

Afghanistan, The Lost Truth



A film by Yassamin Maleknasr

"Afghanistan, The Lost Truth is the only film I've seen on the subject which is able to peer beyond the clichéd images of a war-ravaged land to note evidence of the Afghan people's indomitability and resilience."

- Peter Scarlet, Executive Director, Tribeca Film Festival



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Synopsis



Shortly after the fall of the Taliban, Iranian filmmaker Yassamin Maleknasr embarked on a remarkable journey across the vast landscape of Afghanistan from Herat to Balkh, the only woman and filmmaker to have traveled such distances since the fall of the regime. Her resulting film, *Afghanistan: The Lost Truth*, is a fascinating look at the people, culture and landscape of the country—and the optimism that endures despite the countless tragedies the country has suffered.

Maleknasr's intimate interviews offer a surprising look at Afghan women that goes far beyond Western perceptions of the burka. Conversations with women from all walks of life, including students, artisans, and one of the country's only female judges, reveal the incredible strength, hope and determination that women bring to the task of rebuilding their war-torn homeland. An

emotional meeting with filmmaker Siddiq Barmak, director of the acclaimed Afghan feature *Osama*, offers powerful insight into the overwhelming challenges faced by artists and filmmakers under the Taliban. Maleknasr's thoughtful dialogues combine with stunning footage from all regions of the country to paint a vivid portrait of Afghanistan today.



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Credits

Iran • 2003 • 64 Minutes • Color

Producer/Director
Yassamin Maleknasr

Camera
A. Taghikhani

Editor
S. Shahsavari

Photography
Sh. Shahablou

Digital Sound & Editing
Rasaneh Pouya

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Festivals and Screenings

For the most updated list, please visit www.wmm.com.

Tribeca Film Festival

SILVERDOCS, AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival

The Montreal Int'l Festival of New Cinema and New Media

Pusan International Film Festival

Middle East Film Festival Beirut

Fajr Film Festival, Tehran

Rome Asian Film Festival

The Montreal Int'l Festival of New Cinema and New Media

Kish Documentary Film Festival

Istanbul Women's Film Festival

Singapore Film Festival

Zanzibar Film Festival

Assilah South-South Film Festival

Festival of Iranian Independent Documentaries, Brazil

Las Garzas Film Festival



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About the Filmmaker

Born in Tehran, Yassamin Maleknasr is a graduate of filmmaking from University of Southern California (USC) and did post-graduate work in Drama at Towson State University in Maryland. She made her first short film, *Jazz Ballet* in the U.S, and after several years working at American film companies, she returned to Tehran to perform in Dariush Mehrjui's film *Sara* (1993) for which she won a Best Supporting Actress Award from the Fajr film festival of Tehran. She has also acted in a number of other Iranian features. Maleknasr directed her debut feature film, *The Common Plight* in 1995, and has made several documentaries including *Bababaghi*, which documents the lives of lepers and their families living in the outskirts of Tabriz, and *Iran through Foreign Eyes*, in which foreign-born women express their views on life in Iranian society.



Director's Statement



"Filming *Afghanistan, The Lost Truth* was an experience as precious as the famed rubies of Badakhshan region. I entered this exotic, mysterious and historic land shortly after the fall of the Taliban regime. Our intention was to seek love and life - not aversion and death. This hope was my small crew's guiding light. Despite the turmoil in Afghanistan, there is life and a timeless essence that I hoped to capture in the film. Men, women and children voice their hopes, aspirations and how hopeful they are about the future. The future, which itself, is the mystery of existence in contemporary Afghanistan.

Being a woman filmmaker from Iran worked to my advantage in the making of this film. Though I was in a patriarchal environment, the people's kindness enabled me to build close relationships with the Afghan women. This film aims to go beyond the limits of Burka, to reveal women's real lives."

Yassamin Maleknasr



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Tribeca Film Festival Puts Spotlight on Middle Eastern Cinema

Neeme Raud

New York

11 May 2004

More than 200 feature films, documentaries and short films from nearly 40 countries made the third Tribeca Film Festival in New York as adventurous and diverse as the host city.

Actor Robert de Niro and several business partners launched the Tribeca Film Festival in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Their aim was to bring the area surrounding Ground Zero, the former site of the World Trade Center, back to life. Now in its third year, the festival has blossomed into a major international event, offering something for everyone - from political documentaries and screen dramas to panel discussions, a family festival, a street fair, even outdoor films at a theater by the Hudson River.

The ideal festival is a big tent open to all, says Peter Scarlet, the festival's executive director.

"We have films made by people up the street, people at the other side of the world," he said. "We also have films made by filmmakers in their 90s and filmmakers in their teens and that's because this is such an international city. People come here from all over the world. It is the crossroads for cinema, as it is the crossroads for the world and has been for hundreds of years."

This year, during the first nine days of May, audiences had a chance to see a vast range of films, with an emphasis on Middle Eastern filmmakers. According to Mr. Scarlet, the festival is making a special effort to introduce Middle Eastern films to Americans.

"I think, in part because of 9/11, I always felt it important to bring films here from the Middle East," he added. "We had the first two films from Afghanistan ever shown in the competitive festival last year. This year we have three programs from Iraq, including the first two documentaries shot in Iraq since the fall of Saddam."

Iranian-American filmmaker Yassamin Maleknasr praised the festival's attempts to broaden people's understanding of the world. She brought along a documentary shot in Afghanistan, in which she tried to show the country through different lenses.

"When you say Afghanistan, people only think of one thing - the Taleban, the Kalashnikov, the burka and the desert," she said. "I passed these images, because I wanted to say, 'Look, there is something more.'"

Yassamin Maleknasr says other countries and nationalities are often seen only through the stereotypes created by the media. Ms. Maleknasr says that because she was educated in the United States, young people in Iran often ask her, "What is America like?" She says they think it is only MTV, Hollywood, red carpets and celebrities, as they have seen in the movies and television.



Afghanistan, The Lost Truth

"They don't know you work 14 hours a day to make a living," she added. "So, I think we just have images and I think media needs now to play a much more important role than before and documentaries can be a great help in this, to show the real image about ourselves, to show a different image. I think there is a great human thing in Americans and in Iranians and in Europeans. We all have hearts. We all have minds. We fall in love, we cry, and we care for the same things. Maybe we should just wash our eyes and try to see one another."

One of the most powerful films at this year's festival, the winner for the best documentary, was the Israeli-Dutch co-production *Arna's Children*. The Israeli director, Juliano Mer Khamis, tells a very personal story. In his youth he spent several years working with a children's theater group set up by his mother, Arna, as part of an alternative education system in the occupied West Bank.

Two years ago, after his mother died, he returned to find out what happened to the boys. "Unfortunately, I discovered that one of them became a suicide bomber," he said. "One of them was leading a resistance group against the Israeli army and was killed. One was killed during the filming, on camera. Three of them are buried under the ruins. We haven't found them until today. The last boys died during the shooting of the film. The last one of the group died three months ago, just a few minutes before the first screening of the film."

The Israeli director was truly surprised by the reaction of the New York audience. Mer Khamis feared a negative response because the film deals with terrorism and was shown just steps from Ground Zero. However, he got the opposite, three full houses and heated but informed debates. "I am touring with the film around the world," he said. "This is the biggest surprise. I thought, I come to New York and the movie is going to be shown to three or five people and I am going to have some good times in New York. But, hey, if there is something during this tour that surprised me and encouraged me and empowered me, it was the last screening in New York."

According to *The New York Times*, in just three years the Tribeca Film Festival has become one of the fastest growing cultural institutions in New York and will most likely be a major player in the new downtown cultural center planned at Ground Zero.

