

Be ready to change your minds and take on projects that challenge you to keep motivated, advises Qumra Master Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Masterclass by Ceylan takes audiences through his films, scripting process and keen interest in the editing process

Doha, Qatar; March 6, 2016: Acclaimed Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan delivered a masterclass today as part of the second edition of Qumra that was insightful and also inspiring for the emerging filmmakers who were part of the audience.

Ceylan's interaction with the Qumra audience came after a packed-house Modern Master Screening of his Cannes Jury Grand Prix winner, ***Once Upon a Time in Anatolia***, a straightforward tale that rises to be a complex reflection of life. It left audiences with unanswered questions but Ceylan prefers not to answer them.

"I have my answers but I prefer to hide them," he said. "Cinema becomes deeper when there is well-controlled ambiguity. I believe that the audiences should find the answers and create the answers for themselves. I am not a teacher, am not sure of anything, and I myself am trying to learn things."

But that candid talk hides a sharp and decisive mind, as Ceylan doesn't hesitate to declare: "I don't do genres. Today, there is pressure on directors to make films on minorities. I don't feel that requirement. To me, directors must make films that are reflections about life, and stories that they feel are important to them."

Ceylan said that when he started off he was an alien in Turkish cinema. "I was unsure of what I wanted to be. I travelled to India, Nepal and London. I worked as a waiter. And when I was obliged to do military service, I got the opportunity to read a lot of books. On my return to London, I watched many movies, three a day. Watching movies was my best teacher and is the best way to learn about cinema – if you watch carefully of course."

He said it is better to start one's career as a filmmaker earlier in life because "then you are not afraid of making mistakes, and making mistakes is how you learn."

A photographer himself, Ceylan was challenged by the possibility that cinema offered to provide "deep and complex reflections of life. It brought out a sense of astonishment in me. Video cameras made the real more surreal."

Earlier, he used to prepare elaborately for his films, said Ceylan. "Today, I am more spontaneous. I like the nice surprises that come at the last minute."

Ceylan did not hide his love for editing, which he says is "full of surprises," and digital filmmaking now gives him the freedom to shoot more. He said: "Editing is very important to me, I am obsessed with editing. Even if you are a very experienced filmmaker you cannot foresee what will happen during editing. You go on writing the script as you edit, you change things. Since I know this reality, I shoot many alternatives now, with the help of technology as I couldn't do that before with 35mm."

Ceylan said Russian literature influenced him tremendously. "I was 19 when I read *Crime and Punishment*; after that nothing else seems to be as deep enough." He added that human condition is

the same everywhere. “They have the same motivations, the same nature – and as a filmmaker – it ultimately depends on how you look at life. In Russian literature, I look for the similarities with my own soul.” Creating movies for the soul, not surprisingly, was a dominant narrative of his Masterclass.

Ceylan said writing has always been a challenge for him. “You struggle and there are moments you feel you will go nowhere. Some days after the struggle, there is a script, and you forget the process. My script changes with time, and today, I write with a keen sense of what I can shoot.” The thumb rule for writing, he observed, is to ensure that it should motivate you after you finish it.

Grounded in a realistic approach to filmmaking, Ceylan, who has acted in his own film, said the experience was painful. “I am obsessive as a director, and as an actor, you do not have as much control as you might want. With digital, it is easier today but no, never again.”

The Palme d’Or winning filmmaker said he does not hold on to fixed ideas about any aspect of filmmaking. “I like to be surprised because that is how life is. You change as a person over time, and it reflects on your style. That is not planned. If I want, I can make the same kind of films all over, but that does not motivate me.”

Speaking about the challenge of making his Palme d’Or winning film ‘Winter Sleep’ Ceylan said: “the starting point for the film was a story by Chekov. I had it in my mind for 15 years but never felt confident enough to make it until that time.”

“We wrote it in about six months. It was a challenging film with a lot of philosophical, heavy dialogue and I was really afraid of that. But I need something to be afraid for each film. That is the motivation for me. If you are afraid of something, you work harder. If there is no danger, you are lazy.

Schamus is one of five Qumra Masters at the event - the others are screenwriter, director and leading US indie producer James Schamus; Russian auteur, Aleksandr Sokurov; Japanese writer/director Naomi Kawase and two-time Academy Award nominated US documentarian Joshua Oppenheimer.

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About Qumra:

Qumra is an initiative that seeks to provide mentorship, nurturing and hands-on development for filmmakers from Qatar and around the world, alongside a series of screenings for Doha audiences featuring films by international masters and recipients of support from the Institute.

** The Arabic term ‘qumra’ is popularly said to be the origin of the word ‘camera’, and to have been used by the scientist, astronomer and mathematician Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham, 965-c.1040 CE), whose work in optics laid out the principles of the camera obscura.*

About Doha Film Institute:

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute’s platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar’s 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.



Doha Film Institute

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