

CRYSTAL

A Documentary about a girl in Kurdisatn/ Iran

IRAN

54 minutes. 202

Directed by: **Mania Akbari & Mahmoud Aydin**

Short Synopsis:

Akbari's first film as (co-)director is on one level a fascinating documentary about Ayshe, a 19-year-old from a village in Kurdistan who for has for some years been suffering a mysterious condition, whereby she has been producing crystals that emerge painfully from different parts of her body. But at the same time it's also, characteristically, an exploration of the clash of modernity and traditional values, of science and superstition, and of the cruel relegation of women to second-class status in certain societies.



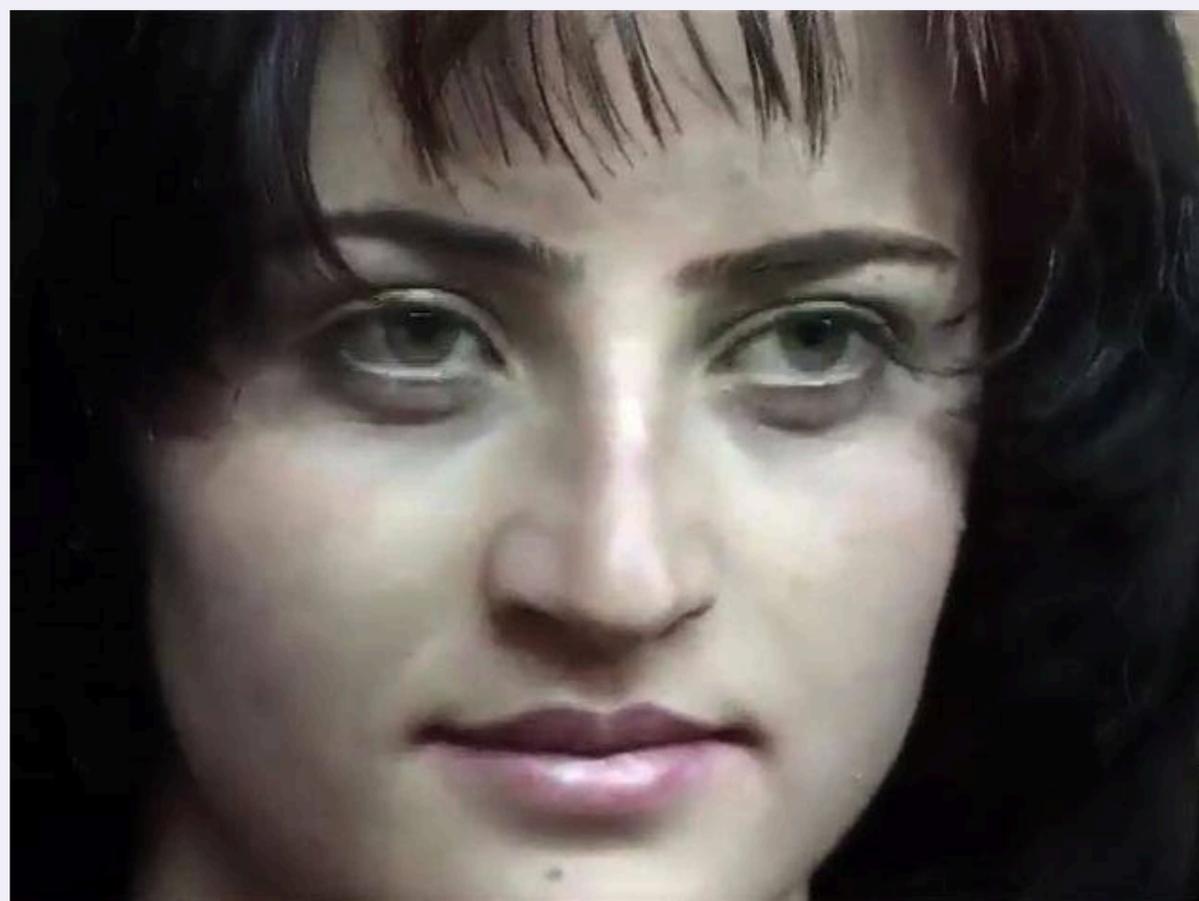


In 2002, Mania Akbari headed up north to the city of Chako in Kurdistan, right on the border with Iraq, to film a 19-year-old woman called Ayshe, who seven years previously had started producing crystal stones from her mucous membranes that emerged from her vagina, eyes, throat, the palms of her hand and the soles of her feet. Akbari took Ayshe to Tehran later that same year to see doctors and learn more about the illness. In the process, we witness their daily lives, their very different views on life, and the restrictions placed on both of them as women in Iran. The intimate bond that develops between them allows Akbari to get under Ayshe's skin and reveal her as a fully rounded person. With the doctors as confused and lost as the women, *Crystal* starts to transcend its subject matter; what initially seems a straightforward documentary on a rare sickness soon opens up into a study not only of social segregation in Iran – very few of the doctors who see Ayshe take her case seriously – but also of the abuse perpetrated on Kurdish women. We soon learn that Ayshe was forced by her father to marry when she was 12. Her strange condition emerged a year later, at the same time as her first period. The husband ended up abandoning her because of her illness, but not before hitting her and breaking her arm in a quarrel, the reason why Ayshe tried to terminate her life on a couple of occasions – the first by drinking a whole bottle of bleach, the second time by drenching herself in kerosene and trying to set fire to herself. These intimate revelations emerge thanks to the tangible bond of trust Akbari establishes with Ayshe. Before long, the whole film becomes the story of their friendship – two lonely women (Akbari mentions a phonebook full of names, but no friends) connecting powerfully over a very short but intense period of their lives. This friendship feels so genuine and truthful that it takes over the story, with the camera – mostly in extreme close-ups and narrow spaces (Akbari's car and flat, the lift in her building) – capturing their mutual need for female companionship. At one point Ayshe tells Akbari that the doctors had enjoined her to be happy, since sadness only makes the problem worse. *Crystal* is as shocking as it is moving, but in the end, what lingers in the mind is the genuine sense of hope it offers, even if that seems somewhat at odds with both these women's realities.

By Mar Diestro Dopide







CRYSTAL 54min by Mania Akbari
www.maniaakbari.com