

DOK Leipzig
Goethe-Institut
Documentary Film Prize
2020

DOK Leipzig
German
Competition
2020

insel
FILM

THE GUARDIAN

World Premiere at DOK Leipzig International Film Festival 2020

A documentary by Martina Priessner

PRESS KIT



TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original Title: THE GUARDIAN
Country of Production: Germany
Year of Production: 2020
Genre: Documentary
Length: 88 min

Format: 1:1.85
Sound: 5.1
Languages: Kurdish, Turkish
Subtitles: English, German

LOGLINE

THE GUARDIAN is about the Syrian Orthodox nun Dayrayto. Despite the hostility of the Kurdish Aga, she is left alone with her animals in the dilapidated village of Zaz in southeastern Turkey. She made a vow to protect the church and not to leave the holy place, even at the cost of her life.

SYNOPSIS

For 18 years, the Syrian Orthodox nun Dayrayto lives on the grounds of a church in Zaz, a dilapidated and abandoned Assyrian village in southeastern Turkey. Together with the monk Abuna she cared for the church for fourteen years. Ever since the monk died four years ago Dayrayto lives alone with her two dogs, a cow, chicken, and three cats. She is vulnerable to multiple threats. Her presence in the region is a thorn in the side of many local actors. There has always been hostilities from the Muslim side and little support from her own community. Lately, the situation is getting worse and Dayrayto fears for her dog's life, which she believes has been deliberately poisoned. The camera follows Dayrayto through her everyday life and observes her struggle for survival, her worries and hardships as fear and loneliness are her constant companions. An yet, Dayrayto is a courageous and fearless woman - she promised Abuna to never leave this holy place and to protect the church, no matter what.

"As a film maker commuting between Germany and Turkey I have been interested in the people of Mesopotamia - more concretely Tur Abdin - for many years. Dayrayto's church is located at the upper reaches of the Tigris in the Southeast of today's Turkey; the Tigris breakthrough forms the eastern border, in the north the Tur Abdin borders on the plain of Diyarbakir and in the south on Syria. The mystic bonding of the Suryoye with this land is impressive. Through my travels and research during these past years I also met Dayrayto. It was love at first sight. From the first moment I was fascinated by her. Her story not only represents the fate of the Suryoye people, but is a universal narrative that can be found in almost every part of the world due to war, migration and flight. It is this aspect of the story of this extraordinary woman that makes me want to share that the story with a broader audience."

Martina Priessner



DAYRAYTO



Around the year 1956, Verde, as her real name goes, was born in the village of Hah. She wanted to become a nun at the age of 14, but the father did not allow it. When he died shortly after the military coup of September 12, 1980, her mother with her five children remained alone. As a result of the coup, the Turkish army occupied the predominantly Kurdish areas in the east of the country, where many Syrian Orthodox Christians lived, especially in the southeast - in Tur Abdin. The army devastated villages and tortured, arrests and executions were widespread. In 1984, Dayrayto's mother decides to leave Turkey together with the five children. In Sweden, the family is finally granted asylum, where the mother lives until today. Dayrayto, however, does not settle in Europe and in the early 1990s she returns to Turkey, to her home village of Hah, where she becomes a nun. After the Suryoye were expelled from their villages, Kurdish families who themselves became victims of the brutal persecution by the military, often settled in the abandoned and devastated villages of the Suryoye and started to farm the land and fields. In the monastery of Meryem Ana where Dayrayto lives after her return from Sweden they hear that the church in the neighbouring village Zaz also suffers this fate and together with Abuna, the monk, Dayrayto goes to Zaz to take care of the church. Dayrayto describes her arrival in Zaz 18 years ago: It was a shock. There was not a single Assyrian left in the village. They even occupied the church and used it as living space and cattle shed. The olive tree was their toilet. Remembering these days it still is very painful for Dayrayto. Today, the village is empty except for two Kurdish families, to which Dayrayto has no contact. The majority of the former residents of the village lives in the Diaspora in Hamburg and visits the old home at most during the holiday season for a few weeks. Many of them would like to return for good, but the unsolved landgrabbing conflict prevents them from doing so.

TEAM

Author & Director:	Martina Priessner
Cinematographer:	Meryem Yavuz
Editor:	Özlem Sarıyıldız
Sound design:	Robert F. Kellner
Producer:	Gregor Streiber
	Friedemann Hottenbacher
Co-Producer:	Martina Priessner



MARTINA PRIESSNER (Author & Director)



Martina Priessner is a documentary filmmaker and author based in Berlin. She obtained her degree in Social Sciences at the Humboldt University of Berlin. For the past several years, her interests have focused on German-Turkish migration. Priessner completed her first full-length documentary in 2010 entitled **BASED DOWN SOUTH**, which was nominated for the Grimme Award. While she was living in Istanbul from 2012 to 2017 she documented the summer 2013 known as the Gezi Protests through the found footage film **EVERYDAY I'M CAPULING**. In 2016 Priessner finished the documentary **650 WORDS** which deals with migration and language. Priessner has been the recipient of scholarships from Nipkow, Defa, Kulturakademie Tarabya and Mercator-IPC. Her latest work **THE GUARDIAN** is a documentary about an Assyrian nun in Southeast Turkey.

FILMOGRAPHY (selection)

DIE WÄCHTERIN / THE GUARDIAN (2020)

Documentary, 87 min / Author & Director

WIR SITZEN IM SÜDEN / BASED DOWN SOUTH (2016)

Documentary, 88 min / Author & Director

World premiere: DOK Leipzig 2010 (German Competition)

Nominated for Grimme Award 2011

EVERYDAY I'M CAPULING (2013)

Found-Footage Film, 60 min / Author, Director & Editor

650 WORDS (2010)

Documentary, 45 min / Author, Director, Editor & Producer

www.650woerter.de

DIE SECHS TAGE VON ADAM UND EVA (2008)

Short Fiction, 15 min / Author & Director (with Tuncay Kulaoğlu)

DIE RASUR / WET SHAVE (2005)

Short Fiction, 7 min / Author & Director (with Tuncay Kulaoglu)

Among other festivals: International Filmfestival Locarno 2006



CONTACT

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