

BUSHRA AZZOUZ



You moved to the US from Iraq. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came here?

I grew up in Iraq. Then as a teenager we moved to Beirut, Lebanon. I decided I didn't want to go to the American university in Beirut where everybody in my family had gone. I wanted to be far away. My uncle suggested I might like Reed College. I thought it was fun that I had to look Portland up on the map.

You received a degree in theater from Reed College. How did you get from theater to film?

I finished at Reed but I was missing half a credit. At the time PSU had a Center for the Moving Image, so I took a class there with Andres Denium in film theory that changed my idea of what cinema is. Then I took film production, which gave me confidence in the technology. It was an accident, but it went from there.

It sounds like Denium was a big influence on you. Can you pinpoint what it was he showed you about cinema that opened your mind?

Andres showed me that film is a language you can learn to speak. You can basically learn to write a haiku or an essay or a novel, or you know, to speak film. And that intrigued me - the possibilities of cinema as a way of reflecting on the world or assigning meaning to our world.

Is there one aspect of filmmaking that you prefer?

There is the excitement of shooting a film, which I always love, but I think the really hard work for me as an artist is in the editing room. That is where you rework the material and come to terms with what you have.

Is there a theme which runs through all of your work?

I often end up focusing on what women have to say. I don't have a particular philosophy that says that I want to represent what women say but I have a fascination with how women view the world.

You're an instructor at the NW Film Center teaching documentary and digital editing, among other things. As a teacher, what are the most important things you try to impart?

I think that practicing filmmaking is really important. Practice shooting material, practice writing, or making music for films -- whatever that practice means to you. Engaging in filmmaking adds to the fabric of your life, and for me, I have made a lot of friends that way.

How do you select film projects to work on?

I take on projects by accident, and I love that. I don't go out seeking projects. I often have 10 or 15 projects in progress. Which one will come to the foreground and get finished is not always clear to me. As a filmmaker, I think you should keep sketches and diaries, like visual artists keep sketchbooks. I don't feel particularly compelled to finish everything I've started.

How do you like to involve others in the making of a film? Is collaboration easy?

I don't think all collaborations work, but when you find someone you can collaborate with it's really wonderful. A lot of the work that I have loved doing has involved collaborations with other women. Otherwise, editing can be really lonely.

You often film subjects in remote areas or tribal communities. Do you have any advice for filming people that may be apprehensive of the camera or technology?

I'm kind of fearless. But I do think interacting with the people is helpful. That's how I broke the ice when I was shooting women in the Borneo jungle. I specifically used a digital camera with a screen to show the women the footage I had shot. That made a huge difference because the women very quickly figured out what I was trying to shoot, which made them comfortable. When they were going to do something that they thought would interest me, they'd come and get me and invite me along.

Tell us about your most recent film.

I have been working for a few years with my friend Vassiliki on a film about the women of Cyprus. We have captured their relationship to their divided island and their attempts at bringing it together. Vassiliki interviewed women, both Greek and Turkish, who had already been talking to each other. They actually have more in common than differences that are unbridgeable. There are all the grey areas in between, and that is the part that interests me -- the shades of grey.