

A RUSSIAN-BORN FILMMAKER IS CASTING A NEW LIGHT ON THE FACE OF THE ARAB WOMAN. HER DOCUMENTARY HAS RECEIVED PHENOMENAL REVIEWS FROM EAST TO WEST.

Hidden beauty crosses borders



Filmmaker Olga Sapozhnikova grew up to travel the globe as a Russian diplomat, including six years in Japan, but she was raised in the Arab world. Struck by a fond attachment to the warmth and generosity of the culture she discovered there, she also developed a deep appreciation for the strength and beauty of its women. This insight has served as the impetus behind her most recent documentary, "Hidden Beauty", a film that intends to reveal the true face of the Arab woman to the world, in just 26 minutes.



In the film, Sapozhnikova traces the lives of four women she calls "heroes," who are living examples that reflect what Sapozhnikova sees as the hidden beauty of the Arab woman, and women all around the world who choose to live out their dreams and ambitions by following their hearts.



In the title of the film, "hidden" has many meanings. It may refer to the inner beauty of a woman, hidden behind an exterior that does not meet the classical definition of beauty for her culture. It may also mean beauty that is hidden, either by folds of fabric, or by the expectations of society. It may even mean hidden on a personal level, because as Sapozhnikova says, "often the people who do the most beautiful things in their lives talk the least about themselves, out of modesty". The most groundbreaking interpretation however, is that "hidden beauty" characterises the fact that the nature and beauty of the Arab woman is something that is hidden to the West; it is a beauty which has not been open to them. Until now. The documentary has already received widespread attention from Western media outlets, and was screened this October at the LaFemme Film Festival in Hollywood, where it received rave reviews and generated a flurry of media interest.



"People were surprised that I covered the subject of Arab women in such a positive way," Sapozhnikova said. "The producers were very enthusiastic, and they couldn't wait to see more." This reaction, for Sapozhnikova, encourages her view on the power of film to inspire change. She believes

that "when people start knowing each other and stop being afraid of one another, this will help us reach peace". Her film is for Arab women, to empower them, as much as it is for Western women, to open their eyes to the beauty of the "other."

"Arab women are very soft and very strong, happy and unhappy at the same time. But they all have unique potential, beauty and strength," Sapozhnikova explained. "My message with this film is that it would be great if we find this hidden beauty in ourselves, and to find it in others. Women everywhere have a great beauty in them that is not just on their face, but also in their hearts."

Sapozhnikova also conjectured that Western women could be particularly intrigued by her film because Arab women may demonstrate "some of the beauty, some of the qualities that we've lost [in the West]." Commenting on a certain frustration that she has seen arising in the lives of some women bent on obtaining a Western style of feminine independence, Sapozhnikova noticed that it often leaves many women feeling estranged from their natural social roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and members of the community. She suggested that it may be time for this individualised vision of independence to be questioned; "at the end of the day do we really need to live like that? Maybe a man taking care of a woman is a good thing."

Sapozhnikova's quest to bridge a gap between East and West is not yet finished. She is already preparing her next documentaries, with an aim to explore the perspectives women in the East and West have about each other, their different lifestyles, and the inner beauty they share. Her dream is "to use my films to show people that the other is not frightening... to show their human side, their interesting side... so that you may actually want to meet these people, and who knows... maybe even fall in love with them."

For more information, visit www.olgasapozhnikova.com/hidden%20beauty.html