

Crossing [15]

2024 Sweden/Denmark/France/Turkey/Georgia 106 mins

UK released	19 July 2024
Director	Levan Akin
Screenplay	Levan Akin
Cinematography	Lisabi Fridell
Cast	Mzia Arabuli (Lia); Lucas Kankava (Achi); Deniz Dumanli (Evrin)

Istanbul is a place people go when they want to disappear. At least, that's how it seems to Lia (Mzia Arabuli), a retired history teacher who travels from Georgia to search for Tekla (Tako Kurdovanidze), her estranged trans niece. She reluctantly brings along Achi (Lucas Kankava), a restless teen whose mother went to work in the Turkish capital and never returned. The lives of the unlikely duo change after they meet Evrim (Deniz Dumanli), a trans rights lawyer who helps them to navigate her world. As they experience the city's hidden corners, they realise that leaving home is not only an act of severance, but an opportunity for self-expression and new connections. Crossing is the emotionally rich, deeply humane and politically resonant fourth feature of Swedish-Georgian director Levan Akin, whose *And Then We Danced* (2019), Sweden's Oscar entry, faced a harsh conservative backlash in Georgia because of its storyline of romance between two men in a traditional dance ensemble. Crossing gives timely visibility to an exodus of LGBTQ+ Georgians who feel there is no safe future for them in their home country. Through Tekla's backstory, which emerges gradually, we understand the precarity of trans lives and the daily risk of violence in Georgia's very patriarchal society, where her family drove her out of home. In this difficult terrain, Akin creates a beautifully poetic sense of place. From the wooden coastal houses of Batumi, a long bus ride takes Lia and Achi over the Bosphorus Bridge, and they settle into a low-end Istanbul hotel room

flooded with neon light. Long weaving shots lead us through the uneven, cat-filled streets and cramped corridors of the city, where the ezan is called out from mosques and homeless kids try to hustle a few lira from passers-by. Strong performances across the board bring to life multifaceted characters whose flaws and quirks are key to their disarming vulnerability. The stern Lia makes sanctimonious comments about refinement and shuts down callow but resourceful Achi's chatter, but her plastic bottle of Georgian brandy is always close for a sly swig, and the armour around her feelings of fading desirability soon falls away. Evrim is warm-hearted, canny and resilient. As a trans woman, she is used to the romantic and professional obstacles thrown in her way by society. Recently qualified in law, she works for next to nothing at an NGO, Pink Life. She endures coldly averted gazes while her documents are being authorised for female status, and helps her fellow trans residents, who have few viable employment options and predominantly resort to sex work.

Akin offers a moving portrayal of the bonds that can form between people who, on the surface at least, have little in common. In the rooming houses of Istanbul's red-light district, where women shout down from the windows and camaraderie unites them through the walls, the director explores alternative means of belonging. The beating heart and hope of *Crossing* lies ultimately with collective activism rather than with family.

Carmen Gray, *Sight and Sound*, 18 July 2024 (abridged)

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