



Official Selection

Soldat Ahmet

ein Film von Jannis Lenz



Soldat Ahmet

Austria | 2021 | 76 min | German/Turkish with subtitles | Digital



Cast

Ahmet Simsek
Margot Vuga
Andreas Simma
Adriana Salles

Production Company

PANAMA FILM
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Written and Directed by Director of Photography Editing

Jannis Lenz
Jakob Fuhr
Jannis Lenz
Roland Stöttinger

Sound & Music Dramaturgical Advisor Producer

Nooran Talebi
Benedikt Palier
Tizza Covi
David Bohun
Lixi Frank

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Logline

Ahmet, a champion boxer with Turkish roots and a professional soldier in the Austrian Army, starts taking acting lessons. On stage he comes face to face with his own internal battles.

Synopsis

Ahmet is the dutiful son of Turkish immigrants, a tough champion boxer, a diligent soldier who has dedicated himself to “serving the people of Austria”. Throughout his life, he has learned to adapt and conform to other people’s expectations.

The desire to feel like himself again, pushes Ahmet to pursue an old dream and enroll in acting lessons, where he is encouraged to connect with his own vulnerability. But this is easier said than done. Ahmet hasn’t cried since he was a little boy. And the more he tries to break out of traditional gender roles, the stronger his internal battles become.

Soldat Ahmet begins as a parable about a Turkish migrant living in Austria. As the film progresses, it reveals a complex portrait of a young man, his quest for belonging, and the power of his emotional world.



Press Quotes

«Jannis Lenz creatively and amusingly challenges prejudices.»

Vladan Petkovic, *Cineuropa*

«With musicality, beauty and delicate caution, Jannis Lenz's camera follows the soldier Ahmet inside the barracks, in the demanding boxing training and during his rehearsals, playing a Stanley Kowalski unable to let himself be carried away by his passions.»

Violeta Bava, *Visions du Réel - IFF Nyon*

«A multifaceted debut film, that's carried by a deeply lovable protagonist, whose optimism and bold nature is a breath of fresh air in uncertain times like these.»

Jan Hestmann, *FM4*

«Jannis Lenz achieves the rare feat of unifying meta-piece and complex, layered characters; he masterfully crafts an intimate viewing experience that lives from its lightness, while still embracing moments of heaviness.»

Jakob Dibold, *Ray Film Magazine*

«There is sweetness and attention in Lenz's gaze, there is understanding and study in the formulation of the portrait: Soldat Ahmet grows progressively and remains in circulation for a long time, precisely because he knows how to treat the muscular part like the tender one from his protagonist.»

Massimo Causo, *Critic Fipresci / European Film Academy*

«*Soldat Ahmet* is a complex, subtly layered and ever-growing portrait.»

Carolin Weidner, *Catalogue Diagonale '21*

Director's Statement

I have known Ahmet since 2014 when I worked with him on my short film project *Shadowboxer*. What already fascinated me about him back then was his life between the spheres: Austrian citizen with Turkish roots, army soldier and boxer with ambitions. A young man who had to work hard for everything in his life and who, despite the dominant stereotypes around him, refused to submit to them. Moreover, he wanted to break out of them and pursue his enthusiasm for acting.

I can understand the conflict of his life very well, because my family and thus also my own life is shaped by the hurdles of a migration background in Germany: my grandmother is Palestinian, one of my sisters came to our family as a war refugee from Cambodia and my partner, the mother of my son, is Afro-Cuban.

Inspired by Ahmet's life story and my own goals, in *Soldat Ahmet* I wanted to pursue questions of identity, home, belonging and the therewith related social constructs. By accompanying Ahmet over the course of more than a year, I wanted to let these worlds collide in a subtle way.



Interview with Jannis Lenz by Karin Schiefer

The title SOLDAT AHMET invites the viewer to step into the milieu of the military, a world associated with uniformity, anonymity and the lack of individuality. But we quickly get to know your protagonist, Ahmet Simsek, as quite the opposite. Was it always your intention to defy the viewers expectations?

Ahmet is someone who theoretically fits into many boxes: as a Turkish immigrant and as a soldier. But he actively tries to subvert these labels. I wanted to play with the viewer's initial expectations, which are further put into perspective by Ahmet's position as a Muslim in the Austrian Federal Army. The title challenges the viewer to confront their own prejudices. We get to know Ahmet as a real person and not as a fictional character who is easily classified.

How did you first meet Ahmet?

I met Ahmet in 2014, during the production of one of my first short films 'SHADOWBOXER'. Despite him being an amateur actor, I casted him in the boxing club for the leading role. We got along really well and became good friends. What was interesting to me, was that the closer we got, the more I forgot that Ahmet was a soldier in the federal army. The idea to create a portrait of him came right after my son was born. Ahmet had come over to our place to get to know our baby. He came directly from work and was wearing his full uniform. And there was this strange moment, when he was standing in our flat, holding our little son in his arms, that there was a sudden clash in between the Ahmet I knew, and the image I now had of him in uniform.

You also came up with the concept for the film. What elements of the film existed before shooting started? And how much did you let yourself be led by Ahmet?

I always wanted to unify the different world's Ahmet navigates in his everyday life, while at the same time providing space for them to collide with one another. With this being our initial point of departure, the film's concept and framework were clear from very early on in the process and gave us something to keep coming back to during shooting.

The film grew very organically over a long period of time. Because Ahmet already had some experience on set, he knew how things worked and consciously incorporated certain things that then fed into our collaborative process. I found it exciting that he too had an influence on the events that took place in the film by offering us his own take on things.

Dinner with Ahmet's parents is a good example of how we often responded to things very spontaneously. Ahmet informed us that same day that we could come over, and we then quickly set up our team without having any idea of what to expect from the scene. It was often like that. We let ourselves fall into random situations and were rewarded for it again and again.

That's part of the reason why it was so important that our team only consisted of 3-4 people. This constellation allowed us to react flexibly if something unexpected came up, but also gave us enough room to quickly reschedule if we had to.

We observe Ahmet in both his professional and personal world, which largely revolves around boxing and theatre. Both are an attempt to get to know the self and seem to be prompted by Ahmet's desire to shed tears. Were you aware of the ambiguous pain he harbors deep inside of him beforehand?

Ahmet once confided in me that he hasn't cried since he was 12. This moment really touched me. A soldier and a professional boxer who in his everyday life has to constantly prove how hardcore he is... wants to learn how to cry. In this sense, Ahmet's search for tears very naturally evolved into a central theme in the film, without us forcing it in any way. It's a narrative strand that interweaves all of Ahmet's very different worlds and, in my eyes, poses the very important question of how emotions are dealt with in each of the spaces he occupies.

The theme of acting in the film explores Ahmet's examination of himself and his feelings, along with the different roles he has to slip into in his everyday personal life, the boxing club and his professional world. He also has to uphold a certain image of masculinity that I wanted to question.

Ahmet's worlds seem to have a relationship with the "stage". In your observations of the military, you seem to enjoy emphasizing it's theatrical, rhythmic and choreographed components.

It's true that the performative aspects embedded in the federal army interested me. The foot drills, for

[cont...]

example, or the different roles that individuals would embody once they entered the microcosmos of the barracks. Ahmet himself says that the uniform transforms him into a different, stricter person. But the same uniform also allows him to submerge into a group – to become one of many. I used music to place the performative elements in the federal army, the acting classes and the boxing club in relationship to one another, whilst simultaneously emphasizing their stark differences.

Choreography has always fascinated me. I've created many projects that incorporated dance and performance art, mostly for museums and exhibitions. My transition into filmmaking began when I started to film me and my friends doing Le parkour, a form of performance art in an urban environment, that also possesses a lot of dance-like elements. My gaze naturally gravitates to these movements, and I love incorporating them where people least expect it.

Ahmet's story is also one of integration. One experiences his inner conflict – particularly when he places the Eid on the flag of a country, that isn't the country where his roots lie. Or maybe also just a mundane form of integration: Ahmet came to Austria as a little child and lives his life here like so many other individuals of whom no one ever talks about.

I'd say the latter gets to the heart of the matter. I feel like when the topic of integration is discussed, it's always presented in between two extremes. Films very often feed into these cliches, even if their intent is to do the opposite. I think it's really problematic when it's depicted as a matter of making a choice between the two.

For me it was about raising awareness on how hard Ahmet had to work to 'be integrated' and how he still has to prove himself on the subject every day.

It's an inner conflict that very clearly exists, and will always exist, but simply becomes part of life. It can be really enriching to live in between two worlds. I think it becomes problematic when it's depicted as a matter of making a choice between the two.

I always felt Ahmet's strong desire to belong. It's part of why he wears a uniform, and part of why he's so skillful in adapting to new situations. It's something he had to learn from a very young age, in order to craft a place for himself.

The beginning and end of the film revolves around a Turkish and Viennese version of an old fable. A crocodile and a hyena complain that their emotions, whether expressed in tears or in laughter, are never taken seriously. What is the meaning behind this fable in context of the film?

The fable is about two animals that each, in their own way, express their emotions, but neither one of them feels taken seriously by the other. I found it was fitting perfectly for Ahmet, because he's someone who never complains and instead tries to push past the barriers that are thrown at him. Beyond this, the fable offers a very nice framework for the film, because I increasingly saw Ahmet's search for tears as a fairy tale. I hope that this magical imagery that existed in my mind, managed to interweave with the raw reality of Ahmet's everyday life.





Biography

www.jannislenz.com

Jannis Lenz studied Directing at the Film Academy Vienna under Jessica Hausner. Alongside his studies, he also worked as an assistant for Michael Haneke. He got selected for Berlinale Talents, received the START Scholarship for Cinematic Art by the Austrian Ministry of Culture, the Distinction of the Society of Fine Artists Austria and is an official member of the European Film Academy.

Growing up in Germany, Lenz gained his first camera and directing experiences filming himself and his friends doing Le Parkour. His films have been screened and won awards at numerous renowned film festivals and are shown in museums and exhibitions around the globe. His Bachelor- Degree Film *Wannabe* won the Prix Clermont- Ferrand and got nominated for the European Film Awards.

Filmography (Selection)

SOLDAT AHMET

Documentary | Austria | 2021 | 76 min

Festivals & Awards:

Visions du Réel - IFF Nyon, Burning Lights
Nominated Best Documentary Film, First Steps Award
Winner, This Human World Festival
Best Director, Kitzbühel Film Festival
Best documentary sound design, Diagonale
Further festivals (selection) Sarajevo FF, Biografilm FF

BATTLEFIELD

Documentary | Austria | 2020 | 8 mins | Distributor: Lemonade Films

Festivals (selection)

Sarajevo Film Festival
Festival du Nouveau Cinéma Montréal
Helsinki International Filmfestival
Encounters, Bristol

WANNABE

Fiction | Austria | 2017 | 30 mins | Distributor: sixpackfilm
100+ International Festivals including 20 Awards

Best Short Film Nomination, European Film Awards 2017
EFA-Award , Clermont- Ferrand International Film Festival
Grand BMW Short Film Award, Landshut
Further festivals (selection): Sarajevo FF, Tallinn Black Nights, Max Ophüls Preis

ZERO-G

Documentary | Austria | 2016 | 10 min | Distributor: sixpackfilm
150+ International Festivals including 12 Awards

International Film Festival Rotterdam
Sheffield International Documentary Festival
Best Student Documentary - Montreal World Film Festival
Further festivals (selection): Palm Springs Festival, Tampere Film Festival, Nashville Film Festival

SHADOWBOXER

Documentary | Austria | 2015 | 17 min | Distributor: sixpackfilm
20+ International Festivals including 7 Awards

Best Short, Diagonale – Festival des österreichischen Films
Special Mention of the Jury, Edinburgh International Film Festival
Baden - Württembergischer Filmpreis, Nominierung

« I often carry very different ideas and thoughts with me over a longer period of time. Now and then these things come together and something new, unexpected emerges from that. I love contrasts in life and to see which effects unfold when I bring them together. »

Jannis Lenz



PANAMA FILM

PANAMA FILM stands for films that give expression and space to challenging questions, lingering observations and lost longings. We work with filmmakers who approach their projects with an individual style while casting an undisguised glance at the world with all its fractures and subtleties. Our productions are sometimes created in collaboration with international production companies that share our enthusiasm for cinema.

Panama Film was founded in 2018 by the two producers Lixi Frank and David Bohun. The creative co-founders are the directors Stefan Bohun and Sebastian Brameshuber, with whom there is a constant artistic exchange. Currently we are enthusiastically developing new projects with Bernhard Braunstein, Timm Kröger, Elsa Kremser and Levin Peter, Sebastian Brameshuber, Catalina Molina, Jannis Lenz, Stefan Bohun and Sandra Wollner.

Filmography



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Austria | 2021 | Documentary | 76 Min

Visions du Réel - IFF Nyon, Burning Lights
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THE TROUBLE WITH BEING BORN

Directed by Sandra Wollner

Austria / Germany | 2020 | Feature Film | 94 min

In co-production with The Barricades, ZDF
& Das kleine Fernsehspiel and Film Academy Baden-
Württemberg

Austrian Film Awards: Best Feature Film, Best Director, Best
Sound Design, Best Hair & Make-up
Diagonale 2021: VAM Preis für Außergewöhnliche Produktion-
leistungen
Berlinale: Encounters Competition: Special Jury Award
Golden Romy for Best Feature Film
Academy Award Romy: Special Jury Award
Bergen International Filmfestival: Cinema Extraordinaire Award
Diagonale 2020: Best Feature Film Award
First Steps: Best Feature Film Award



MOVEMENTS OF A NEARBY MOUNTAIN

Directed by Sebastian Brameshuber

Austria | 2019 | Documentary | 85 min

In co-production with Mischief Films
& Le Fresnoy

Cinéma du Réel: Grand Prix
Austrian Film Awards: Nominated as Best Documentary
Filmfest Hamburg: Political Film Award of
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Duisburger Filmwoche: 3sat Dokumentarfilmpreis
Wiener Filmpreis: Special Jury Award
Open City Documentary Festival London: Open City Award
Diagonale Graz : Best Cinematography
Crossing Europe Film Festival Linz: Local Artist Award

CIVILIZATION (IN PRODUCTION)

Directed by Diego Breit-Lira

Austria/Chile | 2022 | Docu-Series | 26 min x 4

In co-production with Nikolaus Geyrhalter Film)
& Glaciar Films

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING (IN PRODUCTION)

Directed by Timm Kröger

Germany/Austria/Switzerland | 2022 | Feature Film | 100 min

In co-production with ma.ja.de, The Barricades, Catpics



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