



ARAF

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
la Biennale di Venezia 2012

Orizzonti – Competition



ARAF — SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN
a film by Yeşim Ustaoglu



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Pretty Zehra and handsome Olgun spend most of their young lives working in a service station cafeteria near a lonely highway. Their monotonous work shifts are broken up only by sparks of naive expectations of a brighter future.

Everything seems transient about their surroundings. The once important industrial area is now a faceless place of economic waste and unemployment. Most of the area's occupants have all escaped to the big city in search of opportunity. But Zehra, Olgun and their friends still remain, caught somewhere in between the past and an uncertain future.

Zehra dreams that love will take her away from her meaningless job and life at home with her strict old-fashioned mother. She becomes fascinated by an older truck driver, Mahur, who spends much of his time on the road. As Zehra's desire for Mahur turns into a tragic first love, her rebellious friend Olgun becomes more and more frustrated, stuck at home, not yet a young man on his own. Zehra and Olgun will experience a bittersweet rite of passage, leading to both suffering and awakening. But as they say goodbye to their childhood innocence, love and hope will help them to move forward.

SYNOPSIS



YEŞİM USTAOĞLU

Yesim Ustaoglu's PANDORA'S

BOX won Best Film and Best Actress awards at the San Sebastian Film Festival. The story of an old woman who suffering from Alzheimer's participated in many international festivals, winning many awards and distribution in various countries.

Yeşim Ustaoglu first received international recognition for her 1999 film, JOURNEY TO THE SUN (GÜNEŞE YOLCULUK). In competition at the Berlin Film Festival, JOURNEY TO THE SUN received the Blue Angel Award (Best European Film) and the Peace Prize. The moving story of a courageous friendship undaunted by political cruelty, JOURNEY TO THE SUN swept the İstanbul Film Festival by winning Best Film, Best Director, the FIPRESCI Prize and the Audience Award.

Her third film, WAITING FOR THE CLOUDS, the story of a woman forced to live for 50 years with the haunting secrets of a hidden identity, was awarded the NHK Sundance– International Filmmaker's Award. She made her feature debut with 1994's THE TRACE (iz).

FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY

- 2012 ARAF
(Turkey/Germany)
- 2008 PANDORA'S BOX
(Turkey/France/Belgium/Germany)
- 2004 WAITING FOR THE CLOUDS
(France/Germany/Greece/Turkey)
- 1999 JOURNEY TO THE SUN
(Turkey/Germany/Netherlands)
- 1994 THE TRACE
(Turkey)

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY





COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR YEŞİM USTAĞLU

THE TRUCK STOP

I wrote the screenplay for ARAF, based on my own original story. The story is set in a large truck stop off the highway between Istanbul and Ankara. This place is a complex that contains a gas station, a cafeteria, lodging for truck drivers and various shops which are all frequented by many people every day. During the preparation and the shoot of my previous film PANDORA'S BOX, we visited that kind of truck stop complex numerous times. It was interesting to see how regular customers gradually became more and more acquainted with the staff. One day, I caught an incident from the corner of my eye. It was a rainy and wistful morning like in ARAF when young woman Zehra sees the truck driver Mahur for the first time. I asked myself what it would be like to fall in love in such a transient, intangible and dead-end world like this truck stop. That's how ARAF was born and then developed. I just needed to return to the same place.

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

"Araf" means purgatory or limbo in Turkish. A state of waiting between heaven and hell. I translated "araf" as "somewhere in between". While I was writing the script, the perception of life in and around the service station reminded me of a state of limbo, a state of waiting that is neither hell nor heaven; an uncertain, hopeless state, like in purgatory. During that time I re-read Dante's *Divine Comedy*, his trilogy of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and once again I felt that purgatory, the state of waiting, is the hardest of them all. This equation is true for the entire film. And if I look at all the characters, places and their lives I created in ARAF, it becomes obvious that they are all living life in a sort of purgatory.

YOUTH IN DESPAIR

The experiences of young people living in a rural area in any corner of Anatolia or in the suburbs of Istanbul definitely coincide with the characters' lives in ARAF. In a sense, we're also dealing with a class reality here. In such a world, the prospects a lower-class youth imagines for herself or himself unfortunately are not far from Zehra's and Olgun's lack of perspective and helplessness. And to feel this is very saddening as much as it is frightening. In PANDORA'S BOX, I already dealt with the despair of middle and upper-class young people. What I find highly distressing is that even the dynamic of being in love and the waiting for the pain inflicted by that feeling of love to subside, which is something that makes us feel alive, somehow seems to be a class-distinctive luxury. Zehra pays a high price for this luxury because of her living conditions.

ZEHRA

Zehra is an eighteen year old girl who lives with her family in a small village. Her village is close to the industrial town that is linked to the truck stop where she works. Like many young people, she wants to escape the small village where she is stuck, and to change her life in the big city. She sometimes works 24-hour shifts at the truck stop. She secretly saves money, looks for potential jobs on the internet, and dreams of going someplace far away. In her spare time, she watches silly TV shows, depicting lives that are very different from hers and which she might even envy. That's the only perspective she can devise in order to change her life. She is, of course, a very inexperienced, naive girl who's full of life.

ZEHRA'S SENSES COME ALIVE

When Zehra notices truck driver Mahur, she starts to pursue her feelings and the desire awakening in her body in an unexpected and courageous way. This love makes all of her senses come alive. She starts to believe that she can conquer all. At the same time, she's also too inexperienced to know that her actual situation will not allow her to lead the life she wants. She ends up in a solitary vacuum she retreats

to where she no longer can share her problems with anyone. If her family environment had been more open than judgmental, perhaps she could have dealt differently with her predicament. But in her case, the situation eventually spirals to almost claim her life. Zehra's story is the kind of story we often read over in a three-line newspaper article and we might even secretly condemn her actions. But once we actually step into her life, we gradually are more understanding and tolerant about what kind of life she leads.

NESLIHAN ATAĞÜL AS ZEHRA

When entrusting such a difficult part like Zehra to an actress, especially after having internalized the part while writing it, it's natural to deal with it very carefully and want to choose very wisely. I met with a lot of talented young women, both amateurs and professionals, and finally got to know Neslihan Atagül. After I met her I knew she was the one I had been searching for. Her very own energy and focus and the way she connected with me was so profound and dynamic. Apart from myself, the whole crew enjoyed working with her all through the shoot. It still gives me great pleasure to watch Zehra in every shot of the film.

BARIŞ HACIHAN AS OLGUN

Olgun is also eighteen and works at the truck stop with Zehra, with whom he's madly in love. Just like Zehra, Olgun is naïve enough to hope that make-believe, money-squandering TV shows will change his life. But he's also a clever and very loyal boy-next-door coming of age. Unlike Zehra, he has no plans of leaving life in the provincial town permeated by smoke emanating from the steel factory. Olgun is also a kid in pain -- he can't get around to loving and respecting his dishonest alcoholic father, and he is very scared of becoming like him. So Olgun pins his hopes on becoming a local hero by hitting the jackpot and winning a competition. That's as good as his dream gets until the moment when even this is shattered. Olgun is played by Barış Hacıhan. ARAF is his screen debut. When I look at Barış, even now, I tend to confuse him with Olgun. That's why I love and believe in every shot of him.

THE ISTANBUL-ANKARA HIGHWAY

The truck stop in ARAF is situated along the Istanbul-Ankara highway next to a nearby small industrial town. It's Turkey's busiest toll highway that connects Istanbul, which is considered one of the world's capital cities, and Turkey's capital Ankara. For one of Turkey's busiest area, it remains stuck between modernity and rural kitsch. On the other hand, the town of Karabük, which used to be one of the forerunners of modern Turkey with its iron and steel factory established in the 1930s, seems to now live the existence of a rural town. When it should be representing modernity it looks a bit like a former beauty queen who has lost her popularity. This stark contrast made a strong impression on me. I've always maintained that life is a matter of perception. Every moment that we haven't seen, heard, touched or smelled before will start to reverberate in us in a very different way and take another form once we experience it. In ARAF, I tried to touch upon those fleeting moments and feelings that can occur.



NESLİHAN ATAĞÜL (as Zehra)

Neslihan was born in 1992. While still studying acting at Yeditepe University, she started her acting career by taking roles in several commercials including Tofta-JOY İN 2005 and Süttaş in 2006. After that she continued acting in a TV series called YAPRAK DÖKÜMÜ for four seasons. She also took roles in CANIM BABAM and HAYAT DEVAM EDİYOR. At the 14th Altın Koza Film Festival, she won the Most Promising Young Actress Award for her performance in İLK AŞK as Bahar character.

BARIŞ HACIHAN (as Olgun)

Barış Hacıhan was born in İstanbul in 1992. He went to primary school at Avrupa Koleji and continued his education at Ataköy Cumhuriyet Lisesi. While he was in highschool, he participated in drama classes which lead him to study acting at Sadri Alışık Kültür Merkezi. He is now a freshman journalism student.

ÖZCAN DENİZ (as Mahur)

Besides his singing career, Ozcan Deniz is also passionate about acting. In 1999, he acted in a TV series, AŞKIN DAĞLARDA GEZER, of which the story is written by himself. He also took successful roles in other important TV productions such as ASMALI KONAK in 2002 and Haziran Gecesi in 2004. He will be starring in another TV series production called SAMANYOLU this year. He made his debut in cinema in Memduh Ün's movie ONA SEVDİĞİMİ SÖYLE. He continued his cinema works with ONA SEVDİĞİMİ SÖYLE, KOLAY PARA, ASMALI KONAK and a documentary work which was supported by Foreign Affairs Ministry, MEVLANA AŞIKN DANSI. Deniz was born in 1972 in Ankara, but spent much of his childhood in Aydın.



TECHNICAL DETAILS

35 mm | CinemaScope | Color | Dolby digital | 124 min

CAST

Zehra	Neslihan Atagül
Olgun	Barış Hacıhan
Mahur	Özcan Deniz
Derya	Nihal Yalçın
Rıfat	İlgaz Kocatürk
Haydar	Can Başak
Meryem	Yasemin Conka
Nuri	Erol Babaoğlu
Feride	Feride Karaman

CREW

Written & directed by: Yeşim Ustaoglu

Cinematographer: Michael Hammon

Editors: Mathilde Muyard, Naim Kanat, Svetolik Mica Zajc

Art Director: Osman Özcan

Sound: Bruno Tarrière

Costume Designer: Ayşe Yıldız

Produced by: Ustaoglu Film (Turkey), CDP (France),

The Match Factory (Germany), ZDF / Arte, TRT



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