

Unknown Land

A film by
Manuel de Coco

“The banned movie that divided the Arab world and Israel”

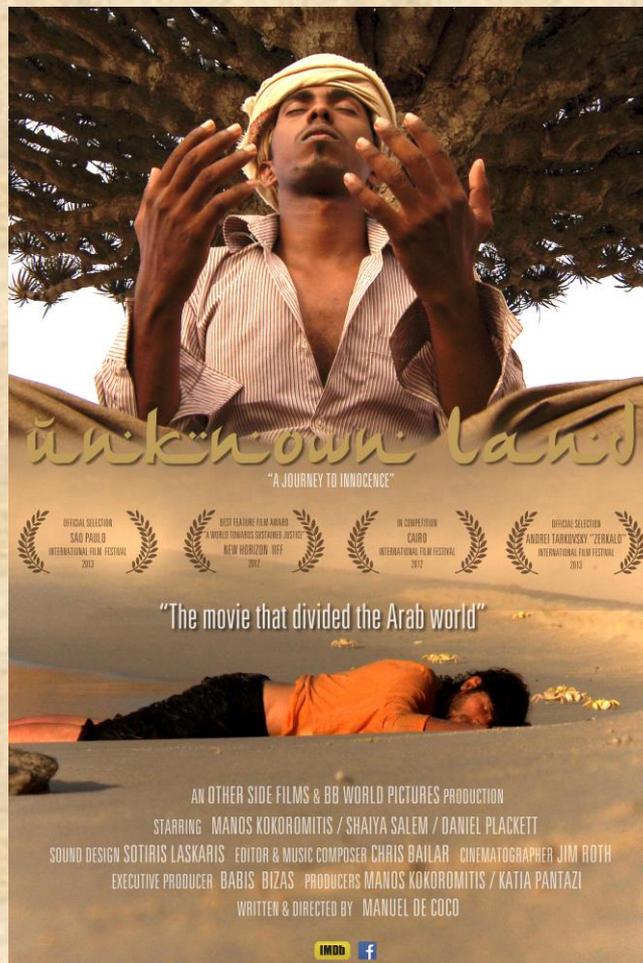
15 Film Festivals – 4 Awards – 15 Nominations

Official Selection

2012 Cairo International Film Festival

2013 São Paulo International Film Festival

2013 Andrei Tarkovsky "Zerkalo" International Film Festival



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Synopsis

The Arab Spring, Yemen 2011. The revolution continues. It's the monsoon season and life goes on smoothly for the inhabitants of Socotra Island. Not far from land, a sailing boat bearing an Israeli flag sinks and the search for survivors begins. A castaway is washed ashore a secluded beach. On the other side of the island, a native dreams of the castaway seeking his help. This adventure begins through the castaway's body, a man who in the sinking of his life sees for the first time a chance to know gratefulness, to be reborn. Will he overthrow destiny? Will he get back alive?



Notes

"Unknown Land" is Manuel de Coco's first feature film and its budget was 25.000 euros

The movie has been filmed with non actors who had no knowledge of the script but only the film's general idea.

Shootings took place in Yemen (Socotra Island) during the Arab Spring and in Israel.

It is the first feature film which has been filmed in Socotra. This isolated island has been described as the most alien landscape on earth. According to the latest research, more than one-third of the approximately 800 plants on the island are unique and can be found nowhere else on earth. Socotra has been recognized as a World Natural Heritage Site and is protected by UNESCO.

It is the first feature film that has been banned both in the Arab world and Israel.

One year after the film's world premiere, Shaiya Salem – who is acting the Muslim who tries to save the castaway – has been missing at a shipwreck in Socotra Island.

Director's Note

With the Arab Spring and the revolution in Yemen as its background, "Unknown Land" is the story of an Israeli castaway washed ashore a Muslim land; the story of a soul's catharsis trapped between two worlds. While the external war continues (Arab Spring), another war, that of the hero, climaxes. The film seeks both outer and inner peace.

This adventure begins through the castaway's body, an ordinary man who in the sinking of his life sees for the first time a chance to know gratefulness, to be reborn. The castaway's fate is revealed at the end of the film; whether he will be granted the second chance which will lead to a miracle. This desperate second chance which we plead for when faced with a difficult situation in our lives.

The visual style of the film is that of a documentary. This style of filming aids the development of the story because it embodies the naturalism of real life.

The people who participated in the film were not professional actors but were chosen for certain roles according to their clothing and general characteristics. My intention was not to let them know the details of the script, so that they would simply go along with the idea of the movie. Rehearsals with these individuals took place only a few minutes before each scene was shot. This allowed them to feel comfortable, and to improvise freely. In this way they could remain simple and the authenticity of the story could be preserved, rather than having them interpret roles as cinematic heroes who were simply delivering the script. For this reason, the few spoken dialogues in the film are very realistic.

With a pure manner and by creating a poetic atmosphere, the movie promotes a message of peace between the two peoples. "Unknown Land" is a metaphysical allegory with hidden symbols of spiritual, religious and political issues.

Spirituality and politics coexist in this human drama which speaks of regret, forgiveness, acceptance, conciliation, love and much more... Our soul is an unknown land, which few have managed to explore.





Director's Biography

Manuel de Coco was born in 1975 in Athens, Greece. He is an award-winning director and writer working on feature films, documentaries and commercials around the world. His first feature film “Unknown Land” has been awarded at International Film Festivals and banned in many countries of the Arab world and Israel. He is currently working on the documentary feature “Invisible World – Shambhala”, the shootings of which took place in Tibet, Mongolia, Russia, Italy, Greece, Israel and Palestine.



Producer's Biography

Katia Pantazi was born in 1976 in Athens, Greece. She received her Bachelor of Studies in Greek Civilization from Hellenic Open University. Fluent in Greek and English, fair in Italian. Since 2009 she has worked in various projects with Greek and international production companies. “Unknown Land” is her first feature film as a producer. Since 2013 she has been a member of the team of curators for the Delhi International Film Festival and she is a partner of Gothenburg Independent Film Festival since 2014. Since 2009 and until present she is working on the documentary feature “Invisible World – Shambhala”, the shootings of which took place in Tibet, Mongolia, Russia, Italy, Greece, Israel and Palestine.

Production

The film was shot during the period when the revolution in Yemen was climaxing. There was issued a travel directive which forbid the entrance of travelers from abroad. The issued visas were provided directly from Yemen and they were delayed for almost a month due to the unstable situation.

Shootings lasted for 12 days and the crew included 8 people, 4 from Greece and 4 from Yemen. We were lacking of basic specialties and we were forced to do double and triple work since we had to cover all the posts.

The sun was rising at 5:00 am and sometimes we needed to be awake at 3:30 am so as to cover the distance from the hotel to the point that the sunrise would be. We were having lunch outdoors wherever we could find shadow. The heat was unbearable and the sun too strong for the lighting of the film. As a result, there was a reduction in the shooting hours. At dawn, the light faded away within an hour and so we had to act fast. Each day we stopped working at 10:00 pm.

When the monsoon season began to appear we lost a significant part of the shootings, since the weather conditions were preventing us from doing the shootings in the proper way. Many of the shots were useless since the strong winds in the area were a great obstacle for the completion of the scenes. Most of the dialogues could not be heard clearly. Therefore the director was forced to shoot the scenes in the location where the script indicated, filming them from far away or with their back on the camera, so that their lips could not be seen. Later on, he did the voice recordings in other locations where the winds were not too strong. Also in many places the shootings were canceled because the cataclysm resulted to landslips and the roads were closed, so we had to maneuver and find other locations more suitable for shooting the scenes.

The electricity in the area was cut all the time...When possible, we were learning from the internet the news about the situation in Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, where we had to cross from in order to go back. Food supplies stopped coming to the island for the last days because in Sanaa the rebels had occupied the airport. The tension in Yemen was rising and there was a general worry among the crew whether we would return or not.

One day before the departure from the island the crew found out that their hotel was a shooting target of the opposite party. For that reason, the hotel placed a guard in the front entrance of the hotel overnight. When we reached Sanaa, the Presidential Palace was attacked and the President of the country was injured. Due to the fights, all the incoming flights were canceled. There was lots of tension, agitation and crowding in the airport since many people wanted to leave the country. We stayed in the airport, where the situation was chaotic, because there was a leak of information that one of the basic targets was the airport too. Finally, our plane arrived the next day.

Festivals/Awards

2012 New Horizon International Independent Filmmakers' Festival

Winner - Best Feature Film Award "A world towards sustained justice"

2012 Baghdad International Film Festival

Nominated – First Prize

2012 Cairo International Film Festival

Nominated - Tahrir Square Prize

2012 Delhi International Film Festival

Nominated - Best Feature Film Award

2013 International Oriental Film Festival in Geneva /FIFOG

Winner - Supporting Mention for the censorship the film has endured

Nominated - FIFOG d'or

2013 Andrei Tarkovsky "Zerkalo" International Film Festival

Official Selection "Tarkovsky Context"

2013 Cologne Conference International Film & TV Festival

Nominated - TV Spielfilm Prize

2013 Petaluma International Film Festival

Official Selection

2013 Cyprus International Film Festival

Winner - Best Director Award

Nominated – Best Cinematography

2013 São Paulo International Film Festival

Official Selection "International Perspective"

2013 Transaharian International Film Festival in Zagora

Nominated - Special Jury Prize

2013 Peloponnesian International Film Festival

Nominated - Best Director

- Best Cinematography

- Best Music Score

2013 Sofia Middle East & North Africa Region Film Festival

Official Selection

2014 Gothenburg Independent Film Festival

Winner - Best Director Peace Award

Nominated - Best Feature Film Peace Award

- Film for Peace Award

2014 Human Rights Film Festival of Barcelona - New York City - Paris

Nominated - Best Feature Film Award

- Amnesty International Award

- Survival International Award



Reviews

“Do we deserve another chance in life?”

“Unknown Land”, a movie to remind us that we 're humans. An amazing film!!”

Mustafa El-Tayeb, Egyptian Radio

“It's an enchanting contemplation on life, religion and primordial forces.”

Umberto Rossi, cinemaetatro.com

“The concept that inspired this film has a very deep spiritual message.”

Nia Foes, Creative Bridges

“Paradise is here if you dare to see it.”

Vasily Ruzakov, Ivanovskaya Gazeta

General Info

Genre: Spiritual – Political Drama
Countries: Greece / Cyprus / Yemen
Year: 2012
Filming Locations: Yemen / Israel

Technical Info

Runtime: 78 min
Color: Color
Aspect Ratio: 16:9 HD
Sound: Dolby digital stereo, Dolby Surround 5.1
Languages: Arabic / English
Subtitles: English / French / Greek



Credits

Production Companies: Other side Films, BB World Pictures
Starring: Manos Kokoromitis / Shaiya Salem / Daniel Plackett
Production Design: Stefanos Katselis
Sound Design: Sotiris Laskaris
Editor & Music Composer: Chris Bailar
Cinematographer: Jim Roth
Executive Producer: Babis Bizas
Producers: Manos Kokoromitis / Katia Pantazi
Written & Directed by: Manuel de Coco

Links

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2484548/>
www.facebook.com/unknownlandmovie