

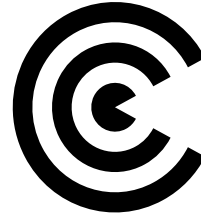
65^e SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2026

DUA

a film by BLERTA BASHOLLI

IKONË STUDIO, ALVA FILM & KAZAK PRODUCTIONS

present



65° SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2026

DUA

a film by
BLERTA BASHOLLI

KOSOVA – SWITZERLAND – FRANCE
FICTION • ALBANIAN, SERBIAN • 2026 • 101'
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SYNOPSIS

Prishtina, Kosova, late 1990s. As war looms and ethnic tensions escalate, 13-year-old Dua struggles to find her place among her peers and within her changing body. After an incident shakes her community, she becomes a target herself and bonds with a fearless girl, Maki, who draws her toward an unexpected form of resistance. Between the daily violence and the growing threat of exile, there is little room for quiet awakenings.





BLERTA BASHOLLI

Blerta Basholli is a Kosova-born writer and director.

During the war, she took refuge in North Macedonia and Germany. Her early works include short films *Mirror, Mirror...* (2006), *Gjakova 726* (2009) and *Lena & Me* (2011) which were selected and awarded at many international festivals.

Her debut feature film, *Hive* (2021), premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where it made history by winning the Grand Jury Prize, the Directing Award, and the Audience Award in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition, the first film ever to sweep all three awards in that category. The film has since been sold in over 50 territories worldwide.

Dua is her second feature.



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INTERVIEW

with **BLERTA BASHOLLI**

After your first feature *Hive*, why did you want to continue exploring Kosova's history?

For me, it was really interesting to go back to how we lived, loved, and dreamed, even in times of war. How do people live their everyday life in war? I wanted to explore that through the perspective of a young woman growing up while there's a much bigger threat around her. How do you deal with that?

People who don't go through war may think it's all about bombs and missiles. In everyday life, people try to survive but they're also like all of us, they want to become successful, listen to good music, fall in love and feel comfortable in their own bodies. I wanted to bring the audience closer to these kinds of people and make them identify with them. I wanted to show that part of our lives, which is unfortunately still relevant for many people in Ukraine, in Palestine and all over the world.

Is *Dua* based on your own story?

Most of the scenes in the film are based on what I experienced and what happened to me. I was fifteen at that time, and I became sixteen when the war ended. Witnessing protests, watching the news, being part of all the discussions at home, leaving the country, it's all based on my life. I wanted to talk about the threat and the need to leave when you really love your country. All these topics are important to me, and through the help of my co-writer Nicole Borgeat, we managed to intertwine these moments. When you're making a film about small countries like Kosova, there's always a temptation to explain because it's complicated. There are two nations, two languages, nobody can tell the difference between them, and not many people know what really happened. They just know there was a war. In this sense, we tried to focus on *Dua* and to tell that journey through her.

The film takes place in Kosova in the late 1990s. Could you remind us of the context and chronology of events?

As Yugoslavia started to fall apart, wars were happening in Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Since 1989, Kosova was under lots of pressure, Albanians were fired from their jobs just because they were Albanians. High schools and universities were taken from us, and a parallel educational system appeared. We can see it in the film, Dua goes to a private house to learn. People turned their houses into schools, although they were tortured by the police. Teachers worked for free and had no income. Tensions really started rising little by little in 1989. It was like a war before the war because Serbian forces would always target patriotic families who worked toward the independence of Kosova. They were imprisoned and tortured until they gave up.



From 1997, things started to get worse. There was a huge student protest on October 1st in Prishtina, my brother and sisters were beaten by the police on the street. It continued with gunfights in villages and in the mountains.

As we approached 1999, there was more and more oppression and killing, even in Prishtina. In March 1999, as no peace agreement between Kosova and Serbia was signed, NATO decided to bomb. A lot of massacres happened in Kosova at that time. Many people were killed or had to leave the country, through cars or trains to Albania. Kosova was liberated in June 1999.

The film looks like a teen movie but Dua is always caught up by the reality of war. Did you want to show the complexity of being a teenager during wartime?

Exactly. War is not just about guns and blood, it's hard in everyday life. People still try to survive and get on with it. I thought it was really interesting to show this from a teenager's perspective because that's something I lived and really know to the core.

I didn't want to make a historical film but a film about teenagers during the war, to show that these teenagers in war-torn countries are the same as any teenager in the world. They have their own dreams and their own problems. They are not sure if they'll be accepted in their friend circle. They like someone but don't know if they're going to be kissed. They listen to music and dream about concerts. It's a teenager's perspective, we hear what Dua hears and how she perceives things. It's a very subjective way of showing things. I wanted to show the oppression and the overall tension through a very young character.

There are many long takes in the film, shot with an extremely mobile and almost invisible camera. How did you work with the Director of photography Lucie Baudinaud?

When I did short films, I was focused on framing. I went to filmmaking because of my father's love for photography and Western movies. But as I grew as a filmmaker, I more and more wanted to focus on story and actors' performances. I feel very close to character-driven stories, where we are with a character all the time.

Naturally, I want beautiful lighting, but I don't want the hand of the DOP, the camera, or the director to be felt. For me, it is very important that we believe in the atmosphere. I want people to feel that we are with an Albanian family in 1998 and not to make it feel like a beautiful film.

Lucie Baudinaud was very open to that, even in terms of lighting. She's very hardworking, so we went through every scene to discuss the feeling and the intention. I like long shots, most of the scenes were shot in one take. Lucie was amazing because shooting the film handheld and in long sequences is very hard.





We think of *Rosetta* directed by the Dardenne brothers. What films may have inspired you?

Rosetta has always been an inspiration for me, even for my first feature film. I love that film, and whenever I'm thinking about shots, I re-watch it. In terms of movement, we mostly based our work on *Rosetta* and *Fish Tank* because I'm a huge fan of Andrea Arnold. One of our references was also *La Niña Santa* by Lucrecia Martel. I like how she frames the characters. Characters seem packed in her shots, but you still feel all of them. It was an interesting approach in terms of where to position people.

There are many scenes of groups and crowds in the film : high school students dancing, neighbors and family friends gathering, crowds fleeing in the streets... What do you like about these group scenes?

I grew up in a crowd. We were four kids living in a 60-meter apartment. I never had a room of my own, and it was really nice to share the room with my two sisters, it never bothered me.

We grew up with guests coming over, people would go from house to house to either have dinner or tea. So it was always crowded somehow. In the schools, there were a lot of kids, we were always 40 students in a class. I was always in crowds, even in the protests.

In the film, Dua is always caught up with another person or a group. For example, when Dua is in the bathroom, the mother comes and knocks on the door. When she's listening to music, protesters come in. It's always something from outside interrupting her life.

But having privacy at that time was not something you could ask for.

How did you manage to shoot the crowd scenes?

It is quite difficult working with extras because we still don't have the means in Kosova to work with them. I have to be thankful to the first assistant director Benoît Monney and the third assistant director Blerta Haziraj, who did an amazing job.

We didn't have enough extras so we sometimes used the same people, changed their clothes and put them somewhere else. I don't especially like shooting with extras, but I think when you have the right people around you, it makes the shot believable. They all put in so much effort and made my work easier.



Many events in the film happen off-camera. How did you manage to find a balance between what's on and off-camera?

As I really wanted to feel what the character feels, my intention was to let some events happen off-camera. Off-camera was the only way to show tension and what the characters are feeling without having to explain it.

I think sometimes the use of TV or radio can be explanatory, but it was relevant here because that was the truth, we grew up with the TV on. We woke up and fell asleep with the voice of the radio journalist, listening to reports. Even when somebody is talking, we don't point the camera at him.

We really wanted to feel what Dua is hearing when she's eating, walking, or coming to her house after school. I wanted to show how things are affecting her.

There is a very powerful scene, where violence is off-camera, when Dua's father is beaten up by the Serbian police. How did you imagine this scene?

That was a risky scene, but I'm happy because it looks and feels exactly how I imagined it. Focusing only on one character and doing sequence shots represents a big risk. It's different when you take coverage; you have options to edit. I had a 13-year-old girl with all these people around her, a car driving, police being out. Pineau doesn't understand Serbian, so she doesn't understand what the police officers are saying to her father. But she did a great job because she knew the scene.

She doesn't have any acting experience, but she's intuitive. This is a scene that I based on a real event. It's not something I witnessed, but I discovered it from research. A girl described how her father was beaten up by the police, and she couldn't even turn her head. She only saw the blood when he came in the car. There were many ways to shoot this scene, but for me, it was really important that we remain with Dua observing what's going on and not really understanding it. I imagined it exactly like that.

Pinea Matoshi, who plays Dua, is a true revelation. She doesn't need to speak, her eyes say more than a thousand words. How did you find her?

With my second assistant director Dafina Gjikolli, we went through every primary school and high school in Prishtina to look for Dua and the other teenagers in the film. I saw around 5,000 children. For me, it's important to also meet the shy people who normally don't apply to auditions.

Pinea Matoshi's mom is an actress and was in my first feature. I saw Pinea when she was little, but I didn't hear from her for ten years. As we went to her school, we auditioned her, but the audition was not good ! But I really liked her, I liked her face and her voice.

We cast Pinea's sister for the role of one of Dua's sisters, so Pinea came to a rehearsal where she improvised with her sister and another actress.





She also came when we auditioned actresses for Maki's character, and she felt really good with Vlera Bilalli, who got Maki's part. They had good energy together, they became friends, which was great because the audience follows them throughout the film.

After Pinea met the crew bit by bit, she finally said yes. She never complained about anything, even when she would get hurt during judo lessons. She's a little bit like me when I was a teenager, she doesn't talk much. I don't like when there are too many dialogues, I prefer actors who express themselves with expressions or attitudes. I think Pinea has this ability to talk with her eyes.



Yllka Gashi, who plays Dua's mother, was already in your first feature film. Why did you want to work with her again? Could you tell me a few words about the other members of the cast?

I always want to work with Yllka Gashi ! She's very well-known in Kosova because she was in a famous TV series. I also saw her in plays, where I really liked her. Yllka has the same quality as Pinea : she expresses a lot by not saying much. She's hardworking and gives everything for her roles. I love working with her and she's going to be in my next film.

Kushtrim Hoxha, who plays the father, is an actor that I've never worked with before. I love to see how some actors become more mature and interesting as they age, they are better in their forties. I'm glad I cast him because he managed to portray the soft and strong sides of the father, who is not a traditional father.

From the beginning, he had a great connection with Pinea.

Fiona Abdullahu, who plays the sister Mimi, was a makeup artist in my first film. After working in many films as a makeup artist, she went to acting school. She's very talented, she reminded me of my older sister.

The other sister, Tina, is played by Kaona Matoshi. I had already worked with her in one of my short films and then in my first feature, I wanted to work with her again.

We did auditions for Vegim's character, but Andi Bajgora was the one who best portrayed Dua's brother. He's a very good actor and he also acted in one of my short films. We needed someone able to be strong but at the same time who wasn't the type to go to war. It was a pleasure to work with all these actors who became a great family.

It's the first time I work with Vlera Bilalli, who plays Maki. I found her in her school while auditioning and I really liked how natural she was. I don't ask actors to intellectualize their parts, I just want a truthful feeling in performance.

How did you work with the actors to create the family's chemistry?

It was important for me to create real relationships in the family, especially between Dua and Vegim. My brother and I had a special connection. As Pinea is very young and inexperienced, and Andi is an actor she knew, it was important to create a real relationship between them.

They developed a brother-sister relationship even behind the camera, and that was a relief for me. One of my favorite scenes is when they're fighting and laughing, it feels right and believable.



CAST

Dua

Pinea Matoshi

Zana

Yllka Gashi

Maki

Vlera Bilalli

Bekim

Kushtrim Hoxha

Tina

Kaona Matoshi

Vegim

Andi Bajgora



CREDITS

Director	Blerta Basholli
Screenplay	Blerta Basholli & Nicole Borgeat
Cinematography	Lucie Baudinaud, AFC
Sound	Marc Von Stürler, Xavier Lavorel and Philippe Ciompi
Set Designers	Sasho Blazhevski
Music	Audrey Ismaël
Editor	Enis Saraçi
Costume Designer	Leonora Mehmeti Hoxha
Production	Ikonë Studio (Kosova) – Valon Bajgora and Yll Uka and Alva Film (Switzerland) – Britta Rindelaub and Thomas Reichlin
Coproduction	Kazak Productions (France) – Amaury Ovise

