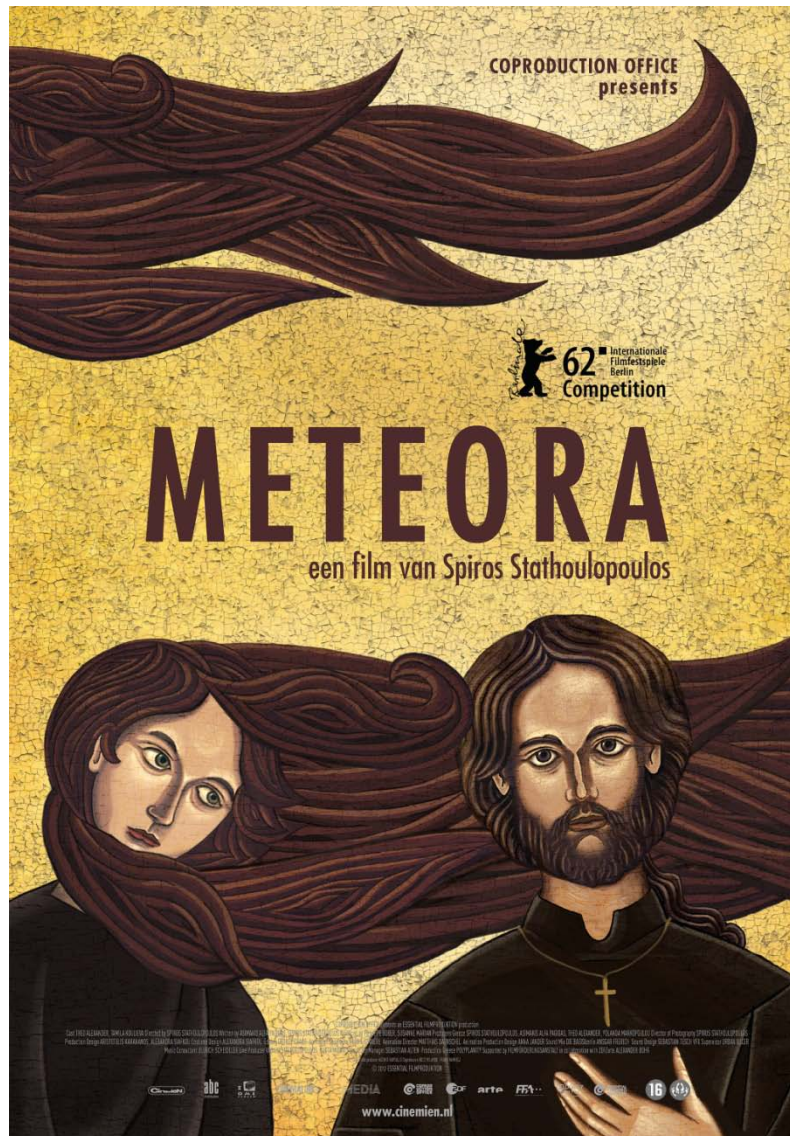


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METEORA – synopsis nl + fr

In het bergachtige gebied van centraal Griekenland liggen de kloosters van Metéora, bovenop hoge steentoppen en ver weg van zowel hemel als aarde. De jonge monnik Theodoros en non Urania hebben hun leven gewijd aan de strikte rituelen en levensstijl van hun gemeente. Maar de twee jonge mensen worden elke dag meer verscheurd door een groeiend verlangen naar elkaar. Zij zullen moeten kiezen tussen spirituele toewijding of wereldlijke passies.

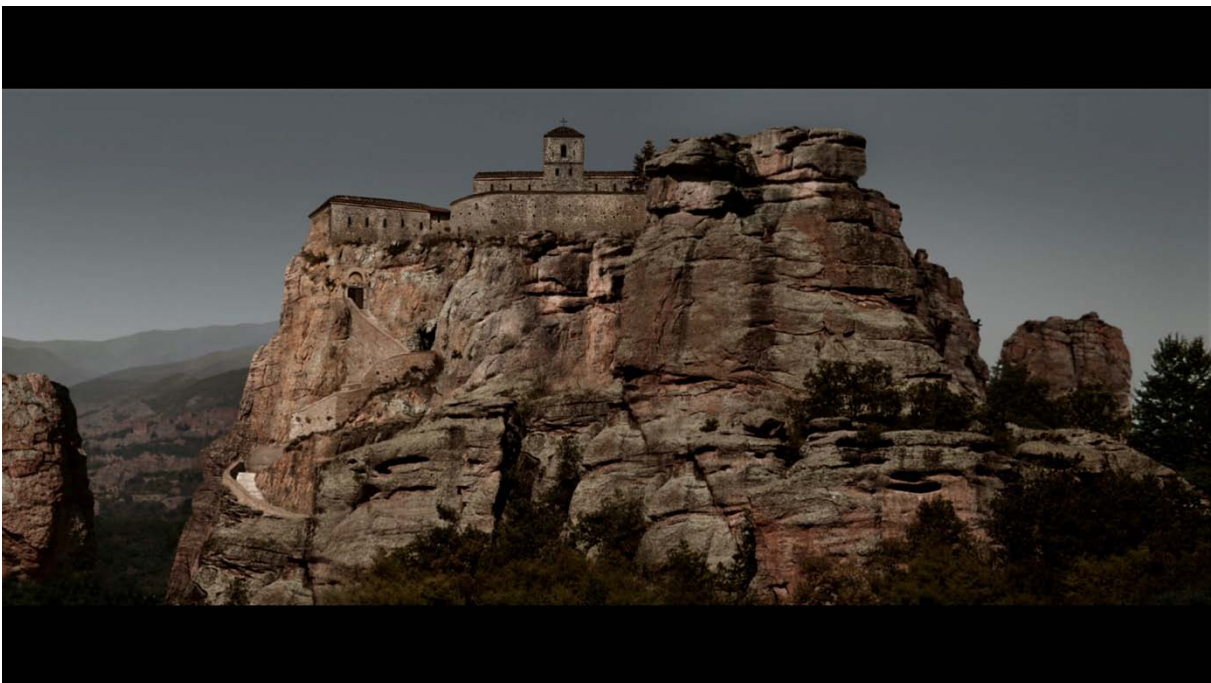
Metéora maakte deel uit van de officiële competitie van het Filmfestival Berlijn 2012.

Lengte 81min. / Taal: Grieks / Land: Griekenland

Au cœur de la Grèce, les monastères de Météora trônent sur des colonnes de grès vieilles de millions d'années, comme suspendus entre ciel et terre. Dans les vallées qu'ils surplombent, les cycles éternels de la vie paysanne contrastent avec le monde austère des religieux. Le jeune moine Theodoros et la nonne Urania ont voué leur existence à Dieu mais une attirance grandissante les pousse l'un vers l'autre.

Déchirés entre dévotion spirituelle et désir charnel, ils sont bientôt contraints à un choix terrible.

Durée 81min. / Langue: grecque / Pays: Grèce



METEORA – cast

monnik / le moine Theo Alexander
non / la nonne Tamila Koulieva-Karantinaki

METEORA – crew

regie / réalisation SPIROS STATHOULOPOULUS
scenario / scénario ASIMAKIS "ALFA" PAGIDAS
..... SPIROS STATHOULOPOULUS
productie / production PHILIPPE BOBER
..... SUSANNE MARIAN
productie Griekenland / production Grèce SPIROS STATHOULOPOULOS
..... ASIMAKIS "ALFA" PAGIDAS
..... THEO ALEXANDER
..... YOLANDA MARKOPOULOU
beeld / image SPIROS STATHOULOPOULOS
décors..... ARISTOTELES KARANANOS
..... ALEXANDRA SIAFKOU
kostuums / costumes ALEXANDRA SIAFKOU
montage..... GEORGE CRAGG
animation supervisor..... FRANK GOVAERE
animation director..... MATTHIAS DAENSCHERL
animation production design..... ANNA JANDER
geluid / son..... SEBASTIAN TESCH
..... DIE BASISberlin – ANSGAR FRERICH
VFX supervisor URBAN VUCER
muziek / musique..... ULLRICH SCHEIDELER
line producers VASILIS STATHOULOPOULUS
..... RUSTA MIZANI

METEORA – Spiros Stathoulopoulos

Spiros Stathoulopoulos, geboren in 1977, is een Grieks-Columbiaans regisseur. Zijn eerste film, PVC-1, schoot hij in een enkele sequentie.

PVC-1, die het verhaal vertelt van een vrouw die probeert om een explosief te verwijderen dat rond haar nek hangt, werd geselecteerd voor de Quinzaine des Réalisateur te Cannes en de film won de FIPRESCI op het Festival van Thessaloniki. Spiros Stathoulopoulos begon zijn studie in Bogota, Colombia vooraleer hij verder ging studeren aan de California State University. METEORA is zijn tweede speelfilm. De film werd vertoond in competitie op het filmfestival van Berlijn in 2012.

Né en 1977, Spiros Stathoulopoulos est un réalisateur grécocolombien qui a signé un premier film, PVC-1, tourné en un seul plan séquence.

PVC-1, qui met en scène la course contre la montre d'une femme tentant d'enlever un explosif accroché autour de son cou, a notamment été sélectionné à la Quinzaine des réalisateurs et remporté le prix FIPRESCI du festival de Thessalonique. Spiros Stathoulopoulos a débuté ses études à Bogota en Colombie avant de les poursuivre à la California State University. METEORA est son second long métrage. Le film a été présenté en compétition officielle au festival de Berlin en 2012.



METEORA – director’s statement

Beginning in the Late Middle Ages, orthodox monks built monasteries on top of the sandstone monoliths of Central Greece – masterful human creations fused to a magnificent natural phenomenon formed millions of years ago. The clouds, which glide below the monasteries, eclipse the monoliths generating an optical illusion of suspension between heaven and earth (in Greek “Metéoros” means “suspended, hovering”).

My first memories of the rocky landscape and the monasteries of Metéora go back to my early childhood. Even after we moved with my family from Greece to Colombia, memories of Byzantine Icons and the archaic rituals of the Orthodox services have remained with me ever since. Hence my critical and at the same time respectful approach to the spirituality of the Orthodox belief is always paired with the reflection upon childhood images of another home that was far away – yet deeply rooted within myself.

After my first film was made in Colombia, my maternal home, I felt it was time to devote myself to a film about my paternal home. My idea was related to the sight of the monasteries from my past memories, the landscape symbolizing two very different worlds: the individuality of rural life present in the valley on the one hand, and the monastic communion in the cloudy heights on the other.

The protagonists of the film navigate between these two worlds: against their own wish, the monk Theodoros and the nun Urania have not managed to completely detach themselves from their earthly existence. From the monastic point of view, carnal desire represents an obstacle on the path toward the highest goal, while for the farmers reproduction is an essential component in the cycle of life. Both perspectives are of a spiritual nature and only differ in their manifestation.

To me the protagonists’ craving, longing, and carnal desires are not to be perceived solely as sins. They quarrel with themselves, struggle, and have yet to find their definite place. They arrive at a crossroads where a decision has to be made.

It almost seems as if this struggle is mapped upon the image of the suspended monasteries – an allegory of the human soul that has been perpetually suspended between the spiritual and the secular existence.

A partir des XI^e et XII^e siècles, les moines orthodoxes ont construit des monastères au sommet de monolithes de grès dans la région des Météores – ces constructions ont épousé majestueusement les formations sédimentaires sculptées par l'érosion. Les nuages qui glissent sous les monastères éclipsent les monolithes et créent l'illusion d'un flottement entre ciel et terre (en grec, « météore » signifie «suspendu, flottant»).

Mes premiers souvenirs de ce paysage rocheux et des monastères de Météora remontent à ma petite enfance. Et lorsque j'ai quitté la Grèce pour la Colombie avec ma famille, les icônes byzantines et les rituels liturgiques ancestraux m'ont toujours habité. Ainsi, mon approche à la fois critique et respectueuse de la foi orthodoxe va toujours de pair avec les réminiscences des images de mon enfance.

Après mon premier film réalisé en Colombie, la patrie de ma mère, j'ai senti qu'il était temps de faire un film sur le pays de mon père. Mon idée était de mêler des images des monastères à celles de mes souvenirs, le paysage symbolisant deux mondes très différents: la vie rurale dans la vallée bâtie autour de l'individu d'une part, et la vie en communauté religieuse dans les hauteurs embrumées de l'autre. Le moine Theodoros et la nonne Urania naviguent entre deux mondes: ils n'ont pas réussi à se détacher complètement de leur existence terrestre. Pour les religieux, le désir charnel représente un obstacle sur le chemin de la foi, tandis que pour les paysans, la reproduction est un élément essentiel du cycle de la vie.

Pour moi, les désirs irrésistibles qui animent les protagonistes ne doivent pas être perçus uniquement comme des péchés. Ils se battent contre eux-mêmes et n'ont pas encore trouvé leur place définitive. Ils arrivent à un carrefour de l'existence et doivent faire un choix.

Cette lutte est à l'image des monastères suspendus – allégorie de l'âme humaine perpétuellement ballotée entre le spirituel et le profane.

METEORA – Theo Alexander

Theo Alexander is geboren in Athene. Nadat hij zijn studies Business Administration aan de Universiteit van Boston beëindigde, studeerde hij aan The Circle in het Square Theatre Conservatory in New York. Sinds 2010 maakt hij dele uit van de cast van de succesvolle HBO-serie TRUE BLOOD. Hij vertolkt de veel geprezen rol van “Talbot”. Als producent ontwikkelde hij en is hij bezig met de productie van twee projecten: “Amazons” met “Escape Artists” en de beroemde roman van Nikos Kazantzakis (Zorba de Griek, The Last Temptation of Christ) “Freedom or Death”.

Filmography

2007	El Greco van / de Yannis Smaragdis Chuck van / de Jason Ensler
2008	CSI: NY – Like Water for Murder van / de Anthony Hemingway Pushing Daisies – Circus, Circus van / de Lawrence Trilling
2010 – 2014	True Blood van / de Michael Lehmann, Scott Winant, David Petrarca
2011	Losing Control van / de Valerie Weiss Should ‘ve been Romeo van / de Marc Bennett
2012	Meteora van / de Spiros Stathoulopoulos



METEORA – Tamila Koulieva

Tamila Koulieva-Karantinaki werd in 1967 geboren in Baku (Azerbeidzjan). Nadat ze afstudeerde aan de muziekschool, ging ze studeren aan de Moscow National Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) en verhuisde ze in 1992 naar Athene. Naast haar acteercarrière, geeft ze ook acteerles en acteert ze in televisieseries en in het theater. Ze was op de planken te zien in *The Troyan Women* (2001), *Medea* (2003), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (2008) en *Beast on the Moon* door Richard Kalinoski (1999, 2010) in het Nationaal Theater van Griekenland.

Filmography

1990	The trap van / de Rasim Ismailov
	The Mystery of Handwritten Quran van / de Rafael Gaspariants
1991	A Dance in the Night (Gaùis Tsekva) van / de Aleko Tsabadze
1997	Vassiliki van / de Vangelis Serdaris
	Tomorrow is Another Day van / de Dora Masklavanou
2003	A Sea Apart van / de Ersi Danou
2004	Here We Are van / de Stavros Tsiolis
2012	Meteora van / de Spiros Stathoulopoulos



METEORA is an enigmatic story of love between a monk and a nun. Can you expand upon the relationship between the topography in the film and the theme of the story?

The origin of the word «Metéoros» is “suspended”. When the monasteries are viewed from below, clouds conceal the monoliths and it seems as if the monasteries are floating in the heavens above.

The main theme of METEORA is the suspension of the human soul between two poles. One pole is communal life, the monks and nuns with their communities. The other is life as an individual. In their love for one another, the monk and the nun have to make a decision between these two poles. In the film, this polarity is also mapped onto the topography: up above is life in the community; below is the individual. Central to the film is the place in-between, which I call the “area of suspension” – an area of conflict where the human soul is confronted with the decision of which direction to go.

The story has a timeless quality. The story could take place today or in the Middle Ages.

METEORA is timeless because the struggle in the film is timeless. The human struggle between the flesh and the soul has always existed. This timelessness is represented visually in the film: the monks still dress like they did a thousand years ago, the monasteries look essentially as they did back then, the rocks haven’t changed. This quality is mixed with certain aspects of modernity. For example, you see a farmer wearing jeans, and he uses modern tools to inflate and skin the goat. So it is at the same time modern as it is archaic. The intention is to show that such fundamental themes exist and have always existed. And that we are still discussing them.

What is your own personal experience with Greek Orthodoxy?

I was raised in an environment where religion was abundant, both on my mother’s and my father’s side. In Thessaloniki, we lived within walking distance from at least ten Orthodox churches. Greeks born before Second World War are the last remaining generation of highly disciplined Orthodox who regularly attend Christian Orthodox churches exclusively (it is the case of my grandmother for example, who I convinced to play in the film). In my childhood I went on a road trip driving from the North to the South of Greece. When we reached the monasteries’ area, I saw it for the first time through the window. I had seen before natural beauty and also beauty created by humans, but this was the first time I experienced perfect harmony between a magnificent natural phenomenon and one of the most striking architectural masterpieces of mankind. Since then, this image has stayed with me. Today, I re-explore this setting not through the windshield of a car but through a camera lens – this time entering the Orthodox monastic life responsible for this miraculous creation.

What is the genesis of the animations and what is their function?

Visually speaking, I thought that using Orthodox Icons would be an ideal visual narrative device considering the fact that they belong to the universe of the story. But in order to reach the optimum visual narrative power of this device I originated the animated Orthodox Byzantine icons.

Aside of using the animations to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters and as a platform where their story could develop upon, the animations are also used to reference the many other myths, paradoxes and allegories of Greek or biblical origin that have underlying parallels with the story, such as Achilles and the Tortoise, Theseus and Ariadne in the labyrinth of Minotaur, redemption through the blood of Christ, and, of course, the story of Adam and Eve.

Does the inclination toward individuality differ for the monk and the nun?**Were there specific challenges?**

When Orthodox monks were persecuted during the Ottoman occupation centuries ago, they found here the toughest possible terrain, which ensured optimum protection. Even though the landscape has become more accessible over time with roads, staircases, and paths, it was still a difficult area to shoot in. Filming in the sweltering heat is not only difficult for the equipment but also for the physical and psychological endurance of the crew.

Can you describe how you filmed the monoliths, sky, and landscapes?

The light at this geographical coordinate is highly unusual, especially during the transition from spring to summer. Cloudless skies are predominant in summer, but in the late spring Greek skies can become almost mythological. In the morning, a heavy fog often hangs in the valleys between the monoliths, creating an ominous and contemplative ambience. Later in the course of the day, the clouds give way to the blazing sun and sharp, crystal clear skies and the temperature reaches well over 40 degrees. The objective was to capture this transition. I had chosen to use an anamorphic lens and to film in CinemaScope in order to shoot the immensity of the monoliths and landscapes, and decided to further study the natural light and the behaviour of the clouds in order to use them as a narrative resource.

Does the inclination toward individuality differ for the monk and the nun?

The characters of the monk and the nun are complementary – their struggle is the same. But the monk and the nun are used to describe different aspects of this struggle. For example, the nun is used to illustrate the exploration of physical desires or inflicting pain to repress them. Tenderness and patience are shown through the nun. The monk is used for other trials and deliberations. Together they constitute a troubled soul.

What is the role of the flutist and of the hermit?

The flutist and the hermit are the main peripheral characters. They are steps in the “the ladder” that the monk ascends and descends between community and individual. In search for an expression of his individuality, the monk goes to the periphery of the community and finds the hermit, who has decided to live in isolation, to deprive his body of sleep and food in order to discover something about God that one cannot experience by leading a worldly life. The monk belongs to a community that likewise strives toward this spirituality, but by falling in love, he must reject the rules of his community and is confronted with inner turmoil. The monk’s struggle brings him down into the valley to the flutist, a secular individual who lives alone with his crops and animals. The monk’s friendship with the flutist encourages his free will and his feelings for the nun.

Are there connections between your first film PVC-1 and METEORA with regard to the filmmaking process or your personal approach?

There is a common interest of mine in both films: the concept of entrapment as a dramaturgical device. In PVC-1, the character is trapped in a bomb; in METEORA, the main protagonists feel trapped between their life in the community and their life as an individual. But the two films have opposite resolutions of their respective entrapment situations. In terms of my filmmaking approach, I shot PVC-1 with a stabilized tracking camera system and still shots in order to convey the physical sensation of claustrophobia, while METEORA was shot mostly on a tripod in order to convey a more psychological feeling of claustrophobia.



METEORA est une histoire d’amour énigmatique entre un moine et une nonne. Quelle est la relation entre la topographie dans le film et le thème de l’histoire ?

Le thème principal de METEORA est le balancement de l’âme humaine entre deux pôles. Le premier pôle, c’est la vie en communauté, celle des moines et des nonnes. L’autre pôle, c’est la vie en société en tant qu’individu. Leur amour contraint Theodoros et Urania à choisir entre les deux. Dans le film, cette polarité est également inscrite dans la topographie : en haut, la vie dans la communauté ; en bas, l’individu. Au milieu, c’est l’entre-deux, ce que j’appelle la « zone de suspension » - une zone de conflit où l’âme humaine doit choisir la direction à prendre.

L’histoire est intemporelle. Elle pourrait se tenir aujourd’hui comme au Moyen-Age.

METEORA est intemporel parce que la lutte dans le film est intemporelle. Ce conflit entre la chair et l’âme a toujours existé. Cette intemporalité est représentée visuellement dans le film : les moines s’habillent de la même façon depuis mille ans, les monastères n’ont pas changé depuis leur construction, il en va de même pour les rochers. A côté de ça, certains détails sont modernes. Par exemple, un agriculteur vêtu d’un jean utilise des outils modernes pour gonfler la peau de la chèvre. Le décor est donc à la fois moderne et archaïque. L’intention est de montrer qu’il existe des thèmes fondamentaux qui ont toujours existé. Et que nous sommes toujours en train de les discuter.

Quelle est votre expérience personnelle de la religion orthodoxe ?

J’ai été élevé dans un environnement où la religion était très présente, tant du côté de ma mère que de celui de mon père. A Thessalonique, il y avait de très nombreuses églises orthodoxes à proximité de là où nous habitons. Les Grecs nés avant la Seconde Guerre mondiale sont la dernière génération d’orthodoxes très disciplinés qui fréquentent régulièrement les églises (comme ma grand-mère, que j’ai convaincue de jouer dans le film). Durant mon enfance, on a fait un voyage du nord au sud de la Grèce. Quand nous sommes arrivés dans la région des monastères, je les ai aperçus pour la première fois par la fenêtre. J’avais déjà vu avant la beauté de la nature et aussi la beauté créée par l’homme, mais c’était la première fois que j’ai ressenti une harmonie parfaite entre un phénomène naturel et l’un des chefs-d’œuvre architecturaux les plus marquants de l’humanité. Cette image s’est inscrite en moi. Aujourd’hui, j’explore à nouveau cette vision non pas à travers le pare-brise d’une voiture, mais à travers une lentille de caméra – en entrant cette fois dans la vie monacale orthodoxe qui est responsable de cette création miraculeuse.

Quelle est la genèse des animations et quelle est leur fonction ?

Je pensais que l'utilisation d'icônes orthodoxes serait un outil narratif visuel idéal compte tenu du fait qu'ils appartiennent à l'univers de l'histoire. Mais pour encourager la puissance de la narration visuelle, il fallait donner vie à ces icônes. Leur animation communique les pensées et sentiments des personnages et sert de plateforme au développement de l'histoire. Les animations ont également été utilisées pour convoquer nombre d'autres mythes, de paradoxes et d'allégories grecques ou bibliques. Ceux-ci tissent des parallèles sous-jacents avec l'histoire, comme Achille et la tortue, Thésée et Ariane dans le labyrinthe du Minotaure, la rédemption par le sang du Christ, et, bien sûr, Adam et Eve.

Y-a-t-il eu des défis particuliers à relever lors du tournage ?

Lorsque les moines orthodoxes ont été persécutés pendant l'occupation ottomane voilà des siècles, ils ont trouvé ici le terrain le plus escarpé possible, ce qui assure une protection optimale. Même si les lieux sont devenus plus accessibles au fil du temps grâce aux routes, aux escaliers ou aux sentiers, ça n'en reste pas moins un endroit où il est difficile de tourner. Filmer dans la chaleur étouffante n'est pas seulement éprouvant pour le matériel, ça l'est aussi pour l'endurance physique et pour le moral de l'équipe !

Pouvez-vous décrire comment vous avez filmé les monolithes, le ciel et les paysages ?

La lumière dans cette zone est très particulière, surtout pendant la transition entre le printemps et l'été. Les ciels sans nuages prédominent en été mais, à la fin du printemps, ils peuvent devenir presque « mythologiques ». Dans la matinée, un épais brouillard s'accroche souvent dans les vallées entre les monolithes, créant une atmosphère inquiétante. Plus tard au cours de la journée, les nuages cèdent la place à un soleil de plomb, un ciel limpide et la température dépasse aisément les 40 °C. Le but était de capturer cette transition. J'ai choisi d'utiliser une lentille anamorphique et de filmer en Cinémascope afin de capturer l'immensité des paysages, et j'ai étudié de près la lumière et le comportement des nuages afin de les utiliser comme une ressource narrative.

Quel est le rôle du flûtiste et de l'ermite ?

Le flûtiste et l'ermite sont les personnages secondaires les plus importants. Ils constituent des marches dans « l'échelle » que le moine monte et descend entre la communauté et la société. En quête de son individualité, Théodoros s'éloigne de la communauté et trouve l'ermite, qui a décidé de vivre dans l'isolement, de priver son corps de sommeil et de nourriture afin d'appréhender quelque chose de Dieu que l'on ne peut éprouver qu'en s'affranchissant des aspects matériels. Le moine appartient à une communauté qui s'efforce également d'approcher cet état spirituel, mais en tombant amoureux, il doit rejeter les règles de sa communauté et s'en trouve déchiré intérieurement. Sa lutte le conduit au flûtiste dans la vallée, une personne non croyante qui vit seul au milieu de ses bêtes et ses champs. Son amitié pour le flûtiste renforce son libre arbitre et ses sentiments pour la religieuse.

Y a-t-il des liens entre votre premier film PVC-1 et METEORA en ce qui concerne le processus de production ou votre approche personnelle ?

Dans les deux films, le dispositif dramaturgique repose sur une même idée : les personnages sont pris au piège. Dans PVC-1, le personnage est prisonnier d'une bombe, dans METEORA, les protagonistes se sentent pris au piège de leur vie monastique. Mais les deux films proposent des résolutions opposées. En ce qui concerne mon approche du cinéma, j'ai filmé PVC-1 avec un steadycam afin de transmettre la sensation physique de claustrophobie, tandis que METEORA a été tourné principalement avec un pied afin de transmettre un sentiment plus psychologique de claustrophobie.



Can you tell us how you became involved with Spiros and METEORA?

His film PVC-1 made an impact in Cannes. To my surprise, he was staying in Los Angeles and we decided to meet. I felt a strong artistic connection with him. A year later he called me to discuss his new project and asked if I wanted to be part of it.

How was it to work with Spiros as a director?

Spiros captures raw emotion, the truth of the moment. For me, this is the most important talent a director can possess. Working with the non-actors in the film was an exhilarating experience because you cannot be fake at any moment, with non-actors delivering an air of authenticity; the challenge is whether or not you can match them.

Do you have a personal connection to the Greek Orthodox faith?

I come from a religious family and was an altar boy in my youth. I respect the teachings of our faith.

Your character in METEORA is torn between two worlds that elicit a deep but paradoxical passion. Was this a challenge for an actor in comparison to previous roles?

I prepared the role for about three months. I visited the monasteries on the holy mountain of Athos. I lived with the monks and tried to take in every moment that I could. I discovered that most monks are extremely passionate people. The inner conflict, the struggle is more visibly and physically expressed through the character of the nun.

Do you feel that the monk was more secure in his struggle or that his actions were more intentional?

Each character in the film deals with his struggle in his own, unique way. The monk is more capable to hide his struggle when he is amongst people than when he is alone with her. It is a character choice, to hide the struggle until it erupts in our scene together.

The love scene in the cave is at once beautiful yet polemical. How did you and your co-star prepare for the love scene in the cave ?

I worked together with Tamila for several weeks before we started shooting. We improvised our scenes and developed the history of our characters. Nothing can really prepare you for a love scene in front of the camera. Tamila and I trusted each other and that played a huge part in the scene, this and the fact that we knew exactly where our director was going.

METEORA: worlds apart from working on something like TRUE BLOOD, or oddly similar?

All projects have the same challenge, and that is how you approach the truth of the moment. When the camera rolls, no matter what is the budget, it's all about capturing that truth.

What was the biggest challenge for you as an actor while working on the set of METEORA?

When a monk meets another monk, he bows, not to the person he sees but to the divine that the other person carries inside them. As an actor I tried to explore love in the broader sense of the word, the divine dimension of love. I tried to match my own experiences to those of the actual monks. The people I met there were so close to-God that their eyes were full of light. It was as if I was looking into the eyes of a child.



How did you become acquainted with Spiros Stathoulopoulos and his film project METEORA?

Spiros thought of me for the role of the nun. As I saw his first film PVC-1, I instantly understood that he is an unusual director, someone who looks for new ways of showing reality, new directions in cinematography. During our first meeting, we discussed in detail his vision of the story and I became very intrigued by this project.

What was it like to work with Spiros as a director?

I think he is a very attentive person, toward himself and toward others. Spiros really loves his profession and is committed to it. He is thoroughly interested in the details of the each and every shot and the particularities of his characters. I like to work with people who do not just stay on the surface but invest their time and talent fully exploring a story in order to obtain the result they want on the screen.

What were the differences for you as an actress in METEORA in comparison with previous productions?

The first difference was the extensive use of long shots. This process is not always easy as one must organize the minute succession of events that take place on screen beforehand. Another challenge in the acting was to come as close as possible to the “truth” aspect, the feeling of verisimilitude that is characteristic of a documentary style. There are also non-actors in this film – shepherds, villagers, who had the great advantage of the genuine simplicity and sincerity. It’s not always easy for a professional actor to stay on the same level. Andrei Konchalovsky, for instance, used this combination of fiction and documentary in his film THE STORY OF ASYA KLYACHINA (1966) in which the real dialogues of the villagers were built into the story – and it sounded natural and true.

Are there parallels between your own story as a Greek actress of Russian origin and your character?

Perhaps, I would say that there is a parallel with my own experience, my life. It’s the habit of questioning yourself. Thinking about your life and having questions that do not have answers. And this is the essence of being human, the fact that we try to understand this world and its laws of existence. This is important to me, and perhaps this is something I share with my character.

The biggest challenge in playing this role?

It was incredibly difficult to act in all those clothes and, of course, even more difficult on blistering hot summer days. I was surprised to learn that the outer black clothing is only the first, visible part of the nun’s vestimentary code. Trust me, there are many more nonvisible layers underneath! One feels bound and quite immobile. As a consequence, facial expressions and movements of hands acquire greater significance.

Did you have a certain background story of her in mind – for example, why she is there?

Of course, I tried to figure out her background – how did she come to the monastery? But then it's something very personal and subjective ; it's an idea or feeling you get from the character. For me, the three-dimensionality of a character is one of the most important things in cinema and theatre – a character that speaks both about its past and present. But ultimately, the viewer should find his own truth about the character.

What do you think are the main differences between the roles of the monk and the nun?

I do not think they are very different. On the contrary, I think they are very alike in how they repress their emotions and in their inner conflicts and struggles. And also in their efforts to communicate and to avoid one another. Her struggle manifests in more extreme acts, for example, self-inflicted pain. The nun tries to do what she thinks is true and not to betray the choice she made to unite with God. I think the scene where she burns her hand reflects her inner struggle, pangs of conscience, a feeling that what is going on is basically wrong. That is exactly the essence of what happens to her character: her nature rebels and becomes difficult to control, and she tries to resist to that, she does not want this change in her life, does not want to let go.

In your opinion, was the rather overt sex scene in the cave toward the end of the film a “logical” step to perform in contrast to the previous subtler character development?

For me, it was more like a challenge than a “logical” step. Challenge as a sudden change. This is precisely how I understand life: Life itself is unpredictable and illogical, full of changing circumstances and surprising events every now and then. It reminds of a saying by Dostoevsky – our life is much more interesting and much more unpredictable than the wildest fantasies of fiction.

