

FLAUNT



Kim
BASINGER

SOMEWHERE BEAUTIFUL

Written by
Théo Jourdain

*SELF-REFLEXIVITY, 16/35MM,
HOMAGE, AND GETTING DUMPED
IN A GORGEOUS PLACE*



"SOMEWHERE BEAUTIFUL." (2014). 80 MINUTES. 16MM, 35MM FILM. COURTESY SEVEN34 FILMS.

"The film is a selfie because in the middle of telling a story, it turns the camera and says, 'Look at this story that's happening as I'm trying to tell you a story,'" says Armenian-American director, Albert Kodagolian, speaking from Cannes where he'll later shoot Leica-selfies on the coast with cast member Dominique Pinon (*Amelie, Delicatessen*) of his debut feature, *Somewhere Beautiful*, a swift, visually rich portrait of two interwoven relationships in differing states of dissolve. The film, part of this year's DGA Director's Finder Screening Series, is set between the stunning steppes of Argentina and the hills of Hollywood.

A twenty-years-later homage to Atom Egoyan's film buff-adored *Calendar*—a defining example of self-reflexive, mixed-format (film and handycam VHS) storytelling—*Somewhere Beautiful* similarly sees its director play a loose version of himself. Having returned home to Los Angeles after partially completing a feature film, Albert discovers his wife has left him alone to look after their two-year-old daughter. Intercut between his process of attempting to move forward, we witness William (Anthony Bonaventura)—a landscape photographer and (it's suggested, though not wholly apparent) the protagonist of Kodagolian's unfinished film—lose his own wife, Elena (María Alche, *The Holy Girl*), to the couple's rugged guide (Pablo Cedrón, *The Aura, Aballay*). Shot on 16mm, versus L.A.'s 35mm, Patagonia becomes a kind of symbolic, gauzy window to the past, a physically claustrophobic sort of stand-in for anyone's own having lost it long before

they finally lost it. This unusual treatment sees Albert become his own unfinished film's finishing, with a performance at times awkwardly off-key, instilling a voyeuristic, docudrama-like tonality of vulnerability and self-awareness.

Of the self-referential nature of the project, which includes a heady score by composers Zander Schloss and Kevin Haskins (drummer of legendary post-punks Bauhaus), Kodagolian suggests the ever-so-slight delay produced in reflecting images pays off in the storytelling. "I guess I always loved the music when singers talk about wanting to sing," he says, "and as they're saying that they're actually singing, I just love the mirror. I love putting two mirrors against each other and having that infinite reflection, that self-reflection. And the tone we aimed to achieve was as if it just happened, and the camera is a bit too late and we're all behind."

Perhaps this dramatic meta-delay was made mutually achievable by the many hats worn by Kodagolian, an accomplished commercial director, who acted with his own toddler, Zoe, for the L.A. story. "I was directing the crew, taking light measurements, choosing the lens, all with my daughter in my arms, and meanwhile we're both playing characters. It was unbelievable. It was so special."

Mixed formats, culture clash, and expression through telling physicality inform a respectable directorial debut, but it's clear that Iran-born Kodagolian's own geopolitically displaced past—which largely becomes a subject in the film—is what punctuates the



story's intentionally ambiguous title, its implication of an open-ended quest. "What happens when a person goes through trauma," Kodagolian says, "is that a part of their personality ceases development, and so emotional response can be like that of a three-year-old. Meanwhile, intelligence is cultivated and its contrast creates drama and tension and humor, and that's what I hoped to explore autobiographically—growing up in Iran, and seeing the revolution, and separating from my parents, and attending this Charles Dickens-style boarding school in Cyprus... I've learned to live beyond that trauma, to be less fearful and more present and aware, I guess. Fear is a powerful force, but so is enthusiasm, and enthusiasm wins."