

SHIPS

Writer Elif Refiğ
Director Elif Refiğ
Producer Pelin Uzey
Shooting Start 1-29 October 2010
Total Budget 952,490TL
Contact Elif Refiğ
Ozogul Sokak. Ozoglu Apt. 19/3
Purtelas Mah. Cihangir, Istanbul
Phone : +90 212 292 0426
+90 533 636 9910
E-mail : elifre@gmail.com



Elif Refiğ has a B.A. in international trade from Bosphorus University

and an M.F.A. in film from Columbia University. She served as a contributing writer and an editorial board member of Altyazı Film between 2001 and 2005. Her feature screenplay 'Adanmış Detaylar' (*Devoted Details*) was selected among 2200 projects and considered as a finalist for the 2004 Sundance Institute Screenwriters Lab. Her first film 'Bekleyolu' (*Roadwait*) was showcased at several national and international festivals. She received the Gestures of Reconciliation Prize from the Goethe Institute with her next film *Esperanza Starring*, which was shown on ZDF in Germany. Elif Refiğ received the prestigious Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Grant twice in 2004 and 2007. In 2007, she completed her film *Three Bodies* with a grant from Kodak. The film was showcased at several festivals in Istanbul and New York. Elif Refiğ

taught screenwriting at Columbia University in 2006 and 2007. The following year, she completed her thesis film *Erkek Adam (Man to Be)* with a grant she received from Kodak and the Best Foreign Filmmaker Award from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. The film also received the Caucus Foundation Production Grant and Open Society Institute Grant. Elif Refiğ plans to shoot *Gemiler (Ships)*, which received the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Script Development Grant, in the fall of 2010.

Filmography

Erkek Adam (Man to Be), 20 min, 16mm (2009) Caucus Foundation Production Grant / Open Society Institute Grant
Kodak Film Grant / Hollywood Foreign Press Association Best Foreign Filmmaker Award
Three Bodies, 8 min, 16mm (2007)
Esperanza Starring, 13 min, HD (2005) Goethe Institute Gestures of Reconciliation Prize
Bekleyolu (Roadwait), 12 min, DV (2004)

Pelin Uzey has a B.A. in philosophy from Bosphorus University and an M.F.A. in film



from Columbia University. She produced *The Time We Lost*, which was showcased at the 2003 Venice Film Festival. That

same year, she received the prestigious Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Grant. She was a contributing writer and New York correspondent for

the Altyazı Film Magazine between 2001 and 2004. She was the producer of *The Wannabe*, which received the Best Short Film Award at the HBO New York International Latino Film Festival and was shown at many festivals in the US and Europe. She also produced *Sight Unseen*, which starred Philip Casnoff from *Strong Medicine* and Army Carlson from *Law & Order*. In 2006, she was a finalist for the prestigious Producer's Guild of America Debra Hill Award. Her feature screenplay *Nilüfer* was a finalist for the 2007 Sundance Institute Screenwriters Lab. She coproduced *'Aliens Among Us'*, a documentary about Special Registration after 9/11 in the United States, which participated in the IFP Rough Cut Documentary Lab and was recently shown at the IFC Center in New York. She produced *Concerto*, which premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and won the BAFTA/LA Award for Excellence at 2009 Aspen ShortFest. She was also the producer of Elif Refig's short film *'Erkek Adam (Man to Be)'*, which was the recipient of the Caucus Foundation Production Grant and Open Society Institute Grant. Pelin Uzay is currently developing two more projects in the US and Europe aside from *Gemiler (Ships)*. She is a member of New York Women in Film and Television (NYWIFT) and Independent Film Project (IFP).

Filmography

Erkek Adam (Man to Be), Dir: Elif Refig, 20 min, 16mm (2009)

Caucus Foundation Production Grant / Open Society Institute Grant

Concerto, Dir: Filippo Conz, Zbabam Productions, 15 min, HD (2009)

Caucus Foundation Production Grant

2009 Sundance Film Festival / 2009 Aspen Shorts Fest BAFTA/LA Award for Excellence

Aliens Among Us, Dir: Martina Radwan, 24 min, HD (2009)

Sight Unseen, Dir: John Petrini, Toybox Productions, 88 min, HD (2006)

The Wannabe, Dir: Althea Wasow, 24 min, 35mm (2006)

2006 HBO NY International Latino Film Festival Best Short Film Award

The Time We Lost, Dir: Tommaso Cammarano, 16 min, Mini-DV (2003)

2003 Venice Film Festival

SYNOPSIS

22-year-old Ali, who has a habit of falling of asleep unexpectedly, has a recurring dream: He swims after a ship called 'Distant' sailing in open waters, but he is unable to make it to the ship and drowns. Ali believes in signs, fate and the meaningfulness of coincidences and considers this dream as a sign that a better life is possible elsewhere.

Ali helps out his father Raif, who has a wholesale store in İSTOÇ, an industrial mall, and lives with his parents in an industrial neighborhood in the outskirts of Istanbul. The claustrophobic store, which has been invaded by a gazillion objects, is nothing but a nightmare for Ali. Raif tells Ali about the new 99-cent store he plans to open and asks his son to get his act together and run the new store for him. Ali is determined to go away in pursuit of a better life and regards this request as a death sentence. Kısmet, who is a guard at a nearby shipyard, is Ali's best friend. The night when Raif tells Ali about the new store, Ali hangs out with Kısmet on the hill

behind the shipyard and when he climbs on the tower on the hill, he notices a half-completed ship mural on the wall across from him. He considers this as another sign and decides to find the person who made the graffiti. When he gets back home, he sees that the products for the new store have been stacked in his bedroom. Unable to sleep, Ali heads back to the hill and starts to wait for the person who made the ship mural.

Despite her striking beauty, 21-year-old college student Eda has an intimidating look with her piercing gaze and tough attitude. Eda has no friends and never goes out without her pocketknife. She lives with her mother who owns a beauty parlor and acts as if she were younger than Eda. Her father Mahir abandoned them when Eda was a toddler. Still angry at her father, Eda goes out at night and makes ship murals all over the city. Hakan, one of the tough guys of the neighborhood, is in love with Eda, but she does not care much about him. Hakan's closest friend Rıza harasses Eda in the street in front of Hakan. Eda pulls her knife at Rıza, humiliating him in front of Hakan and his other friends. That same night, Eda has an argument with her mother and in spite of the ongoing storm, she leaves the apartment and heads to the hill behind the shipyard to finish her graffiti.

Ali waits at the top of the tower and he calls out to the approaching silhouette, but cannot make himself heard. As he tries to come down from the tower, Ali is struck by lightning and passes out. For the first time, he has a dream in which he is on the dock of Distant on a

bright and sunny day. When he wakes up the next morning, he is convinced that Eda is the person who needs to accompany him on his journey. Yet, when he finally finds Eda, it takes him a while to convince her that he will not do her any harm. He tells her about his dream, his plans to find the ship, the life he envisions and how Eda is a part of this journey, but she does not take him seriously. At the end of the night, Ali drops Eda off at home and tries to arrange a meeting with her the next day. Eda leaves without agreeing to get together with him. Ali's van breaks down and when he starts looking for help, he comes across Hakan, who is drunk and harassing Eda. In the pretense of pushing the van, he manages to get Hakan to help him and saves Eda without much effort.

The next day, Ali goes to the Maritime Organization to find Distant. He manages to sneak into the room where they keep the records with the help of a 13-year-old shoeshine boy named Suat, but finds nothing. Eda decides to meet Ali and when she gets home from school, she finds out that her father Mahir is back after all these years. Eda is livid and leaves the apartment. She meets Ali at the shipyard and he manages to calm her down. Eda decides to help Ali find Distant and go away with him. They spend the night at Kismet's booth and the next day they go to Eda's place to get her stuff when nobody is home. When they leave the apartment, they find Hakan and his friends waiting for them outside the building. They are roughed up in the ensuing fight, but Mahir saves them. Eda is touched by his father's willingness to put himself in danger and yet does not consider this strong

enough to accept him into back her life. Eda does not agree to go home and leaves with Ali.

Ali and Eda go to the Maritime Organization and inspect the ship log once again with Suat's help, but they cannot find Distant. That same night, they sneak into the Yenikapı Harbor, steal a small boat and wander around the ships, trying to find Distant. Their search leads nowhere. When they get back to the harbor, Mahmut, a security guard, suspects them of being fuel smugglers. Mahmut is soon convinced of their innocence and lets them go. He tells them about a woman who left him and his comments make Eda think about her parents.

Close to dawn Eda and Ali get back to the shipyard to get some sleep. They woke up by a loud noise; the ship that has been recently completed is being lowered into the water for the first time. The ship is lowered into the water with much difficulty and when its tail faces the shore, Ali and Eda see that her name is Distant. They run to the shore and find out that the ship will get its fuel from a nearby city, İzmit and head to India in a few hours. As they pack up their belongings at Kismet's booth, they both realize that they cannot leave without seeing their parents. After they bid farewell to their families and Kismet, they drive to İzmit by Ali's van. After some complications they arrive at İzmit Harbor break the barrier at the entrance to get in and start running to the shore. Ali runs way ahead of Eda and he is able to catch the ship, but he changes his mind not wanting to leave Eda behind. Eda and Ali ignore the security guards who catch up with

them; they hold hands and watch the ship sail away.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up in the 90s when Turkey opened up to the world on a social, economic and cultural level and attempted to integrate itself into the international arena while trying to maintain its own culture and values. The generation that I am also a part of whose oldest members are now in their 30s grew up at a time when the apparant divide between right and wrong disappeared. Inevitably as a result of this, we ended up being different than our parents and maintained a strong sense of uncertainty and soul searching within ourselves. Unlike those that came before us, we have chosen an existentialist outlook geared towards exploring the world rather than a lifestyle based on obligations and needs. We now live in an era in which all ideologies have fallen apart and hope is being replaced by vulnerability. *Ships (Gemiler)* focuses on the journey one takes while trying to realize his or her dreams, and the story makes the point that the journey itself is what matters by helping one grow and change, regardless of whether the dream is actually realized at the end. The story of Eda and Ali incites young people to be courageous, take challenges and have a dream.

I constructed two different groups of settings and moods while trying to portray the inner worlds of the characters. The bleak industrial areas in the outskirts of Istanbul, residential neighborhoods surrounded by highways, the industrial mall that looks like a set of ant farms next to one another and the shop inside it which has been invaded

by a million objects are the locations that heighten the feeling of claustrophobia in the film.

On the other extreme, the feeling of vastness created by the open sea, the small shipyard where the departing ships are made, the freedom of painting ship murals on walls, and the physical situations in which being drenched in the rain or being struck by lightning affects the characters in a positive way and the feeling created by Ali's frequent dreams of escape, were designed as an alternative to that above-mentioned sense of claustrophobia. Throughout the story, the characters go from the former group to the latter in pursuit of the life they want to lead. I would like the visual language of the film not to be just consistent, but also clearly communicate this dichotomy to the audience.

In order to create that feeling, I believe it is best to use long and medium shots with an active and fluid camera style that is motivated by the movement of the actors. Throughout the story, aside from following characters that are looking for a ship, we are also pursuing their inner journey. In that sense, *Ships (Gemiler)* is the story of a two level journey. It is very important for me to create a cinematographic world in which feelings of fluidity and pursuit are prevalent – a world where things are either hidden in a way that heightens expectations or they are apparent to us despite being integrated into a location or texture.

Since we are dealing with a story in which characters are brave and can easily face the unknown, I find it more appropriate to employ a lighting style that uses high contrast and shadows,

and not one that involves saturated or even lighting. Despite having the dominance of blue, gray and white colors, a strikingly yellow sun that suddenly comes out of a white cloud will momentarily create a different mood for the audience and serve that spirit of surprise in the film.

The use of 3D will be necessary for the scenes with the shipyard and ships, and in order to have maximum efficiency during the shoot, it will be crucial for us to work with an experienced 3D artist at the pre-production stage, especially while securing our locations. To me, the presence of the ship in Ali's dream, the launching of the ship into the water and its departure from the harbor are visually and dramatically the most crucial scenes of the film. Since I will encourage the audience to think of the ship and the characters hand in hand from the beginning of the film, it is very important for me that the ships look believable and have a grandeur that is reminiscent of the act of going away. Aside from being the most important element in the film's atmosphere, the ships also have an affect on the credibility of the story.

Turkey has a young population, and yet films about youth have just begun to surface. I think there is still a big void in Turkish cinema in terms of such films. *Ships (Gemiler)* is a story that stays close to its characters and makes their worries, fears, hopes and struggles ring familiar to anyone who has ever been at that age. It is difficult to say that a story that can be summarized as 'Ali searches for a ship he dreams about with Eda whom he just met' has much to do with reality in the sense that we perceive it.

Yet, Ali convinces not only Eda, but also us about how his only way out is to literally look for that ship. While doing this, he encourages us to question our notions about what is *logical, real, right* and *obligatory*. I think the feeling of reality created by this film is similar to the moments of daze we have after waking up from sleep or those instances when we wake up from a dream, but feel like we are still inside it. If realized in this manner, *Ships (Gemiler)* will take the viewers to a different level of consciousness, causing them to reconnect with their pasts and also question the lives they are leading right now.