

GIORNATE
DEGLI
AUTORI

OFFICIAL SELECTION
tiff
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2017

*Looking
for*
**OUM
KULTHUM**

a film by
SHIRIN NESHAT



يا ريتني عمري ما حبيت
عايز أعرف لا تكون غضبان
أو شاغل قلبك انسان
خليتني من ياسي أقول
الغيبة دي غيبة على طول
واتفكر إيه اللي جنيت
من ذنب يسيتك ما لقيت
يا ريتني عمري ما حبيت
اتقلب على جمر النار
واتشرد ويا الأفكار
النسمة أحسبها خطاك
والهمسة أحسبها لغاك
على كده أصبحت وأمسييت

A woman in a long, flowing purple dress stands on a stage, singing into a vintage microphone. She has her hands raised in a dramatic gesture. In the background, two men are seated, playing a violin and an oud. The stage is lit with warm, golden light, and the background is a deep red curtain. The overall atmosphere is that of a classic Egyptian performance.

synopsis

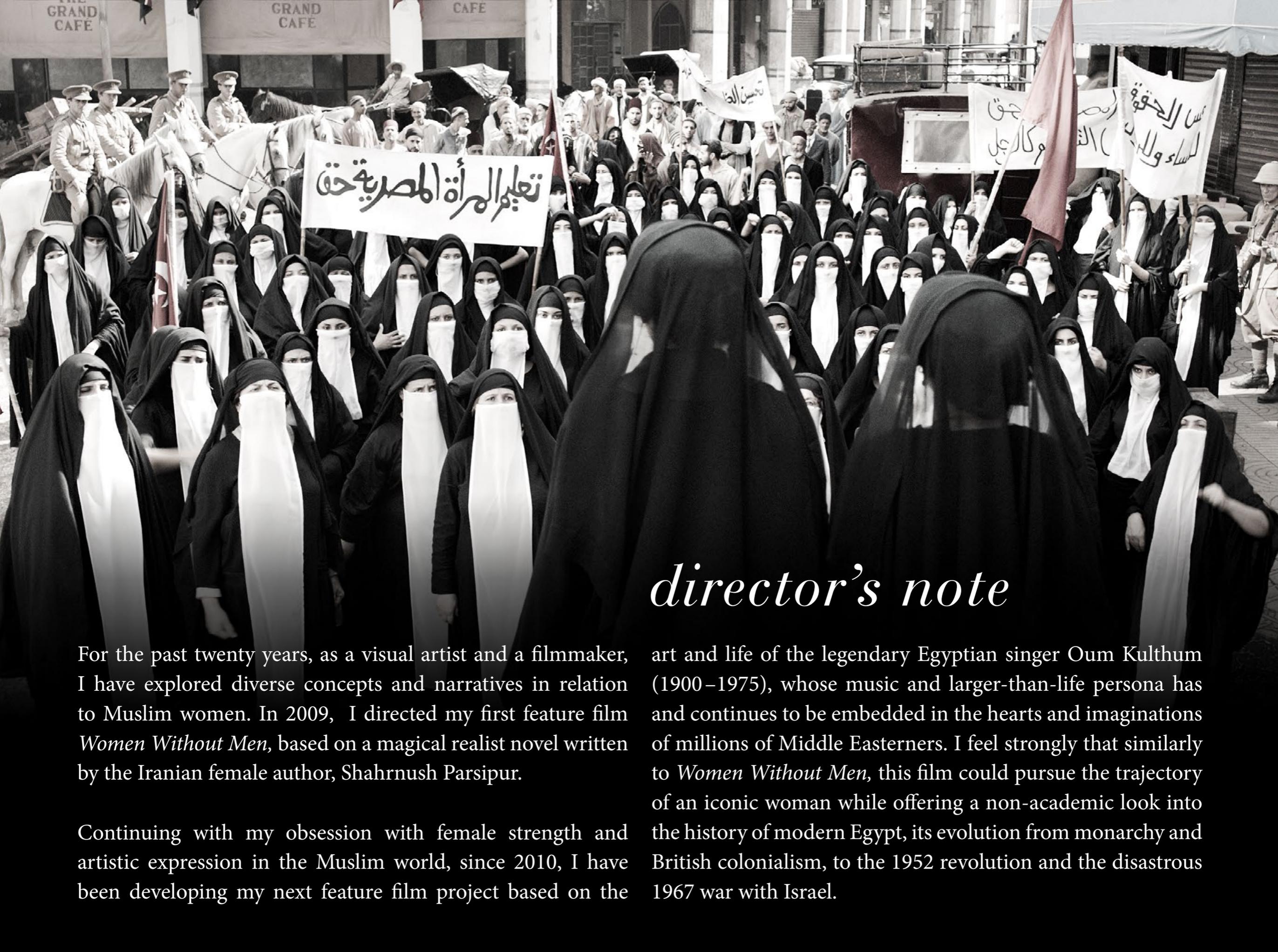
Mitra is an ambitious artist in her forties who embarks on her dream project of making a film about the legendary Egyptian singer and diva Oum Kulthum. Her film explores the struggles, sacrifices and the price of Oum Kulthum's success as a female artist in a male dominated society. However, having left her family behind for her career and in her efforts to capture the essence of Oum Kulthum as a myth, a woman and an artist, Mitra's own struggles blend with those of the singer and she finds herself caught in an emotional and artistic breakdown.



about Oum Kulthum

Looking For Oum Kulthum is based on the art and life of the legendary Egyptian singer Oum Kulthum (1900–1975), whose music and larger-than-life persona continues to be embedded in the hearts and imaginations of millions of Middle Easterners.

Forty two years after her death, Oum Kulthum continues to be the undisputed greatest artist of the 20th century in the Arab World. Known for her extraordinary vocal ability and style, and a dedicated Egyptian patriot, her position transcended from an artist into national hero in the later years of her life. Her funeral was attended by four million people, reported as the second largest funeral in Egypt's history, after President Nasser's.



director's note

For the past twenty years, as a visual artist and a filmmaker, I have explored diverse concepts and narratives in relation to Muslim women. In 2009, I directed my first feature film *Women Without Men*, based on a magical realist novel written by the Iranian female author, Shahrnush Parsipur.

Continuing with my obsession with female strength and artistic expression in the Muslim world, since 2010, I have been developing my next feature film project based on the

art and life of the legendary Egyptian singer Oum Kulthum (1900–1975), whose music and larger-than-life persona has and continues to be embedded in the hearts and imaginations of millions of Middle Easterners. I feel strongly that similarly to *Women Without Men*, this film could pursue the trajectory of an iconic woman while offering a non-academic look into the history of modern Egypt, its evolution from monarchy and British colonialism, to the 1952 revolution and the disastrous 1967 war with Israel.



My journey into this project began with research and the collection of images and literature written about Oum Kulthum and Egyptian history. I finally decided not to make a historical biopic but to tell a personal story, sharing my own perspectives and challenges as an Iranian woman director attempting to make a film about an iconic Egyptian singer.

The current script therefore closely reflects my own obsessions, challenges, process, and unexpected self-discovery that by looking into the destiny of an iconic Middle Eastern female artist, I'm looking at my own experience, and that of other Middle Eastern women who choose to pursue a talent or a professional career. At the core of this film, through the simultaneous exploration of three main female characters, Oum Kulthum, Mitra (the Iranian filmmaker,) and Ghada (the Egyptian actress, who plays the role of Oum Kulthum,) the narrative reveals how regardless of generations and cultural settings, most Middle Eastern women, living in male dominated societies, face a similar predicament: the sacrifice of a traditional family and an unspoken sense of alienation in the absence of a conventional life style, despite the glory of achieving fame and success.

director's biography



Shirin Neshat is an Iranian born artist/filmmaker living in New York. Shirin has among many other awards won an Art Biennale award in 1999 for the video art works *Turbulent* and *Rapture* and a Silver Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival in 2009 for her first feature film *Women Without Men*.

Neshat started her career in photography and gained attention with the *Unveiling* (1993) and *Women of Allah* (1993–97) photo series before going on to video art and feature film. Her art works have been exhibited in the most important museums around the world. She was awarded the Dorothy and Lilian Gish Prize in 2006 and in 2010 Huffington Post named her Artist of the Decade. Neshat also received the Crystal Award in 2014 at the Davos World Economic Forum.

In 2013, she was a member of the Berlinale jury. That same year she directed *Illusions & Mirrors*, a short film commissioned by Dior in collaboration with director of photography Darius Khondji and starring Natalie Portman. Two years later she was photographed by Annie Leibovitz for a series of portraits of the world's most inspiring women for the Pirelli Calendar.

Shirin Neshat is currently directing her first opera, *AIDA*, at the 2017 Salzburg Festival.

FILMOGRAPHY

2017 *Looking for Oum Kulthum*
2009 *Women Without Men*

INSTALLATIONS

2016 *Sarah*
2016 *Roja*
2013 *Illusions & Mirror*
2009 *Games of Desire*
2008 *Farokh Legha*
2008 *Munis*
2008 *Faezeh*
2005 *Zarin*
2004 *Issar*
2004 *The Last Word*
2003 *Mahdokht*
2002 *Tooba*
2001 *Possessed*
2001 *Pulse*
2001 *Passage*
2000 *Fervor*
1999 *Soliloquy*
1999 *Rapture*
1998 *Turbulent*
1997 *The Shadow Under the Web*
1996 *Anchorage*



biography *neda rahmanian*

Neda Rahmanian is a German film and theatre actress of Iranian origin. She graduated from the Rostock University of Music and Theatre in 2003. Neda made her professional debut with the role of Julia in *Romeo and Julia*, for which she was honored with Karl-Heinz-Walther Prize.

Various stage engagements were to follow, among others in the Osnabrück Theatre (2003–2005), the State Theatre of Wiesbaden (2006–2008), the Schauspielhaus Bochum (2009–2010) and the Hamburger Kammerspiele (2016). She has appeared in successful tv series such as *Tatort*. Since 2016 she can be seen in the leading role in the ARD- series *Der Kroatien Krimi*.



biography yasmin raeis

Yasmin Raeis is an Egyptian actress, born in 1985. She started her acting career in a television series called *3ard khas*.

After participating in several movies including *XLarge*, *A Whole One* and *The Benefit*, she drew attention to herself in the lead role of director Mohamed Khan's *Movie Factory Girl* and went on to win several awards including the Best Actress Award at the Dubai International Film Festival.

MAIN CAST

Mitra – *Neda Rahmanian*

Ghada – *Yasmin Raeis*

Amir – *Mehdi Moinzadeh*

Ahmed – *Kais Nashif*

MAIN CREW

Director – *Shirin Neshat*

in collaboration with – *Shoja Azari*

Writers – *Shirin Neshat, Shoja Azari*

Director of Photography – *Martin Gschlacht*

Production designer – *Erwin Prib*

Art Directors – *Attila Planegger, Halima Zniber*

Costume designer – *Mariano Tufano*

Editor – *Nadia Ben Rachid*

Composer – *Amine Bouhafa*

Production Company – *Razor Film*

in co-production with – *Coop99 Filmproduktion,*

In Between Art Film, Vivo Film, Schortcut Films

in association with – *Doha Film Institute,*

Noirmont Art Production

in collaboration with – *ORF*

with the support of – *Austrian Film Institute Fisa -*

Film Industry Support Austria, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg,

Vienna Film Fund, Regione Lazio

cast & crew

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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original title: Looking for Oum Kulthum
Duration: 90 min
Aspect Ratio: 1:1.85
Format: 2K
Sound: 5.1
Year: 2017

Original Language: English, Arabic, Farsi
Countries of Production: Germany, Austria,
Italy, Qatar, Lebanon