin Adepeju

Sat 11 May 14:00

### **Experimenta: Cinema Is Evil: Welcome to the**

**World of Legendary, Queer Occult Filmmaker**

#### **Kenneth Anger**

Sat 11 May 17:50

### **Seniors: Shakespeare Wallah + intro**

Wed 15 May 14:30

### **Families: Wonka**

Sun 19 May 12:50 (Funday)

### **Silent Cinema: Vagabond Queen + intro by**

**BFI curator Bryony Dixon**

Sun 19 May 15:40

### **Relaxed Screening: The Magic Flute Trollflöjten**

+ intro & discussion

Mon 20 May 18:00

### **Restored: The Small Back Room + intro by the**

**BFI Conservation team**

Tue 28 May 18:10

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in vertical movement between the house and the sky as a symbol of Zeina's aspirations and dreams. Once we leave the house, the colour palette is paler, the city is desolated, destroyed, and the camera is steadicam in horizontal movement. I had an amazing grip and camera team, and with H  l  ne Louvart's lens, we achieved both poetic images and lighting, with an authentic setting and context.

The film shifts to magic realism from Zeina's POV after the bomb has fallen on their house. It starts with her illusion of seeing her father swallowed by the house, and then she gradually starts to see the sea in the sky. Once her mum Hala starts changing, and decides to leave the house, she also starts to see Zeina's fantasy moments, but she doesn't succeed as an adult to be fully in her universe. That's why she can see the pigeon at the window, but she can't skim rocks in the sky.

As much as the film is poetic, with magic realism moment, and a fairytale approach, it's deeply anchored in Syrian reality. It was important for me that the audience wouldn't feel the difference between VFX shots, SFX and the production design of the film. Even in the magic realism moments, we tried to make the effects subtle and as integrated as possible. I am grateful that we had a great team who believed in the story and my vision and went beyond everything to achieve this. Production designer Osman   zcan, SFX supervisor Serdal Ateş, and VFX supervisor Ahmed Yousry did lengthy research about Syria, based on archive material and their own photos. It was important for me to represent my city subtly, with authenticity. Ahmed Yousry – who usually works on Hollywood big budget films – managed to make the VFX for our film within our budget and with the same quality. I think with those passionate projects, you can bring the best out of talents if they enjoy making it and believe in the necessity and urgency to tell this story in this approach.

*What do you hope that the audience will take away from this film?*

Firstly, I hope that the audience will enjoy the film on two levels: cinematically and for the story it tells. Then, I want them to really think about how difficult it was for this family to take the decision to leave. *Nezouh* tells the story of a family before they leave the country and become refugees, who will still have a long journey ahead of them.

On the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, displaced people are simply seen as refugees. People cannot understand how difficult it was for them to take the decision to leave. No one wants to leave everything – homeland, memories, identities – to become a stranger, a burden with stereotypes, unless there's a real threat on their lives. That's why I decided that the character of the father would firmly refuse to leave the house, even when things become dangerous, so the audience would end up feeling how mad it is to stay. At this moment, I hope they would realise why people become refugees.

Production notes