

## SULEIMAN MOUNTAIN Info

ORIGINAL TITLE: SULEIMAN GORA  
2017, 102 min., color, Kyrgyz

CATEGORIES : Drama, Debut  
COUNTRIES: Russia, Kyrgyzstan  
PRODUCTION : Virtual Kick Studio  
BUDGET : 3 600 000 euro

### AWARDS

Public Award PYIFF 2017  
Roberto Rossellini Award for Best Film PYIFF 2017  
**Festivals:** Toronto International FF 2017 (Discovery), Pingyao Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon IFFI /PYIFF 2017 (Competition), Palm Springs IFF 2018 (Competition)

### CAST

Daniel Daiyerbekov (as Uluk), Perizat Ermanbetova (as Zhypara), Asset Imangaliev(as Karabas), Turgunay Erkinbekova (as Turganbyubyu)

### CREW

**Director :** Elizaveta Stishova  
**Screenplay :** Alisa Khmel'nitskaya  
**Cinematographer :** Tudor Vladimir Panduru  
**Producers :** Yelena Yatsura (Virtual Kick Studio), Andrey Devyatkin, Victor Kuznetsov

### SYNOPSIS

Karabas (Asset Imangaliev) is a difficult man: a hard-gambling, hard-drinking, child-in-a-man's body who puts only himself first in his family. When his wife #1, Zhipara (Perizat Ermanbetova), calls to tell him she has found their long-lost son, Uluk (Daniel Dayrbekov), Karabas rushes to her, much to the dismay of his much younger, pregnant wife #2, Turganbyubyu (Turgunai Erkinbekova).

Soon the new family dynamics are stretched past their limits, and Karabas is caught between his old ways and the two women bearing his sons: one re-born and one yet to come.

Now this unusual family must decide if they are to co-exist or tear each other apart as old wounds are ripped open and deception becomes the rule of the day.

Shot on location in and around the mystic World Heritage Site of the Suleiman Mountain in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, SULEIMAN MOUNTAIN tells the coming of age story of a grown man who must first lose love in order to find it.

### PRESS

*Enlivened by offbeat humour and vibrant widescreen images reflecting the rugged beauty of this wild Central Asian nation, SULEIMAN'S MOUNTAIN is the first feature from Russian filmmaker Elizaveta Stishova. In a drama fraught with tense uncertainty and often brutal rituals involving folklore and shamanism – a scene involving an unconscious*

woman is particularly alarming – Kyrgyzstan emerges as a region caught between the modern world and one of ancient traditions where women – predictably – get a rough deal as they compete vehemently for the attention of self-seeking macho men, in the hope that somehow, by smothering them with love and attention, they can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Sadly, twas ever thus.

Although Kyrgyzstan initially feels exotic and remote, the human story at its core is as old and universal as the hills. Stishova has certainly made a watchable and lively debut. **Filmuforia**

*Suleiman Mountain* is the debut feature of Russian director Elizaveta Stishova, who establishes herself as a master of texturing comedy and drama. Kyrgyz culture is woven brilliantly throughout with reference to the nation's revered epic poem *Manas*, and the traditional cultures and customs of the countryside. Audiences will find themselves along on a claustrophobic and sometimes paranoid journey, where every turn is unknown and every action has an equal and opposite reaction. **Dimiyri Eipides, TIFF**

Complicating matters, however, is the presence of a pregnant new young wife and doubts as to whether or not Uluk really is Karabas's son. Shishova eschews the merely anthropological for a darkly comic family drama. And yet for me towards the end, the film loses its balance and plunges towards an overly melodramatic conclusion. **John Bleasdale, BFI**

„To nasze pierwsze nagrody!” – mówi Stishova, nawet nie usiłując ukryć ekscytacji. „Byłam bardzo ciekawa tego miejsca, bo cały festiwal wybudowano właściwie od zera. No i chciałam przekonać się, jak chińscy widzowie zareagują na mój film. Zależało mi na tym, żeby każdy z bohaterów był tu jednakowo ważny, dlatego w *Suleiman Mountain* nie ma zbyt wielu ujęć pokazujących krajobrazy. Postanowiłam skupić się na ich twarzach.” W tym tej należącej do debiutanta Daniela Daiyrbekova. „W Kirgistanie jest wiele przebojowych dzieci, ale chciałam znaleźć kogoś, kto by się wyróżniał. Ten chłopczyk wyglądał jak starzec. Miał ciekawą twarz, ale nie potrafił grać. Poprosił mnie jednak, żeby dać mu szansę i szybko nauczył się pracy przed kamerą” – dodaje. **Pol Zartem**

¿Qué cosas estabas buscando en el casting de Karabas?

Estaba buscando a alguien feo, estaba buscando a alguien como Harvey Weinstein, ¿viste? Alguien por el estilo pero con más poder de hombre, estaba buscando poder de hombre. Pero después en Kyrgyzstan, había caras interesantes y caras lindas pero no encontré este poder de hombre. Entonces supimos de esta persona en Kazajistán y fuimos a hacer el casting ahí, y cuando lo conocí entendí que tenía algo, que era alguien a quien le gustaba mirar sus propias fotos, mostrárselas a todos, y ahí pensé esto puede ser, él lo puede hacer. Las dos películas ganadoras del Festival están dirigidas por mujeres, ¿creés que las mujeres están ganando espacio en la industria?

Creo que sí. En general las mujeres no tenemos la misma presión de generar dinero que tienen los hombres, entonces podemos abocarnos más al cine, los hombres están trabajando más en series que les dan estabilidad y plata.

**Santiago Bazán, Indiehoy**

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The production of *Suleiman Mountain* brought together three countries and nine producers. Yelena Yatsura (Virtual Kick Studio) with Victor Kuznetsov and Andrey

Devyatkin from Russia, who produced and distributed some of most important first features. In Kyrgyzstan, the film was supported by the most renowned Kyrgyz producers Sadyk Sher-Niyaz and Samat Sabraev, and Telegey Company. And finally, Radka Bardes, Tomek Moravský, New Europe Sales, and Jan Navazhevsky from Poland. Without this multilateral collaboration it would have been impossible to create this film.

**Yelena Yatsura, General Producer:** *"Suleiman Mountain for me emerged from the group of writers that I am most intrigued by within the world of Russian film. So I had to read it, at the very least. I had already worked with Alisa Khmelnitskaya, the scriptwriter, on her first script called 9 MONTHS, which became the debut for the now famous director Rezo Gigineyshvili (his film 'Hostages' took part in the Berlinale this year). For that project, we were working side by side with seasoned writer Gennady Ostrovsky (known for his work with director Pavel Lungin) and director/producer Bakhtier Khudoynazarov.*

*I really liked Alisa's new script, Suleiman Mountain. In film and in theatre some stories can be borderline bad taste, almost too much, and a love triangle is one of them. Particularly if it involves an older and a younger woman, and a man who comes across as a petty tyrant that the women have to fight for.*

*I thought the idea of transporting this storyline to a different ethnic background was brilliant, with the exotic realities (a real mountain, the practice of having a 'senior' and a 'junior' wife) and the myths (the healing powers of the mountain) adding a special flavour to the mix. The passionate and explosive relations of the main characters as defined by the realities of Kyrgyz culture and everyday life looked great even on paper.*

*I spent a long time planning to turn 'Suleiman Mountain' into a producer's debut. Masha Yakubova had worked with Elizaveta Stishova on her short film 'The Seagull', and between them they knew more about how to film in Kyrgyzstan than I did. They secured a POV grant for the project, along with a lab at Black Nights, and brought in Tudor Panduru as Director of Photography.*

*Nevertheless, the project turned out to be immensely challenging. It's the debut film of a Russian director, using exclusively Kyrgyz narratives and language and without any support from state funds. Given the creative concept, the expeditions, the anamorphic optics, the film was far from low-budget. My partners from other projects Andrey Devyatkin and Viktor Kuznetsov liked 'The Seagull', Elizaveta Stishova and 'Suleiman Mountain'. And so that's how the film was born.*

*A mix of cultures stirred by a Russian creative impulse (writing and directing) turned into a dynamic and in many ways incredibly contemporary film".*

**Elizaveta Stishova, director**

*"On the banks of Lake Issyk-Kul, a little boy covered in mud, alone, happy and occasionally angry, would hang around with us on the set. His mother would ring a bell to call the local children for their school lessons in the small single-storey high-school on the river.*

*"She didn't pay much attention to her son. He roamed free with the cows, rams and camels. Only in the evenings would she come out to the riverbank and shout at the top of her lungs: "Uluuuuk!"*

*"Her call sounded more like the howling of a mother camel separated from her calf.*

*"Despite the apparent silliness of this daily ritual, set against such a monumental*

*landscape, the lonely figure of a woman calling for her son took on a tragic air.*

*"This scene inspired our work on "Suleiman Mountain". The objects and characters were altered, but the images of Issyk-Kul Lake remained unchanged. Tragedy and comedy are deeply interconnected in Kyrgyzstan, in the hearts and minds of its people, and separated by a thin, almost imperceptible line."*

### **An ethnic twist to a universal story**

The film tells the story of the complex relations within a family that exists in a culture where the ancient practice of taking multiple wives is perceived as natural, which leads to dramatic emotional tension. The story is intertwined with the contemporary everyday life of a people that passionately engages in and celebrates ancient customs which can be traced back in the times when the Kyrgyz were nomads. Why Kyrgyzstan? Why such an exotic setting for such a universal story about a love triangle? The producer's flair and subtle sensibility and the scriptwriters' unique vision are complemented by the director's strikingly poignant feel for the environment in which the film is set.

### **A country stuck between the past and the present**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan reverted to the traditional ways of life, with Sunni Muslim and pagan customs and their native language making a comeback. The film is set against the backdrop of the final collapse of the Soviet Union and its cruel aftermath. Traces of the past can still be found in the interior design of the orphanage and in the traditional songs, but that world is no longer a part of today's Kyrgyzstan. The young director manages to capture the remarkable moment when old traditions, such as shamanism and the practice of taking two, if not three wives, actually coexist with a relatively modern world in an almost documentary manner. The dilapidated old truck rolling past a billboard advertising high-speed internet in the middle of nowhere doesn't feel out of place in the same frame. The country's Soviet past has finally been left behind: the kids no longer know the songs about the war off by heart, and there's no point looking for spare parts for an East German built truck. Central Asia has finally regained its identity, shaking off Russian influence and restoring its old customs.

### **Magic mountains**

Kyrgyzstan is located in Central Asia, in the Western and Central parts of the Tien Shan Mountain range. Suleiman Mountain can be found close by to the town of Osh, and is a UNESCO heritage site.

## **Elizaveta Stishova**

Was born in Moscow, Russia

Graduated from the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS) with an MA in Theatre Directing; and from Higher Courses for Scriptwriters and Directors (mentored by V. Menshov). In 2014, she participated in Berlinale Talents.