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a film by **EMİNE EMEL BALCI**

# UNTIL I LOSE MY BREATH



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# UNTIL I LOSE MY BREATH

**ESME MADRA**

RIZA AKIN SEMA KEÇİK

GİZEM DENİZCİ UĞUR UZUNEL ECE YÜKSEL

2015 | Turkey-Germany | 94 min. | 2K DCP | color | 1:1.85 | Dolby Digital | in Turkish

## FESTIVALS

**Pascale Ramonda**

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# SYNOPSIS



Serap is a quiet but hot-headed adolescent who is working long hours in a cramped clothing workshop as a runner. Fed up with her abusive brother-in-law and detached sister, the only thing that keeps Serap going is the hope of moving into an apartment with her father who is a long distance truck driver. Since the father is quite indifferent to Serap's wishes, however, she decides to take matters in her own hands.

# INTERVIEW

with Emine Emel Balci



**The title of the film seems to be addressing the audience directly. Why is Serap losing her breath, what does she want to achieve in life?**

The title of the film points at Serap's determination to stay alive. But it is difficult to give a simple, concrete answer to this question. While I was writing the script I wanted to set Serap free from any taboos, restrictions and limits I myself might be having. I wanted to see what she would be capable of doing. I got Serap involved in things that wouldn't be appreciated; this way I was able to criticise her community and the loneliness she is exposed to. This also gave me the chance to consider Serap as a human being with all the conflicts and grey zones in her character. She is very quiet, but she also has ambitions, feels hatred and experiences complex urges. Although she evolves throughout the film and discovers certain dark sides in herself, for me Serap is still just someone who has ordinary goals in life and believes that one should advance in life.

**It seems like you preferred to leave the city rather unidentified in your film. Other than a few details, you didn't use any defining characteristics of Istanbul. Is there a special reason for this?**

I intended to shape the camera movements and framing according to Serap's life and needs. The city became insignificant as soon as I started to create a character who was living in closed spaces, disconnected from the city she lives in, solely focused on her work. This story could take place in any city, in any country.

It was much more appealing to give clues about the city that Serap lives in through the soundscape for instance. Also, since I was making a film about a character I preferred not to highlight the city too much. Serap's story as such had to take place in a closed, suffocating space.



In your previous short films and your documentary "Ich Liebe Dich" female characters were your main focus. "Until I Lose My Breath" also revolves around a female character. Could we say that as a filmmaker you are more interested in women's stories?

The issues that I am familiar with and I feel an urge to talk about primarily concern women. In a society such as Turkey, where patriarchy infiltrates many areas, it is inevitable for women to be overlooked, ignored and oppressed by the system. Even, when you look at the relationships between individuals the result isn't much different from the bigger picture. This is a situation I feel rather hopeless about, which is why I pursue to tell stories about issues concerning women's lives. But these issues are so multi-dimensional and peculiar that they could be told through a film with an all male cast as well.

**There are very few male characters in the film and they are inept, short-sighted or naive. Is your decision to depict men in this manner influenced by the fact that women are usually defined solely through male characters in Turkish films?**

I'm sure there are certain faulty codes that influence the films we make. Female characters are either sanctified or turned into sexual objects as a result of a well-intended or sexist approach. It's true that I tried to break this tendency in my film. But, I'm not only criticising men in my film. The status that men try to gain in this society is usually ludicrous. A kind of exploitation runs through masculinity and male bonding. However in my film, I do not praise women characters, they are also cruel to each other. This is also about accepting gender roles; it has traces in my life as well as in yours. We are talking about codes that are centuries old. But when making a film it may be useful to subvert customs to make problems more visible.







**Serap is in every shot of the film. Can you talk about the casting process of Serap's character? How did you decide to work with Esme Madra? How was the process of working together?**

When I was developing my script, it was clear that the camera would always follow Serap and tell the whole story while not leaving her side. It was necessary to create a character profile strong enough to engage the audience to achieve such a form of narration. I first thought that I could work with amateur actors. But, my desire to do long rehearsals, to play with the script and to describe the story world through a unique visual design inclined me to work with professional actors. I knew Esme and had watched her previous work. After our first meeting, we embarked on a long period of rehearsals. Esme is an unbiased and very talented actress. It was going to be beneficial for her to go through a process like the one I went through while I was writing the script. She visited many sweatshops, observed how people work and behave there. We worked together on the details of Serap's emotional and physical codes, and we had rehearsals with other actors in a very mixed schedule. This way we ensured the inner continuity of Serap's character. And at the end of this intense period of rehearsals we both started shooting the film with the belief that Serap was a person who actually existed.

**The camera usually watches Serap from different angles while staying very close to her at the same time. Was your main reason for using a hand-held camera to make the audience feel closer to Serap?**

Serap is a character who is constantly in motion. She needs to be permanently available in the sweatshop. That is part of her job. The best way to shoot this was to







“Although she evolves throughout the film and discovers certain dark sides in herself, for me Serap is still just someone who has ordinary goals in life and believes that one should advance in life.”



use a hand-held camera. This choice was also beneficial for the creation of an insecure, uncanny atmosphere. The change of camera movements in relation to changes in the character would also make it possible for us to feel Serap's breathing with the hand-held camera.

**The workshops and the people working there are depicted very realistically. Did you shoot these scenes in a real workshop with real workers?**

There was a long period of research for the film. Although supporting roles, locations and the plot changed a lot through different drafts of the script, Serap and the workshop were always in the centre of the story. I visited textile workshops and talked to the people I met there in an effort to understand the dynamics of this world. During these visits Murat Tuncel, the cinematographer, accompanied me and we took lots of photos to decipher the visual codes of this world. The textile industry is one of the industries where workers are exploited big time. There is a lot of competition, the work is intense, irregular and insecure. Because of such factors we did not work in a real workshop. The workshop in the film is entirely built. We found a location that used to be a workshop, which we changed according to our needs. We had a similar approach in the casting of female extras. We tried to cast women who were either actual workers, or at least worked in a textile workshop once in their lives.

**What was your reason to highlight the issue of money in Serap's life so much?**

Money disrupts everything it gets involved in. It quickly changes ethical perception and judgement. I thought the slipperiness of Serap's relation with money, may raise some questions in the minds of the audience.





**The moment when Serap betrays Dilber is a turning point in the film. Does Serap become a more determined character with the harm she causes to her best friend?**

Usually, certain disappointments and needs lie behind important decisions in our lives. Serap's situation is also like that. I hope that the ethical aspect of Serap's act will evoke some discussions about the difficulty to decide who is more evil or hostile, and what purification or corruption means in our lives.

**After Dilber's departure from the film, a young character, Funda, joins the story. Considering the end of the film would it be fair to say that there is a circular relation among Dilber, Serap, and Funda?**

This circularity creates a dead end feeling, it implies that life has turned into a vicious cycle. I introduced Funda in the story to reveal an important aspect about Serap's life. But when I thought about how the women in the structure of the film are each other's reflection or representation, I created Funda as someone who had the potential of replacing Serap. I wanted to stir up a curiosity in the audience that would linger even after the film was finished; a wish to further pursue the story.



# BIOGRAPHIES





### **Emine Emel Balcı**

Emine Emel Balcı was born in 1984. She graduated from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Film & TV Department. Her short films and documentaries screened at numerous national and international film festivals and awarded. "Until I Lose My Breath" is Balcı's first feature film.

### **Filmography**

**Nefesim Kesilene Kadar (Until I Lose My Breath)**

2015, drama, 94 min.

**Ich Liebe Dich**

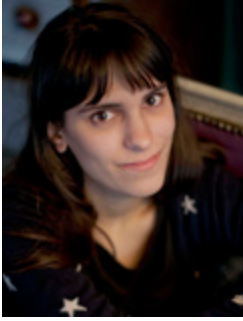
2012, documentary, 74 min.

**Bekleyiş (The Waiting)**

2008, short fiction

**Gölün Kadınları (Women of the Lake)**

2007, short documentary



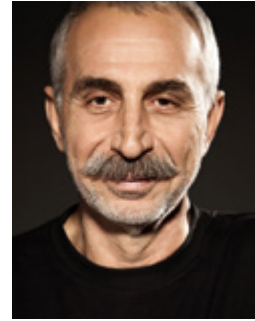
### Esme Madra (as Serap)

Esme Madra was born in Istanbul in 1987. She studied in the Theater Department at the State Conservatory of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. She started acting at a young age with Barış Pirhasan's "Summer Love" (2001). In 2011, with her role in "Majority" by Seren Yüce, she received New Talent acting awards from Yeşilçam and Flying Broom festivals in Turkey. Since then, Madra has appeared in several plays, wrote and directed her first short film ("Meşakket and His Wife"), and prepared various radio programs. In "Until I Lose My Breath" Esme Madra appears in her first leading role.

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### Rıza Akın (as father)

Born in 1957 in, Rıza Akın started his acting career at Ankara Birlik Theater in 1969. He studied Communication and worked as a journalist in his hometown Adana where he also initiated a new theater group. In 2005, he started acting for films with Tayfun Pirselimioğlu's unfinished "Quartet". Since then, he collaborated with Pirselimioğlu in three of his films ("Rıza", "Hair", and "I am not Him"), and worked with many internationally acclaimed Turkish filmmakers such as Semih Kaplanoğlu ("Milk"), Seyfi Teoman ("Summer Book"), and Pelin Esmer ("Watchtower"). Akın is currently based in Istanbul, and appears in many TV series, as well as films and plays.



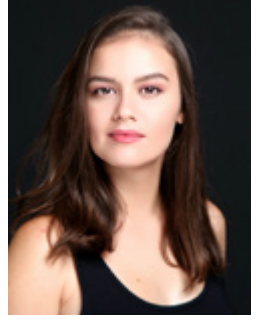
### Sema Keçik (as Sultan)

Sema Keçik was born in Ağrı in 1965. She graduated from the Theater Department of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. She attended various international workshops where she worked with Monica Pagneux, Henning V. Vangerow, Zygmund Molik, Nelia Wechsell, and also with Ariane Mnouchkine in the Soleil Theatre in Paris. She had a long acting career in Turkish theater. In 2003, she had her film debut with Uğur Yücel's "Toss-Up". Since then she acted in several films and TV series, including epic Turkish TV hit "The Magnificent Century", and Reha Erdem's latest feature "Singing Women".



### Gizem Denizci (as Dilber)

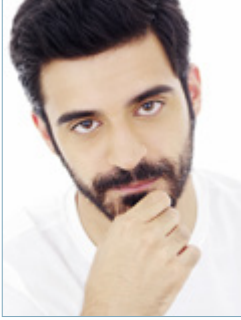
Born in 1988 in Bilecik, Gizem Denizci started acting 2001 at the Kars Youth Theater Club. Although she studied econometrics at Marmara University in Istanbul, she decided to pursue an acting career and studied Acting for Films & TV at Bosphorus Academy in 2009. She joined Oyuncu Tayfası theatre group in 2011 and took part in several plays as well as TV shows and films, including Özcan Deniz's local box office hit "You're My Home". Denizci is also a musician and writer. She published her first book of short stories 'This is My Love Story' in 2014.



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### Uğur Uzunel (as Yusuf)

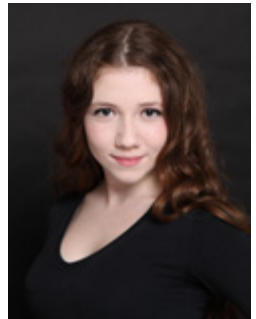
Born in 1988 in Izmir, Uğur Uzunel studied acting in the Theatre Department of Dokuz Eylül University Fine Arts Faculty. He took the leading role in Elif Refiğ's directorial debut "Ships" in 2012 while he was still a student. He acted in many shorts and feature films, as well as plays and TV series. Recent features he appeared include Ali Vatansever's "One Day or Another", Dilek Keser and Ulaş Güneş Kacargil's "Strangers in the House", and Emre Şahin's "The Team".



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### Ece Yüksel (as Funda)

Born in 1997 in Istanbul, Ece Yüksel started her acting career while she was 12 with TV series. Prior to "Until I Lose My Breath", she acted in several short films, and appeared in acclaimed Turkish writer-director Yavuz Turgul's Hunting Season in 2010. She attended the acting courses at Craft Workshop for two years. Recently, Ece Yüksel had a role in Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay's "Drawers" that premiered in if Istanbul Independent Film Festival in 2015.





# Until I lose My Breath

## Nefesim Kesilene Kadar

2015 | Turkey-Germany | 94 min. | 2K DCP | color | 1:1:85 | Dolby Digital | in Turkish

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EMİNE EMEL BALCI

produced by

Prolog Film (Turkey)

unafilm (Germany)

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prolog film and unafilm present **Until I Lose my Breath**  
**Esme Madra Rıza Akın Sema Keçik Gizem Denizci Uğur Uzunel Ece Yüksel Yavuz Pekman Pınar Gök Yavuz Özata**  
Casting **Ezgi Baltas** Make-up **Nimet Inkaya** Costume **Manfred Schneider** Line Producer **Kaan Kurbanoğlu** Sound **Jörg Kidrowski**  
Editing **Dora Vajda** and **Emine Emel Balcı** Art Directors **Meral Efe Yurtseven** and **Yunus Emre Yurtseven** Cinematographer **Murat Tuncel**  
Produced by **Nadir Öperli** and **Titus Kreyenberg** Written and Directed by **Emine Emel Balcı**

### festivals

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