

# BIOGRAPHY

. Filmmaker . Writer . Poet .

**Zeynep Dilara** is an independent filmmaker who produces, directs, and writes interview- and conversation-based digital documentaries for TV channels and streaming platforms such as Disney+, National Geographic, and primarily YouTube.



Despite her strong sense of individuality and belief in independence, she describes herself as a person with a high degree of curiosity and a deep sense of sensibility towards her surroundings, leading to a profound sense of solidarity.

This is why she embraces a nomadic lifestyle, carrying her own flag inscribed with “Love” in Turkish from city to city, country to country, symbolizing her belief in human nature over borders, flags, or governments.

*Photo Credit: This Portrait taken by Zeynep Dilara’s brother Behic Umit Aksoy who is also Senior Editor of all her film project.*

Born and raised in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, Zeynep Dilara nurtured various artistic interests during her school years, including writing, dancing, singing, and painting, winning several prizes along the way. However, she did not consider pursuing a career as an artist until her final year in college.

Zeynep Dilara was set to become the first artist to emerge from a family filled with government officers, workers, and soldiers. Due to the environment she was raised in, her family culture, and her social surroundings, she hadn't even considered being an artist as an option until she reached a certain age of adulthood. While today, she and her two younger brothers, both talented and accomplished artists in the film business, are all pursuing their creative passions, back then, she was the sole pioneer, paving the way for her siblings to follow in her footsteps.

Her path crossed with an artist community in her final year of university, a group that always made her feel blessed. This encounter had a profound impact on her, significantly helping her realize her own artistic potential. In the same year, while in her final year of university, Zeynep began working as an assistant to Ahmet Şerif İzgören, a prominent public figure and author in Turkey, managing both her studies and this role simultaneously.

Zeynep Dilara's passion lies in storytelling, whether through writing, photography, painting, or video. Words have always been her primary tool for self-expression. Early in her career, she drew inspiration from artists, writers, journalists, academicians, documentary filmmakers and photographers in Ankara through personal conversations with them.

She lived on the same street as the late journalist Uğur Mumcu, who was assassinated for his ideas and philosophy. She surrounded herself with bold and fearless individuals who wrote, created, and endeavored to make a difference; consequently, she found many mentors among them and learned from their experiences.

In her perspective, every moment spent with notable figures such as Ahmet Şerif İzgören, Barbaros Şansal, İlber Ortaylı, Zeynep Atakan, Ataman Özbay, Vefa Çiftçioğlu, Oğuz Peri, Serdar Kuzuloğlu, Pelin Esmer, Stephen Hunter, Altuğ Gültan, Brainard Carey, and many others who have made significant contributions to enhancing the quality of life and creation in their respective fields and locations, as well as contributing to important cultural development, as a mentorship that has spanned her entire life.

After graduating with a degree in Computer Science / Information Technology in 2011, she was motivated by her artist friends to leverage her remarkable creative writing skills, thus beginning her career in creative writing for production companies and creative agencies. And her filmmaking journey began in 2013 with testimonial videos for art galleries in Turkey, where she captured artists and curators discussing exhibitions or collections. Utilizing a documentarian storytelling approach, she produced artist progress videos, artist portrait videos, and exhibition opening films. During this period, she also filmed over 100 births in hospital surgery rooms and delivery rooms.

The fascinating similarities between artist studios and delivery rooms, and the connection between an artist on the brink of creation and a mother about to give birth, deeply affected Zeynep Dilara. This profound experience provided her with an immense perspective that helped her understand humanity's deep-seated need for artistic expression and creation. These experiences lasted for a total of 3 years until she decided to become a filmmaker. In the same year that she began pursuing her career as a videographer in 2013, she also married a fellow artist, a sculptor. After her first divorce in 2014 due to domestic violence, she focused on her writing and filming career, starting with screenwriting.

In 2016, she won her first filmmaking prize for her work as a writer and director, directing an award-winning film for Turkey's national television with the country's largest production company. Seeking to broaden her filmmaking horizons, Zeynep moved to Istanbul after her first professional production experience. Her early projects included filming her neighbors and landlord to explore the culture and history of their neighborhood, as well as making films about her family members and friends to unravel the mystery of "Who they actually are?" She delved into documentary filmmaking.

Among the most illustrious accomplishments in her filmography since 2016 are; a documentary "25 Liter" with National Geographic Turkey, which garnered over 60 million views and was incorporated into the middle school curriculum by the Turkish Ministry of National Education as educational material, a digital documentary "I Exist" that achieved 3 million views within its first week on YouTube; and a short documentary "Şile" that received acclaim from critics at The New York Times.

While pursuing her career as a filmmaker, she also created fully independent and non-profit digital impact projects, taking on roles in project management and content creation. Her fully independent and non-profit project "Yazabilirsin" ("You Can Write" in Turkish) provided information about screenwriting to aspiring Turkish screenwriters through a web blog, YouTube vlog content, and an Instagram account. Until 2023 Zeynep Dilara supported this project with her in person screenwriting classes at the most prestigious Universities of Turkey and online workshops. "Yazabilirsin" is celebrating its 7th year and continues to provide access to valuable information.

Another project, "Güvende miyim?" ("Do I feel that I'm safe?" In Turkish) was a fully independent and non-profit initiative aimed at raising awareness of the surge in domestic violence against women during the pandemic, 2020. It brought together Turkish women on the project's Instagram account, creating a space for them to share their feelings about safety. This project concluded in its first year.

Zeynep Dilara is currently in the preparation phase of two new digital impact projects, which she plans to launch within a few months. She will combine the experiences of brands for which she has provided consultancy on setting up YouTube channels, along with insights gained from her experience in New York, to launch 1 new YouTube channel and 1 new Instagram account that will broadcast in both Turkish and English.

Her last international short documentary film, depicting her grandmother's struggle with managing household finances as a rural woman in a kitchen of a big city, received significant acclaim in 2022. Following its premiere in Paris, she came to recognize the universal appeal of storytelling transcending national boundaries, prompting her decision to pursue filmmaking worldwide.

Despite facing the cancellation of three film projects in 2022 due to Turkey's economic climate, she resolved to leave the country promptly. The positive reception of her work by critics, who drew parallels between her style and that of Martin Scorsese's early films in The New York Times article, further fueled her moving out motivation. In early 2023, Zeynep relocated from Istanbul to New York, seeking opportunities for creative growth in a more advanced industry. Currently residing in Brooklyn, Zeynep Dilara actively immerses herself in the city's vibrant culture.

During her initial year in New York, she found herself among a community primarily consisting of tattoo artists who struggled to fully embrace their identity as artists. Recognizing their hesitation, she embarked on a series of interviews aimed at offering them a fresh perspective to alleviate their doubts.

In just 3 months, Zeynep Dilara created a 25-minute digital documentary featuring conversations with 20 different artists—10 tattoo artists and 10 artists from various disciplines and mediums. For the first time in her entire career, she single-handedly undertook the entire filmmaking process, from shooting to editing, directing to sound recording, and all adjustments on color, sound, and music. This project underscored her independence in filmmaking. Inspired by Kieslowski's "The Talking Heads" this documentary captures the city's creative spirit and the transformative journey of shared perspectives. "Just One Question" was released on March 1st, exactly one year to the day that Zeynep Dilara first set foot in New York.

She has always enjoyed asking questions and listening to answers, but above all, she relishes giving others the opportunity to engage in conversation and experience the transformative power of shared perspectives through thoughtful and high-quality questions.

Now, Zeynep Dilara is transitioning her career from documentary filmmaker to narrative filmmaker, and for the first time, she is writing a screenplay for her own film.