



***Gulistan, Land of Roses* Wins Prestigious Doc Alliance Selection Award at Locarno IFF**

On Sunday, August 7, young director Zaynê Akyol became the 9th winner of the unique Doc Alliance Selection Award. It is awarded since 2008 by the international Doc Alliance platform comprised of seven key European film festivals: CPH:DOX, Doclisboa, Docs Against Gravity FF, DOK Leipzig, FIDMarseille, Jihlava IDFF and Visions du Réel. The Kurdish director based in Canada received the award during an award ceremony at Locarno IFF. Along with the award, the filmmaker also received financial support of 5.000 euro for her future film.

***Gulistan, Land of Roses*, winner of Doc Alliance Selection Award 2016**

The documentary film *Gulistan, Land of Roses* offers a unique experience of two strong narrative lines combined by **Zaynê Akyol** into a complex dramatic narrative. The filmmaker follows in the footsteps of a young girl called Gulistan whom she met in Canadian exile and who decided to fight in the Kurdistan Workers' Army. Akyol sets out on a journey from the western world back to Turkey where the story of her friend brings her among the members of the female rebel armed forces in whose ranks Gulistan died in 2000. The film mediates essential insight into one of the crucial war conflicts of the present taking place at the very border between Turkey and Syria.

"Gulistan was a young woman I met when I immigrated to Canada. I was five years old; she was about 18. We used to live in the same building. She used to babysit me and often I went to see her. I considered her like my older sister. She used to talk to me about things I would not necessarily understand, about Kurds and also about Communism," director and award winner Zaynê Akyol recalls how she met the protagonist of the awarded film.

The winner of the 9th edition of the prestigious Doc Alliance Selection Award received an international premiere at the international competition of feature-length films at the Swiss festival Visions du Réel in April 2016. Visions du Réel was also the festival to nominate the film. *"This film, Gulistan, Land of Roses, about women guerrillas places the filmmaker as well as its protagonists at the forefront. A Kurdish woman behind the camera, Kurdish women in front of it. They face a difficult challenge that might reveal to be fatal. The complicity between the filmmaker and the filmed might make you believe it is a propaganda film, but that is not what it is. Of course it takes place in the middle of a battlefield and the people in it are soldiers fighting for a modern and secular country and society. But it is not ideology that inspired these images, but rather a loving exchange of words and glances. For audiences all over the world, the Kurdish women of Gulistan will be unforgettable, because their fight in the name of humanity makes them universal,"* says **Luciano Barisone**, director of Visions du Réel, to explain the decision to nominate and thus support the film.

Looking for new film talents from the perspective of European film critics

The winning film *Gulistan, Land of Roses* was selected by a jury comprised of **seven respected European film critics** coming from the countries of the individual festival members of Doc Alliance. The jury of the 9th edition included: Michael Bo (DK, Politiken), Gabriel Bortzmeyer (FR, Revue

Débordements), Vasco Câmara (PT, Público), Piotr Czerkawski (PL, Dziennik Filmweb.pl), Christian Jungen (CH, NZZ am Sonntag), Tomáš Stejskal (CZ, Hospodářské noviny) and Gisela Wehrl (DE, freelance journalist and screenwriter).

The jury gave the following statement to back up their decision to award *Gulistan, Land of Roses*: “*Gulistan* shows a hidden world: Women in war. With beauty, softness and a tenderness of style the director creates an astonishing dialectic with the violence depicted. Breathlessly you listen to one female soldier as she describes the beauty of her scars from combat. The outstanding camera follows the women during their training and fighting for a free Kurdistan. *Gulistan* lets us understand why the women are fighting, but also leaves us with the decision if violence is the appropriate way.”

The winning film succeeded in the exceptionally demanding competition of six other films nominated in 2016: *Jarocin. Against the Stream* (nominated by Docs Against Gravity FF), *Fragment 53* (nominated by CPH:DOX), *Maybe Desert, Perhaps Universe* (nominated by Doclisboa), *Steam on the River* (nominated by Jihlava IDFF), *Maestà, the Passion of Christ* (nominated by FIDMarseille) and *Train to Adulthood* (nominated by DOK Leipzig).

As **Nina Numankadić**, managing director of Doc Alliance, a project awarding the Doc Alliance Selection Award while also running the documentary online portal DAFilms.com that has become popular both with viewers and critics in the past ten years, points out: “*Our main goal is primarily to promote quality documentary films rather than the brands of the individual festivals. The selected films greatly benefit from the very fact that they have been nominated. All seven Doc Alliance festivals have made an agreement to include three of the titles nominated for the annual award in their festival programme.*”

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Photos from Gulistan, Land of Roses:

