

K A Z A R K E N

A S W E D I G



A FILM BY
GÜLDEM DURMAZ

WITH
DENIS LAVANT

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SHOT AND EDITED WITH

SIMON BACKÈS

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY

FRED COSTA

an A NOUS 2 production

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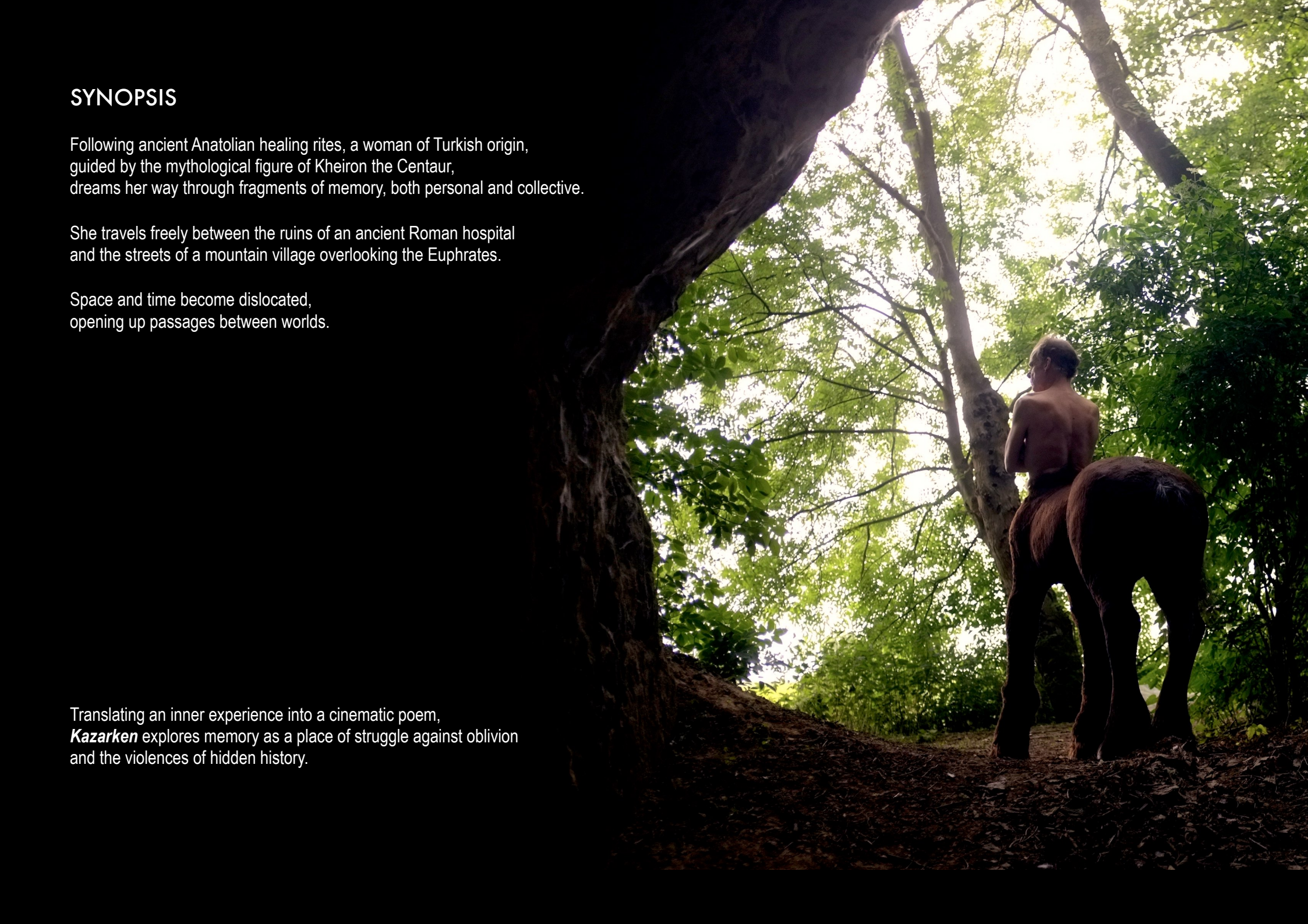
SYNOPSIS

Following ancient Anatolian healing rites, a woman of Turkish origin, guided by the mythological figure of Kheiron the Centaur, dreams her way through fragments of memory, both personal and collective.

She travels freely between the ruins of an ancient Roman hospital and the streets of a mountain village overlooking the Euphrates.

Space and time become dislocated, opening up passages between worlds.

Translating an inner experience into a cinematic poem, ***Kazarken*** explores memory as a place of struggle against oblivion and the violences of hidden history.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Güldem Durmaz, born in 1971, lives and works between Brussels, Istanbul and Paris.

Her work includes, and sometimes mixes, film-making, video installations, and live performances.

Her short fiction films, such as **Şoför/Chauffeur** (2001), and **Koro** (2002), have been selected and rewarded in numerous international festivals (Locarno, Venice, Saint-Petersburg, Amiens, Washington DC...)

She also conducts film and theatre workshops in Paris and Brussels.

In 2011, she directed **Ben/O** (I/him), an experimental documentary about kurdish transsexual artist Esmeray, that was screened at art venues such as les Halles de Schaerbeek (Brussels), la Gaîté Lyrique (Paris), and MuCEM (Marseilles).

In 2016 she completed **Kazarken - As we dig**, her first feature film.

Her work explores the connections between memory, language and cultural or transcultural identities, as she experiments with actors and non-actors, secret or invented languages, spaces and situations both real and oneiric.



AN INTERVIEW WITH GÜLDEM DURMAZ

GENESIS

Notes and traces

The first images we shot for this film date back to 2003. I had travelled to the village where my mother was born. Going there by plane wasn't so easy at the time, so I took an old train all across Anatolia : it was quite a long way. I really wanted to keep traces of this journey. I didn't think I would use these images, I thought this was only research. I had just finished *Koro* (The Chorus, *her second short*, 2003), built on a superposition of memories from when I was 14, and had paid several visits to my aunt in various prisons in Turkey, where she'd been locked following the 1980 military coup. I was still very much a child then. To me, there was no such thing as a context, I was just visiting my aunt. She appears as herself in the film.

I thought I'd go further in that direction, and dig a little – although I had no idea that I was « digging » at the time – to see what was going on in my mother's village. Family stories already crossed my mind. I'd been given a number of recommendations – or warnings : asking questions to the villagers would be difficult. I quickly realized that I couldn't treat the question of my ancestry in a frontal manner while in this place... It just wasn't possible.

Allianoï

After what happened in the village, my reaction was to go even further, by investigating things that were two thousand years old. I've always loved ruins, and I was used to visiting greek or roman sites in Turkey. I met Ahmet, the archeologist in charge of the excavations at Allianoï, in 2004. The site was not very remote from our family's holiday house on the West Coast. At the time, it was an emergency preservation project – the construction of a nearby dam was already planned. When I first arrived, Ahmet began by testing me a little, he wanted to keep an eye on what I was doing – and then he gave me permission to come and go freely wherever I wanted. Nobody knew back then that these ruins would end up being flooded. Several trials were under way, the archeologists were struggling to save the site.

It's really an incredible place, it's part of the world heritage of historical medicine : connected to the famous Pergamon sanctuary, it was a place dedicated to healing, through surgery, dreaming, and the use of water. And the exceptional thing is that the water was still a living presence... The place was quite unspectacular: pickaxes and stones, no fantastic theatre in sight... but at the same time this living water was still flowing, and it had been there, a healing force, since time immemorial.

Again without any specific previous idea, I started filming, using both a mini-DV camcorder and a super 8 camera, thinking these images were just traces, notes, done strictly for the record. I was on holiday, and lucky enough to be able to roam around the premises. I went there eight times during that summer. And the following year, I wasn't allowed to go back. No one was.

Healing

I had found a copy of the Sacred Speeches by Aelius Aristides, an orator from the 2nd century AD – it's the only text that refers clearly and directly to Allianoï, and the dormition rites that used to take place there.

To this day, in some specific caverns in Anatolia, women still perform dormition rites that have their roots in this tradition. That's truly incredible. And there I was, confronted with the writings of Aristides, an important figure in both literary and medical history : he was a pioneer of personal diary writing, entirely concerned with his own health. And he was a hell of a hypochondriac, too!

Then I began thinking that I just ought to seek healing in this antique way. But I couldn't lie down to fall asleep and dream in Allianoï, that had become impossible. The site was surrounded by gendarmes forbidding access, then the valley was flooded, and now everything lies deep under the waters of the dam's reservoir.

I thought then that the film itself should become the scene of that healing process. I wanted to create a space one could live in, not only me, just anyone... Cinema has had a very liberating effect on me throughout my life. Today I feel that a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders, and I'm ready to move on to somewhere else. And it is my strong wish that the film acts as a way to share this feeling with others.

Violence

This whole heritage of violence is a hindrance to me.

Amnesia isn't the answer, whether it be for personal history or human history in general. No matter how hard you try to trample these things into obscurity, they eventually resurface. Those traces cannot be wiped away. And they're quite a burden. It seems to me that talking about these things, bringing them out to light, is a possible way of freeing oneself, and finding one's own place in the world. I have inherited this violence, although it isn't mine. I shall never exactly know the ins and outs of these stories, because I don't have a time-traveling machine, but if this violence passes through me, it means that it's still vivid.

So it is my responsibility to confront it, as an individual, and to do something with it. Maybe that seems very important to me because I am a mother. You feel responsible for what you'll pass on, and something must be done if we want to stop running around in circles. Domestic violence has been lingering around in many couples throughout my family history.

Thus violence passes through us, whether it be on a great scale or in petty ways – that are but an echo of the first instance. That's the kind of wounds that I had to heal, not to wipe them away, I had to confront them so I could lay them besides me, so they wouldn't be a burden anymore.

A quest

This film is both an investigation and a quest, an attempt to reach a state of liberation, where things would be organized so one could respect oneself, and allow something we might call one's 'soul' ample space for development... allow it to become as accomplished as possible before departing from this world.

The film was born out of a necessity to reorganize all the stories that passed through me, and through each one of us, to settle matters once and for all and achieve maximum freedom.

It was vital for me to organize all that, to tell my own story while at the same time opening what I'd call multiple 'tabs' : the village, general history, my father, my mother, Anatolia, and all that... It's the kind of stories each of us is made of... So I had to open all these tabs, find the right place for each one, then close them one by one.

THE FILM'S OWN TIME

Back and forth

We attempted to edit a first version with our 'raw' images. I had these personal stories, and all the research I'd done about medical history, and mythology... lots of food for thought. And these texts started generating new images. As we progressed, we began to develop a kind of awareness of the film 'growing' by itself.

From then on, I started filming new scenes every summer while holidaying in Turkey, at first still with this 'raw' feeling of collecting traces, memories, fragments. You shoot a little, the film progresses, you consider the results, you write a few more lines of text. You think you'd like to shoot this particular scene, you go : 'next summer, we'll go shoot this or that...'

You experiment with editing these images and the texts. It's all interpolated, in a sort of crazy way. Honestly, if someone had told me at the time that it would span over a period of thirteen years of my life, it would have seemed too much, too gigantic a prospect ! (laughs) But I worked on other projects in the meantime, and this film kept developing in a non-industrial, very artisanal manner. We worked on it at home, then at times the film left our house to spend a moment with collaborators from outside, and then we'd go back home to the cutting room... The general narrative only began to reveal itself at a very late stage.

Polyphonies

I'd never used any dialogue in my films so far, just sound ambiances, or the imaginary language I'd invented for Koro, but nothing else. And suddenly, it all came flowing. Speaking in the first person has been quite a challenge for me. It raised the question of impudence : what should I say, and how should I say it...

I wouldn't spontaneously have used this voiceover narration... and yet I didn't really have a choice. But I realized after a while that the narrator's voice couldn't carry the weight of all the stories. There was my mother's voice, the very classical interview with the archeologist, the fleeting exchanges with the workers on the site...

I also wanted to give Aristides' voice a place of its own, and then very quickly there was the River's voice. And finally, very late in the process, the Centaur appeared, and allowed

us to organize the whole narrative, by representing this attempt at healing through a dialogue. I couldn't be healed just by myself. In the course of my research on medical history, I found out that 'diagnosis' means 'the knowledge of two'. And thus the idea of a vocal polyphony in the film began to take shape.

Languages

Turkish is a gender-neutral language, without feminine or masculine forms... I studied french literature in university, and for me, Romanticism could only be born in Germany, the 'I' question is a Western Europe question. In Turkey, there is no 'I' pronoun, and the dominant form is the epic narrative. Even when recounting a very ordinary episode of everyday life, you use a first-person singular form that conveys a sense of an entity through which situations pass, it's like a shell, it's not a psychological 'I'. Speaking in the first person was difficult for these reasons, too. It's such a different way of relating to the world, and of evoking one's experience !

Two languages and two ways of thinking co-exist in me, and that guided us throughout the writing process. Mythology is an anonymous narrative that belongs to everyone. And integrating magical thinking into the film was also a way to make room for this part of me. So being cured by a centaur was a very logical thing to do ! (laughs)

Kheiron

When we started filming all this material, together with my partner in life, Simon Backes, who also co-edited the film, we worked for a while on a script for a fiction film, that featured a centaur, but this project was later abandoned. And the centaur turned up again in this film. But this is not just any centaur. Kheiron is the only really sympathetic centaur, an immortal being who knows all about the world of nature, gods, and men – and he passed this knowledge on to Asklepios, who later became the god of healing and medicine.

Kheiron became a guide, a traveling companion for the editing process. And the film is indeed a mental journey, under his guidance. When all this became clear for us, two or three years ago, we edited the rest of the film, with all these images from various sources, and the new voices of Aristides and of the River, before preparing the shooting of the scenes with Kheiron. We showed this version to Denis Lavant, who'd play the Centaur, and on that basis we worked on integrating our scenes together. It was a bit of a gamble !

Attention

I think we sometimes experience what you might call signs, or encounters - rare moments when everything seems to be just right, and you feel that you're really alive. Of course one shouldn't be passive and just wait for these moments to arrive. It's more about practicing your attention. Ninety percent of film directing to me is about making yourself available. You start with an idea, a plan that is more or less clear, but in fact, something is going to start unfolding, at this very moment, at this very place, and you have to give it all your attention. No matter if you're directing a fiction film or a documentary, what will be recorded is this specific moment. So if you want to leave as much room as possible for something magic to happen, you have to be fully present, and very attentive to everything happening around you. You need a little control, but lots of availability.

MEMORY TIME, DREAM TIME

Collective memory

For me, epic movies, set in ancient Rome or Greece, are deeply connected with childhood. I watched these films like they were documents on ancient Romans, while in fact they are documents about a certain trend in 20th century cinema.

I thought it'd be interesting to evoke this aspect of memory, in a widened perspective. I sensed that we'd come to lack a form of collective memory, we'd lost access to a kind of mythology, that was in fact still present, passing through us in a very subtle manner that required all our attention.

It's about common roots, a larger territory, our shared humanity... Memory isn't just the memory or real facts, it's also the memory of dreams, fantasies, the imaginary.

Cinema and archeology

When Ahmet the archeologist speaks of his work, he also speaks of my quest : he provides keys, he also acts as a guide in his own way.

But he also says something about cinema when he refers to archeology as a way to 'create your own scenario' while always keeping your mind both skeptical and open – because one must be able at any time to welcome a new element, and to accept that it will modify the whole vision you've been constructing. For me, this is a definition of the editing process. Ahmet's research, his methods for leading this archeological excavations, both from a geographical and a purely physical point of view, were a key inspiration in making the film.

Weaving the threads

We very consciously tried to create associations while editing the film. If you want it to be shaped like a series of dreams, you must create connections. So you keep trying things, sometimes they don't work at all, sometimes they come out great... We had to create these motives, and to open the way for free associations. I can still be surprised by small echoes here and there when I watch the film... We realized that we could sometimes have fun while evoking serious matters, and be very serious about small details.

Tiny things, for example the antique vial filled with tears, involved very meticulous work, while much more important, even tragic matters were sometimes treated in a much lighter fashion.

And sometimes the film resisted. It had to be tamed, even as we attempted to hear what it was trying to dictate us, with its multiple paths, its purely fictional parts, its raw images.

We had to learn to allow ourselves this vast freedom of form.

The final stages of the editing process were really like dancing. They reminded us of what we'd known when we started shooting and writing the film. Because in the end we could welcome so many different things into the film – images we'd shot with other intentions, new scenes shot along the way, more premeditated things... and also pictures snatched from the internet or culled from old films.

Dream time

As we edited the film, we tried to explore time dilation, a specific form of perception to experiment with. I think film conveys a way of perceiving things differently. By adopting the archeological method of research, of digging ever deeper, we ended up stretching time, dilating it, folding it upon itself, to reach a hypnagogic state... Just like that moment when we lie in bed, on the edge of sleep : consciousness becomes scattered, you don't know if it lasts 5 minutes or 30 seconds, images come to our minds, and we're neither awake nor fully asleep. The idea with the film was to find an equivalent to this state, and then to use it to question certain 'truths'. We don't have a machine to travel back in time, but the past is there, inside of me, inside of all of us. I compare this to translation. Each different language is a different vision of the world. When you compare languages, you realize that things happen between them, by friction. Truth lies in exchange, in the games created between languages. Maybe that's a life philosophy, too...

interview conducted by Anne Feuillère / © Cinergie 2017
translated by Onur Karpuz

AN INTERVIEW WITH DENIS LAVANT

In Kazarken you play the very peculiar part of Kheiron the Centaur. This very important mythological figure, a character well-versed in science, as well as a precursor of medical studies, is here catapulted into a contemporary context.

Denis Lavant: This project involved working alongside a very dear friend, Güldem Durmaz. She set out to dig deep into Turkish history, in order to bring certain things out to light, using purely cinematic tools, while simultaneously tracing her own family history. The resulting film concentrates on her family tree, and yet manages to convey lots of other things, of more universal value, things that concern many humans, since they are connected with key interrogations regarding our present.

How did it feel to act with four legs?

Denis Lavant: Definitely tricky ! Not so much because I had a horse's hind legs grafted on me, but because there was a real horse acting next to me in some scenes we shot. And I was afraid it would resent my presence, and become angry at me as a competitor.

What was your reaction on being offered the part of a centaur?

Denis Lavant: When I was offered the part I didn't even ask myself who the character was, or what he would represent. I was just deeply moved by the project as Güldem explained it to me, I was really touched by her very personal, even intimate, idea of the film. We've got quite a history, since we worked together in a theatre company where we produced Grand Guignol-tinged versions of *Richard III* or the story of Nero. It is hard for me to explain in words my relationship with someone when it is so intense. It is something that builds slowly over time, and goes beyond friendship once it fully comes to life. And generally, I like to play spiritual guides, I've done it before, and even recently.

Who were your role models, or references, for the truly unique way you work with your body in films ?

Your training was no doubt influenced by Marcel Marceau, for example...

Denis Lavant: You're quite right to mention Marceau, he is a key figure for me. But also, naturally, Chaplin in his first films, Harpo Marx, Buster Keaton... All these characters who used their body in a somehow scandalous manner, I'd dare say. And there's also Michel Simon, who was a larger than life character, even as a human being. I think actors ought to have a very pronounced social and human side. To me it can't be any other way. And finally... horses ! *(laughs)*

interview conducted by Davide Stanzione / © 2016 www.quinlan.it
translated by Onur Karpuz



KAZARKEN

A S W E D I G

Belgium / France - 2016 - 90 mn
DCP- Colour - 1:1,77 ratio - 5.1 sound

with

DENIS LAVANT

GÜLDEM DURMAZ

NECLA ERDEM DURMAZ

AHMET YARAŞ

ILYA YARAŞ

DILSHAD BACKÈS

and the voices of

MARTIN SELZE

MARIE-SOHNA CONDÉ

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promo@cbadoc.be

TRAILER:
<https://vimeo.com/187660250>

directed by
GÜLDEM DURMAZ

written, shot and edited by
GÜLDEM DURMAZ & SIMON BACKÈS

writing contribution by
ESTELLE RULLIER

centaur costume created by
RAPHAËL RUBBENS & MARIE MESSIEN

photography (Belgium)
PIET EEKMAN & BERNARD VERSTRAETE

sound recording (Belgium)
VALENTIN MAZINGARBE

original music
FRED COSTA

sound design and mixing
MANU DE BOISSIEU

color correction
OLIVIER DASSONVILLE

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