

Iranian Director Ali Ahmadzadeh Pressured to Withdraw 'Critical Zone' from Locarno



Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

The Locarno festival and the production of 'Critical Zone' ignore threats.

The Film Verdict, August 10, 2023

Critical Zone, the story of a drug dealer set in the Tehran underworld, will be one of the highlights premiering in Locarno's International competition. It will be screened for festival audiences in spite of the fact that the director, Ali Ahmadzadeh, has been receiving threats, harassment and all sorts of pressure to withdraw it from the festival. He will not be able to attend the screening.

[Continues next page](#)

CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE



Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

CRITICAL ZONE

VERDICT: In another angry bulletin from Iran in revolt, Ali Ahmadzadeh's 'Critical Zone' hits censorship out of the ballpark.

Deborah Young, August 10, 2023

A highly stylized, visceral incursion into an upscale drug dealer's world set in an eerie nocturnal Tehran, *Critical Zone* (*Mantagheye Bohrani*) by Ali Ahmadzadeh is a major shocker.

Reflecting the rage and anger in Iranian society, particularly among young people, in the distorting mirror of speeding cars and strung out toxic excess, here is a film that takes allegory to exciting and frequently uncomfortable extremes. It is hard to believe

such a direct screenplay, one filled with harsh obscenities and a protracted female orgasm, could have been shot in Iran. Its frankness can only be compared to last year's festival hit *Holy Spider* — but that was a Euro coproduction shot in Jordan.

It is a slippery film to grab hold of in the early scenes, where elegant long takes and repetitions are the order of the day, and a bit puzzling in the middle. But the film gathers momentum as it goes

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ALI AHMADZADEH (Continued)

Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

Although Locarno is perhaps not the first place people go to see new films from Iran (the last one was screened in 2015), when it chooses a film it sticks by it. According to the film's producer Sina Ataeian Dena, festival director Giona Nazzaro has staunchly defended the inclusion of *Critical Zone* in the program and neither the festival, the producer nor the director entertains any idea of withdrawing it. "We are not alone in our fight," says Ataeian Dena.

Shot just before the uprising that has involved so many women demanding their basic rights, the film is described as a highly topical reflection of the rage and anger in Iranian society, particularly among young people. "We kind of knew it was a matter of controversy," said the producer, an Iranian who now

lives in Germany. "It is a very different underground film, and without censorship."

Even without seeing the film, people who Ataeian Dena calls "supporters of the Islamic regime" have been deluging the director with threatening and accusatory messages meant to intimidate him into pulling the film from its international showcase this week. He has also been summoned to appear at interrogations by the country's security services, reports Ataeian Dena, and is expecting possible arrest after the film airs in Locarno.

This is Ali Ahmadzadeh's third feature film, following *Kami's Party* in 2013 and the fantasy-drama *Atom Heart Mother*, screened in the Berlin Forum in 2015.

[For Full Article, Click here](#)

CRITICAL ZONE (Continued)

Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

along to culminate in two dazzling, unforgettable scenes of drug trips gone awry. Its ambience and taboo-breaking should speak particularly to young local audiences, who are very unlikely to see it in film theaters.

Sadly, *Critical Zone* will have its world premiere in Locarno's international competition without the director and screenwriter Ali Ahmadzadeh (*Kami's Party* 2013, *Atom Heart Mother* 2015). But despite mounting pressure from Iran that the film be withdrawn and its screening canceled, the Locarno festival, the director and his German-based producer Sina Ataeian Dena have stood firm. Further festival screenings and possible release through Luxbox can be expected to attract a lot of attention to this bold and disconcerting vision of hell.

There is an air of desperation, even self-destruction in Amir (Amir Pousti), a cocky, single-minded pusher who has something lethal for everyone in his big bag of tricks. Behind his curly brown hair and beard, his pupils are dilated.

[Full Review](#)

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CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE



ROSSOSPERANZA

VERDICT: The audacious second feature from Annarita Zambrano ('After the War') explores the mindscape of Italian teenagers in 1990 who aren't allowed to be themselves.

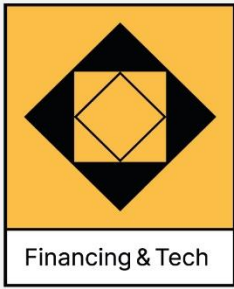
Boyd van Hoeij, August 10, 2023

France-based Italian director Annarita Zambrano's sophomore feature, *Rossosperanza*, is set in 1990 and looks at a group of young misfits in an institution that has promised their respective parents they'll "become normal." The obvious paradox here, of course, is that this situation itself is anything but normal, and Zambrano's feature suggests how surreal this really is not only in terms of the plot but also in terms of the film's structure, with the narrative often going off on tangents that seem to be dreams, have no consequences or might turn around in circles. It's a daring approach to a complex socio-political period in Italy's history, dominated by the "rosso" or "red" of the title, which should bring "speranza" or "hope" but which more often than not turns out to be the colour of despair or blood.

Zambrano's first film, the superlative drama *After the War* (*Dopo la guerra*), premiered in Cannes in 2017 and depicted the ramifications of one left-wing domestic terrorist's actions in the 1970s on his life and extended family in 2002. *Rossosperanza*, her follow-up, seems to do the opposite, looking at how larger socio-political systems impact individual freedoms and more specifically how they impact younger people, who don't or barely have the right to vote yet.

Any young generation stands to inherit the country left to them by their parents and the other members of the previous generation, and in 1990, the Years of Lead of domestic terrorism (the focus of *After the War*) had come to an end a decade earlier but that didn't turn Italy into a prosperous nation...

[Full Review](#)

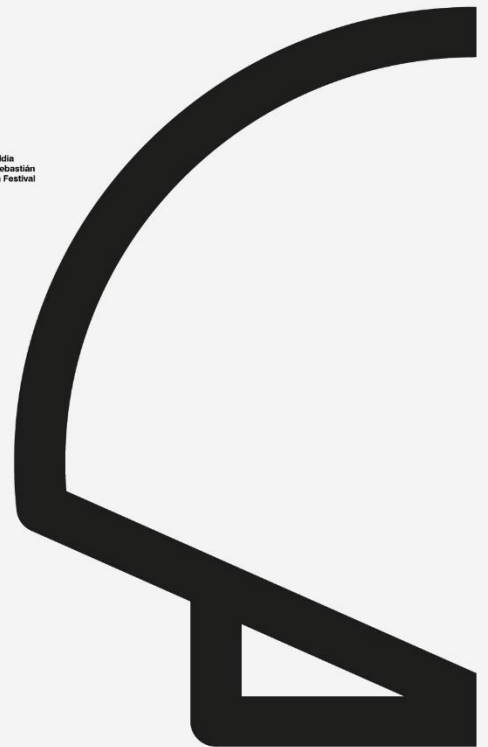


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10:30 · Forum @ Spazio Cinema
Conversation with Renzo Rosellini
Lifetime Achievement Award
Moderated by Maniio Gomasasca

10:30 · Forum @ Spazio Cinema
Conversation with Harmony Korine
Pardo d'onore Manor
Moderated by Manilio Gomasasca

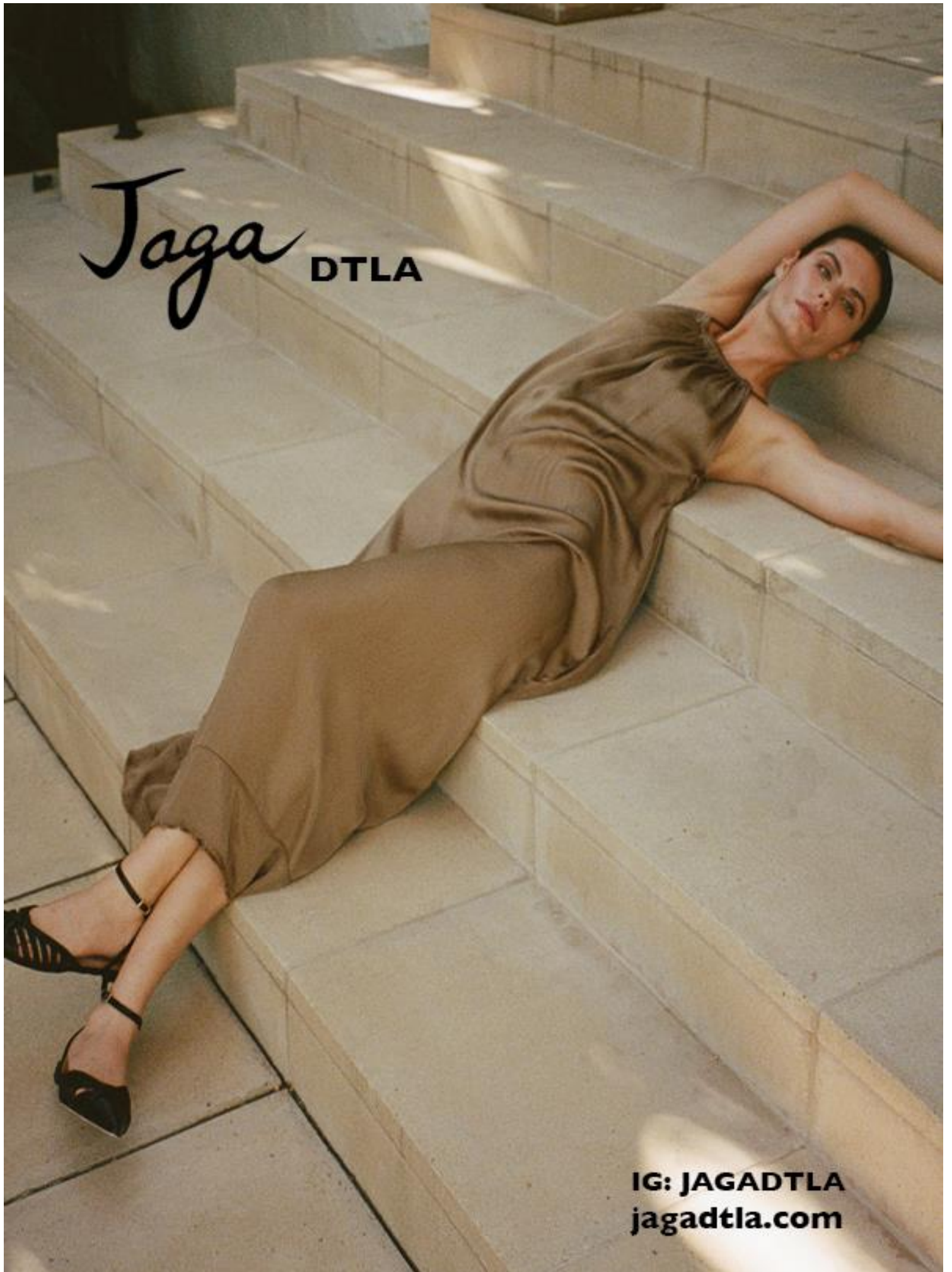


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