

Başka Sinema promises an alternative cinema experience

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With moviplexes monopolizing distribution, release dates and lengths and independent films are finding it more difficult to find release options, Başka Sinema (Another Cinema) hopes to breathe new life into the film industry in Turkey. The project, kicked off in four theaters in Istanbul and Ankara last week, promises an alternate experience

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Turkish director Onur Ünlü's award-winning "Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi" (Thou Gild'st the Evening) will be screened.

for a shopping complex. Last year, it made headlines when Emin Alper's "Tepenin Ardı" (Beyond the Hill), the winner of 16 awards, including the Caligari and Best First Feature Film Special Mention in the Berlin International Film Festival, and was only able to secure seven movie theaters for its release. Last week was another low in the Turkish cinema industry when co-directors Melik Saraçoğlu and Hakkı Kurtuluş's feature "Gözümün Nuru" (Eye Am), winner of three awards in the recent Altın Koza (Golden Boll) Film Festival, including Best Film and Screenplay, was taken off of its release after a week. The film, apparently, did not meet the required number of spectators, set rigidly by a system that is monopolized by the day. That said, last week brought some hope for followers of art house cinema and the festival circuit, those who have been, more and more, missing the movies they were expecting due to limited release times, and the audience who simply care. Istanbul and Ankara's audiences welcomed a new initiative that hopefully will change the uneven and unfair dynamics of the film industry in Turkey one day. Every day is a festival for Başka Sinema's audience. An ambitious and well-thought-out project, Başka Sinema (Another Cinema) kicked off Nov. 1 with the tag line, "Every day is a festival to us," in four theaters, three in Istanbul and one in Ankara. Project Director İmre Tezel said, "Başka Sinema is offering a brand new viewing experience, in which the audience will be able to watch three independent films in the same theater in one day, with no break (similar to festival screenings) if it's no longer than 110 minutes."

How does the system work? "Başka Sinema is bringing an alternative to the present structure of show times in theaters," said Tezel. "The films will be screened in alternating order, so the audience can watch at least three films in a single theater. Each film will be on release for at least four weeks."

"Başka Sinema is also offering the chance to meet with the cast and crew following the screenings, pre-screenings, surprise films, and a selection of shorts," said Tezel. Equally important is the fact that Başka Sinema is offering "a flexible structure," a chance "for viewers to become part of the project in which their ideas and proposals will be taken into account." When you check the November program, there will be five films showing in the Başka Sinema theaters. Noam Baumbach's indie favorite "Frances Ha," Turkish director Onur Ünlü's award-winning "Sen Aydınlatırsın Geceyi" (Thou Gild'st the Evening); director Abdellatif Kechiche's anticipated Golden Palm winner "La vie d'Adèle" (Blue is the Warmest Color), director Aslı Özge's sophomore feature "Hayatboyu" (Lifelong), and Neil Jordan's vampire drama "Byzantium" will be screened with different debut dates, but nevertheless a four-week showing schedule.

Movieplexes have taken Turkey by storm. It's not unusual to see the same blockbuster showing in three theaters in the same movieplex, while the festival favorites and award-winning art house films are on no screen to be seen. Respect and reverence once reserved for historic movie theaters, award-winners and indie productions have all been trampled by a ferocious system now that leaves no room for an acknowledgment of the past, present and future of cinema.

Despite the protests for the past three years from filmmakers, film critics and cinephiles, both here and across the world, Istanbul's historic Emek Theater was demolished earlier this year, opening space



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How are the films selected? “Başka Sinema has a flexible structure, with no clear-cut rules,” said Tezel.

“The selected movies can be international award-winners in the festival circuit, auteur films, or the debut features of Turkish directors. They could be appealing to cinephiles in any different ways.” Başka Sinema, designed and ran by M3 Film, a distributor of independent films supported by the Kariyo Ababay Foundation, is initially offering a taste of alternative viewing experience in two major cities, with four theaters. “We are working on increasing the number of Başka Sinema theaters in Istanbul and add new cities to the mix,” said Tezel.

How did the idea originate? “The recent state of Turkish cinema is one of constriction,” said Tezel.

“Independent art house movies are finding it difficult to find theatrical release. Films get a release date or are canceled at the last minute. Many films are taken off release before reaching its audience. Başka Sinema hopes to breathe theatrical life into these films.”

Film festivals are some of the major supporters of Başka Sinema. For the International Independent Film Festival, İf Istanbul’s blog recently wrote “We rush to all these festivals. Many of the films we watch in these festivals are unable to find theatrical releases. That’s why Başka Sinema kicks off today, to help us watch some of these films in theaters. So if you couldn’t come to our festival, go enjoy Başka Sinema.”

“As always, many films are going to have their original screenings in festivals before their release,” said Tezel. “We want to make sure the audience has a chance to catch the festival-favorites through a broad release. We want to keep the festival excitement all throughout the year. What we want is to be able to do something together, not to be an alternative or a competition.” So if you’ve missed it at a festival, go enjoy Başka Sinema.

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