

A FILM BY KURDWIN AYUB

MOND (MOON)

WITH FLORENTINA HOLZINGER

GENIETEN HOE AYUB SPEELT MET DE
VERWACHTINGEN VAN HET PUBLIEK!
- Variety

AN ULRICH SEIDL FILM PRODUCTION

WITH FLORENTINA HOLZINGER, ANDRIA TAYEH, CELINA ANTWAN, NAGHAM ABU BAKER

CINEMATOGRAPHY: KLEMENS HUFNAGL | EDITING: ROLAND STÖTTINGER | SET DESIGN: JULIA LIBISELLER | CASTING: ULRIKE PUTZER
COSTUME DESIGN: CAROLA PIZZINI | SOUND: DAVID ALMEIDA-RIBEIRO | COLOR GRADING: ANDI WINTER | RE-RECORDING MIX: LUISE HOFMANN, FREDERIK THOMSEN
SUPERVISING SOUND DESIGN: MATZ MÜLLER | PRODUCTION DESIGN: STEVEN SWIRKO | EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: BRUNO WAGNER | CREATIVE PRODUCER: SUSANNE MARIAN
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER: VERONIKA FRANZ | PRODUCER: ULRICH SEIDL | WRITER & DIRECTOR: KURDWIN AYUB

WITH THE SUPPORT OF: ÖSTERREICHISCHES FILMINSTITUT, FILMFONDS WIEN | IN COLLABORATION WITH: ORF FILM/FERNSEH-ABKOMMEN
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Sarah is een martial-arts vechtster die haar carrière ziet vervliegen na een verloren competitie. Ze gaat maar lessen geven in de plaatselijke sportschool maar dan wordt ze benaderd door een Jordaanse zakenman die een tijdelijke klus aanbiedt om zijn jonge zussen te trainen. Ze grijpt dit blindelings met beide handen aan en komt terecht in de patriarchale sfeer van de megarijken in Amman. Daar wordt ze iedere dag van haar luxueuze hotel naar een groot afgelegen paleisje gereden waar ze drie zussen moet trainen. De jonge vrouwen verlaten nooit het huis, behalve voor tripjes met hun lijfwacht. Ze hebben geen wifi, krijgen thuisonderwijs en hebben weinig om zich mee bezig te houden, behalve met make-up of het kijken naar soaps. Tegen de tijd dat Sarah vragen begint te stellen ontwikkelen onverklaarbare kleine gebeurtenissen waar ze over piekerde zich tot iets tragischer en wordt ze meegesleept in hun zucht naar vrijheid,

Korte synopsis

Sarah, een martial-arts vechtster, wordt door een rijke zakenman aangenomen om zijn drie zussen in Amman te trainen. Wat klinkt als een leuke klus wordt steeds ongemakkelijker. Ze komt terecht in een patriarchale sfeer waarin de jonge vrouwen onder continu toezicht staan. Als onverklaarbare kleine gebeurtenissen zich ontwikkelen tot iets tragisch wordt ze meegesleept in hun zucht naar vrijheid,

Oneliner

Een martial-arts vechtster wordt aangenomen bij een rijke Jordaanse familie als trainster van drie zussen en wordt meegesleept in hun zucht naar vrijheid,

Achtergrond

Mond is een als persoonlijk verhaal vermomde politieke thriller over ingeperkte vrouwenrechten. Moderne technologie kan jonge vrouwen helpen, zo blijkt, maar ook hinderen. Maakster Ayub, geboren in Irak maar woonachtig in Oostenrijk, maakte eerder haar filmdebuut in 2022 met "Sonne", ook al een productie van Ulrich Seidl, bekend van "Des Teufels Bad", "Rimini" en "Paradise: Love" en "Paradise: Faith".



DIRECTORS STATEMENT KURDWIN AYUB



How would Sheherezade's stories from the One Thousand and One Nights look today? My first feature SONNE could be perhaps one of them. It is about cultural appropriation and revolves around a family with a migrant background in Europe and young European women who leave the West to go to Iraq. My new film MOND could be another of those stories. My initial idea was to tell the story of a privileged Western woman with privileged Western problems who goes to the Middle East and realizes how trivial her troubles really are. But of course it's not quite that simple...

My main character Sarah is a former mixed martial arts fighter. MMA is considered one of the toughest martial arts and she is basically a born action film heroine. However, I

subvert this genre cliché by crafting Sarah as a very special character, as a person very much with her own wishes, dreams and hopes. She is no more interchangeable than the members of the family. Once for a change a person from the West is working for a rich family in the East. The urge for freedom that Nour feels is in stark contrast to the emptiness and loneliness that Sarah feels in Austria. Nour wants to break out of her cage, Sarah secretly wants hers back. So it's all about sisters, no matter where they come from, and about cages, no matter where they are. Is Sarah actually helping another woman and possibly putting herself in danger in the process? Who can she believe, who can she trust? Does she help her, even if she doesn't know what is true and who is right? And who do we believe? Would we help? As with SONNE, MOND should leave the audience with more questions than answers. Reality is complicated, and there are usually no simple solutions. I hope that MOND also triggers some unpleasant feelings in the audience. When Sarah returns to Austria at the end of the film, some viewers may also in fact be relieved and even happy that she didn't save the sisters. I realise that this is a pretty harsh statement. In MOND, I want to analyse the white saviour complex and have opted for a naturalistic staging. What happens if the white saviour story is not told romantically, as in most fictional films, but realistically? Stories like the one about the family Sarah meets and what happens to their daughters are familiar from the news. I was interested in how Sarah, our born action heroine, would deal with such a situation – in a realistic way and without judgement. I deliberately use genre set pieces in MOND and hint at horror moments and action sequences, only to replace them with reality without warning. The girls let themselves be entertained by soap operas, while their dramatic situation is painfully real. The romance of these stories and all the happy endings make them optimistic, but also naive. We know that's the case with us as well. Sarah from the West will not be able to help Nour from the Middle East. And they both have to realise that. Because reality is not romantic. Unfortunately

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR KURDWIN AYUB

MOND IS YOUR FIRST FILM AFTER YOUR MULTI-AWARD-WINNING FEATURE DEBUT SONNE. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT FOR THE SCREENPLAY?

- During the filming of SONNE I already knew what story I wanted to tell in MOND. The starting point was a documentary about women from the Gulf States fleeing their patriarchal families. I could identify with that. My parents and I fled from the Kurdish part of Iraq to Austria in 1991. Culturally, my family was also very patriarchal. So I know the feeling of wanting to break out pretty well. And I realised back then that there was also another system in the western world telling me how to live as a woman

I shot my documentary PARADISE! PARADISE! in Iraq at a time when Islamic State had taken over large parts of the country. Every problem I had – or indeed anyone has or thinks they have here in Austria – felt extremely trivial in comparison. That's also why I wanted to tell this story. I am influenced by two cultures and I wanted to make a film that takes place in these two worlds. The characters and stories in the film are very specific however, and they are not intended to represent a whole country or its culture. Nevertheless, I tried to play with audience expectations and stereotypes, especially to show differences, but also where there might be similarities.

FLORENTINA HOLZINGER IS A VERY WELL-KNOWN THEATRE MAKER, CHOREOGRAPHER AND PERFORMER, BUT NOT A TRAINED ACTRESS. WHY DID YOU WANT HER TO PLAY SARAH IN MOND ?

- I already had Flo in mind for the main role when I was writing the story. I know her personally, so I also incorporated her own character into the role. We spent a long time preparing together, doing things like trying out different scenes on camera with other potential actors and training with professional martial artists. Flo was super cool throughout the whole shoot. I can't describe it any other way. She did everything that was almost absurd. I was also always afraid that she would get bored filming because she does much cooler and more exciting things on stage in her shows. So in Jordan Flo, Ulli Putzer (artistic assistant and casting) and I were always doing things together at the weekend. We went climbing, we jumped off cliffs and into rivers, we drove across the desert where we got stuck in a storm one night. All these activities were terrifying for me because I'm a scary-cat. But I wanted to get involved in her world of action to some extent, just as she had got involved in my world. She told me later that she saw the shoot as a holiday. I'm glad about that.

YOU ALREADY KNEW FLORENTINA, BUT YOU HAD TO GO OUT TO FIND ACTRESSES FOR THE SISTERS. HOW WAS THAT?

- It was a bit challenging. Every time we found a young woman we liked at a casting in Jordan, we never heard from her again. We found out that acting, at least for women, was not seen as appropriate for some families. We only managed to solve the problem when we cast Andria Tayeh as Nour. As she is quite well-known in the Arab world as a model, influencer and actress in a Netflix series, the other actresses didn't only agree to come along, but actually turned up. She must have awakened the fighting spirit of those young women and their dreams. And Andria was tremendous. The message of the film was important to her right from the start. All the Jordanian actors knew the script and immediately understood that it was about female emancipation and self-empowerment. That was very important to me. As the dialogue was largely improvised, we had to trust each other. Everyone gave a piece of themselves, through their personality and their stories.

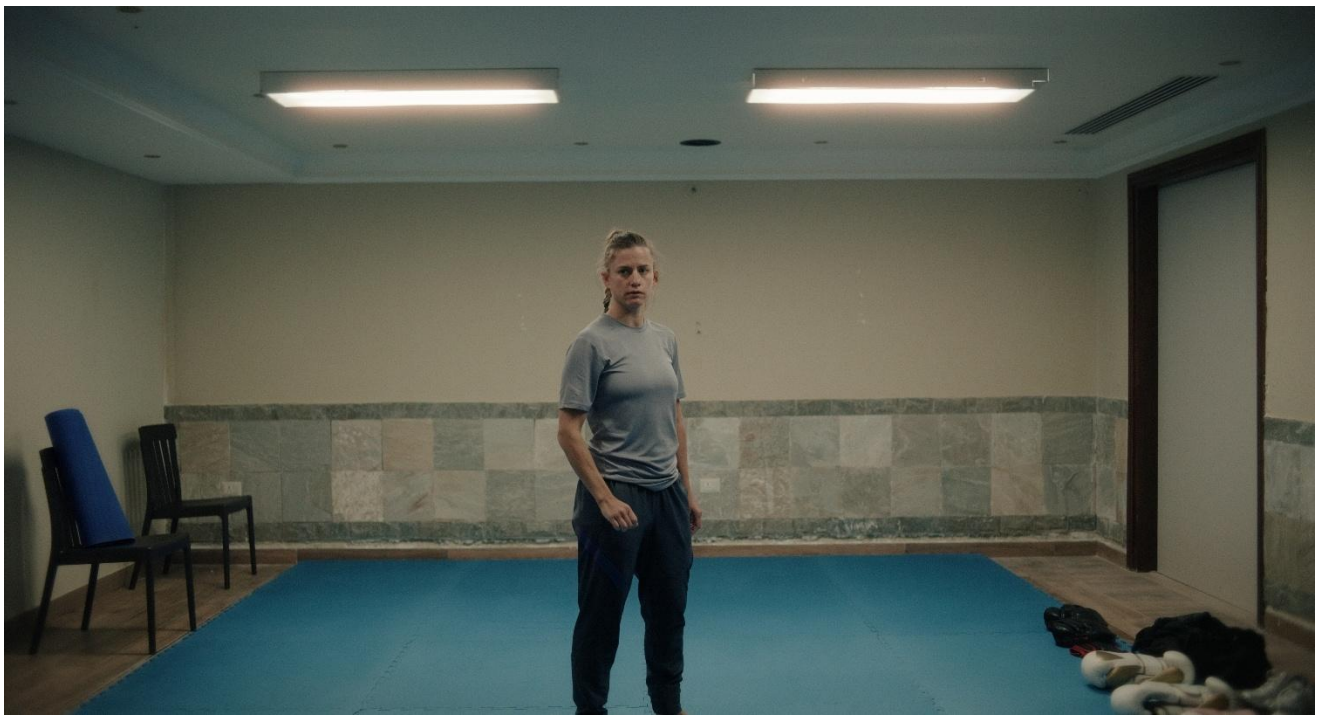


YOU SPENT MOST OF YOUR TIME DURING THE SHOOT IN JORDAN, WHAT WAS IT LIKE FILMING THERE?

- I've been to Kurdistan and Iraq a lot, so Jordan didn't feel foreign to me. The difference with Iraq is that Jordan is a little more liberal and generally safer. Many Hollywood films are shot there. Many of my crew members worked on DUNE 2 right before MOND. I found that very funny. In any case, I learnt to love Jordan and I met some young female filmmakers there too. When they told me about their youth, it reminded me a lot of my own. It made me think of that scene from MADAGASCAR 2 when Marty the zebra sees other zebras for the first time in his life. When I was young, there was only my family around me. But these directors are like me, all Kurdwins, every one. They travel a lot, they've rebelled against their parents, they listen to emo music. I made friends there and I would like to shoot my next film in Jordan too.

AFTER SONNE UND MOND, I ASSUME YOUR NEXT FILM WILL BE CALLED STERNE (STARS) ?

- Exactly. And it's already in the works!



INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESS FLORENTINA HOLZINGER

YOU ARE ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL CHOREOGRAPHERS AND PERFORMANCE ARTISTS IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING WORLD. WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO TAKE PART IN A FILM FOR THE FIRST TIME AND THEN TAKING ON A LEADING ROLE STRAIGHT AWAY?

- Kurdwin asked me directly if I would like to take part in her next film. It all sounded pretty abstract to me. Of course, there were still the details to work out, but even so it was very different from what I normally do. What particularly interested me about it was that for once I wasn't responsible for everything myself. (Laughs) I definitely found that an exciting challenge. And it was also clear to me that I wanted to support Kurdwin as an artist and friend.

DID YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON THE SCRIPT AND IF SO, HOW MUCH OF YOU IS IN SARAH? FOR EXAMPLE, YOU WERE ALSO A MARTIAL ARTIST.

- I did martial arts, including MMA, but mainly kickboxing and Muay Thai. I had the feeling that I could somehow sell or portray that in front of the camera. In my work as an artist, too, I've focussed on this repeatedly and worked with professional fighters. I have to say I was particularly interested in the idea of portraying a martial artist. In preparation for the role, I was finally able to train properly again, something I'd really missed out on in recent years.



HOW DID YOU GENERALLY FEEL ABOUT SHOOTING A FILM FOR THE FIRST TIME? WORKING ON A SET IS VERY DIFFERENT TO WORKING ON AND OFF STAGE.

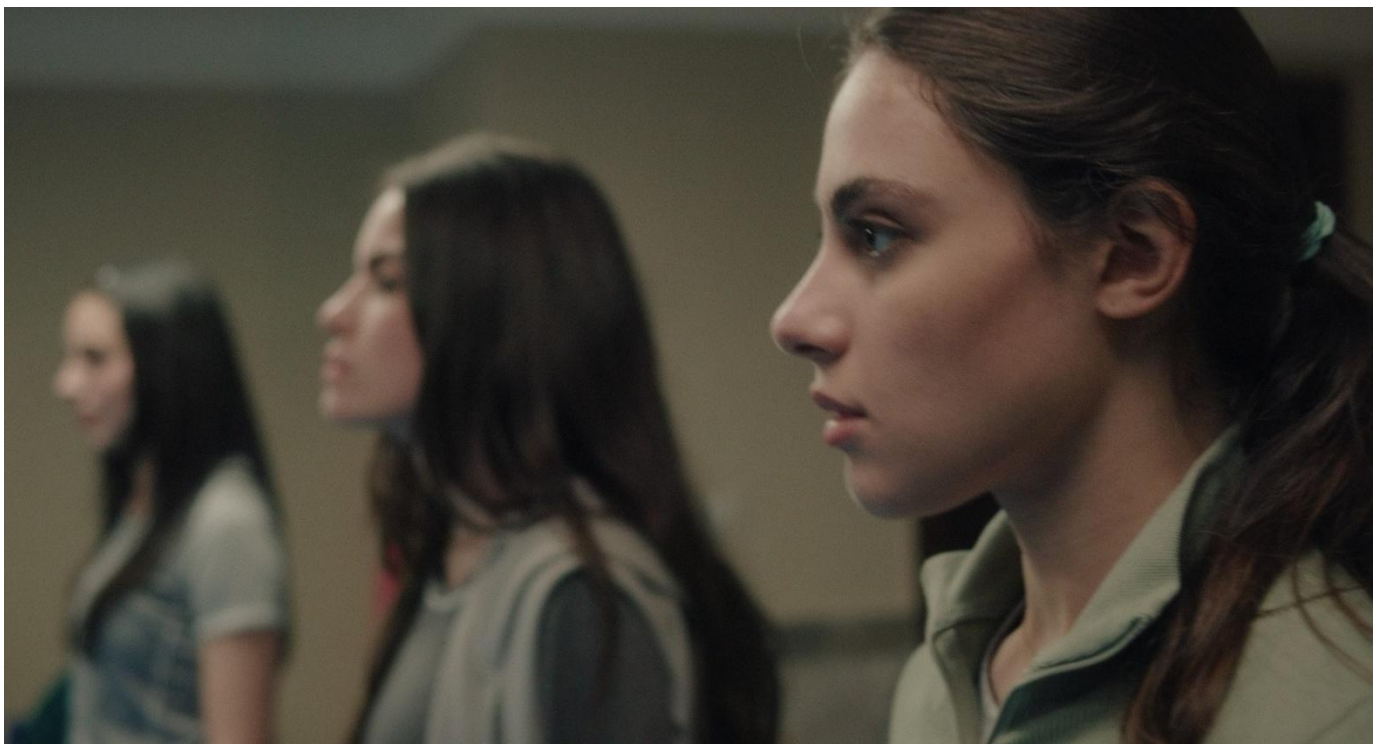
- To be honest, it was the easiest thing on the planet. The time in Jordan was like a holiday for me and extremely relaxing. This is due to several things. On the one hand, I had the feeling that as an actress you are really spoiled. Kurdwin worked with a professional crew and there's a whole troupe there to get you a coffee in the morning. I'm not used to that at all!



And what's more, I didn't have to memorise any texts because of Kurdwin's way of working. The script was rewritten at some point and I didn't even read that version because Kurdwin wanted it to feel as if things were happening to me in reality. For me it was an adventure holiday and I felt like I hadn't done any work at all. As a result, I also felt quite bad about it.

YOUR CAREER IS VERY SUCCESSFUL, BUT YOUR CHARACTER SARAH'S ISN'T AT ALL. HOW DO YOU RELATE TO FAILURE?

- I base my work on the fact that there is always great potential for failure. For me, it's still the case that I can't tell whether it was a good show if a lot of people walk out of the theatre or when everyone stays seated. In any case, the main concern in my work is not that people feel good or that they can pat themselves on the back afterwards. If someone feels provoked, it's also a sign that you've pinpointed something relevant. I probably wouldn't have said yes to this film if I hadn't thought it was another excellent opportunity to fail. No matter how successful you are considered to be, as an artist you are always in a precarious situation. In this respect, failure in terms of your own expectations or the work itself is always present. What I liked least about being a sportswoman was that it is so clear when you win and when you lose, when you fail and when you don't. In the case of art, on the other hand, it can look like it's gone completely down the drain, but that's exactly why it's so awesome. I can also really empathise with Sarah's depression. She has dedicated her whole life to martial arts, then fails at it and falls into the void. I too never have any idea what the future holds and what is really worth doing



ULRICH SEIDL FILMPRODUKION

Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion was founded by Ulrich Seidl and Veronika Franz in 2003 following the international success of Seidl's "DOG DAYS" (2001). On the one hand to produce his own films, and on the other, to provide filmmakers with different means for creating films than in conventional production companies. "IMPORT EXPORT" (2007), the first theatrical feature produced by Ulrich Seidl Film Produktion, premiered in competition at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival. It was followed by the acclaimed film trilogy "PARADISE" (2012). The three films Celebrated their premiere in the competitions of the world's most important film festivals in Cannes, Venice and Berlin. At the 2014 Venice Film Festival two films produced by the Company celebrated their world premiere: Ulrich Seidl's film essay "IN THE BASEMENT" (2014) as well as "GOODNIGHT MOMMY" (2014), the fiction feature debut by Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, who previously made the documentary "KERN" (2012) about the director and actor Peter Kern. Ulrich Seidl's film "SAFARI" had its world premiere at the 73rd International Film Festival in Venice, 2016. "DIE KINDER DER TOTEN" (a film by the Nature Theater of Oklahoma, based on a novel of the same name by Elfriede Jelinek) was screened at the Berlin International Film Festival 2019 in the Forum section. The world premiere of "LILLIAN" (director: Andreas Horvath) took place in the renowned Directors Fortnight (Quinzaine des Realisateurs) at the Cannes International Film Festival in May 2019. Peter Brunner's feature film "LUZIFER" first screened in competition in 2021 at the 74th Locarno Film Festival. Kurdwin Ayub's feature film debut "SONNE" had its world premiere at the 2022 Berlin International Film Festival in the Encounters section. Ulrich Seidl's feature film "RIMINI" also had its world premiere in Berlin in competition. "SPARTA" (2022), the second film of the diptych, had its world premiere at the San Sebastián International Film Festival. The world premiere of the long version entitled "WICKED GAMES – Rimini Sparta" was in the "Harbour" section of the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January 2023. Following up on its major film festival successes, Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion went into the next round at the beginning of 2024 with the world premieres of Daniel Hoesl's "VENI VIDI VICI" at the Sundance Film Festival and of the period drama "THE DEVIL'S BATH" by Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival. The feature film "MOND", directed by Kurdwin Ayub, celebrates its world premiere in competition at the 77th Locarno Film Festival



CREDITS

AUSTRIA, 93 MIN.

WITH Florentina Holzinger, Andria Tayeh, Celina Antwan, Nagham Abu Baker

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