

Telling stories that matter - Q&A with filmmaker Katya Abedian

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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Young South African/Iranian filmmaker of award-winning short film *Skin Diver*, Katya Abedian, shares her thought process behind her creations, gives tips for aspiring filmmakers and advice on staying creative (and kind) during a pandemic.



Katya Abedian

■ ***How would you describe your style and aesthetic when it comes to filmmaking?***

I don't really like to define or box my visual voice, especially because it's still developing and I'm in the early stages of the refinement process.

I'm interested in unpacking and dissecting the human condition, and narratives that strive to better understand humanity and its relationship with nature and with God (or the divine supernatural). I prefer abstracted storytelling. I'm not attached to chronology or formal story structures. My films lean more toward experimental dramas.

I try to sprinkle wonder into the lives of characters, making their journeys atypical and full of unexpected revelation. Nature always plays a big role in my work, it's almost a character of its own.

[Skin Diver - Official Short Film](#) from [Katya Abedian](#) on [Vimeo](#).

■ **What stories are you trying to tell?**

I'm interested in any story that deserves to be told. Every story is important, but some are just more pertinent and timely than others. I'm most excited in stories that are being kept in the dark.

I believe it's a unique privilege and responsibility to be able to shed light on such stories if I am given or create an opportunity to do so.

“ I am really trying to tell stories that can move the human spirit in some way that transcends the film itself. Something that lingers inside people's hearts long after the curtains close. Stories that shift things within us to the extent of translating into action. ”



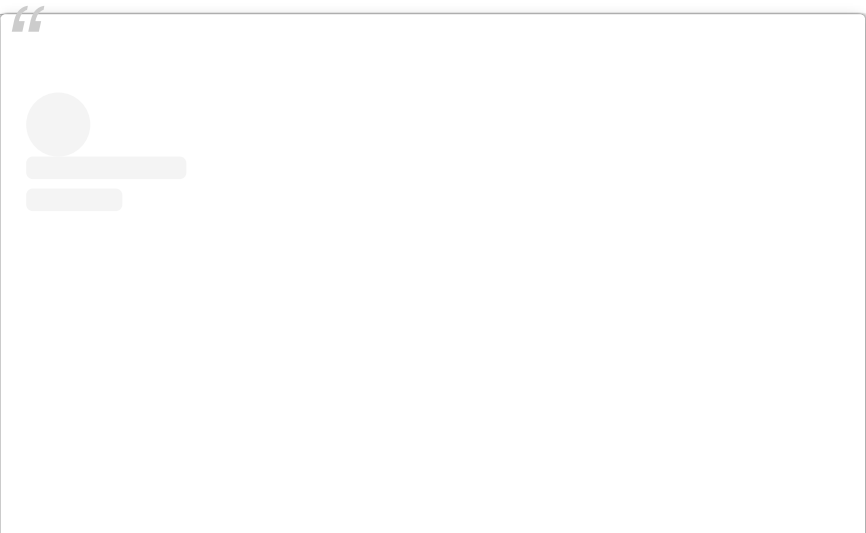
Still from Skin Diver

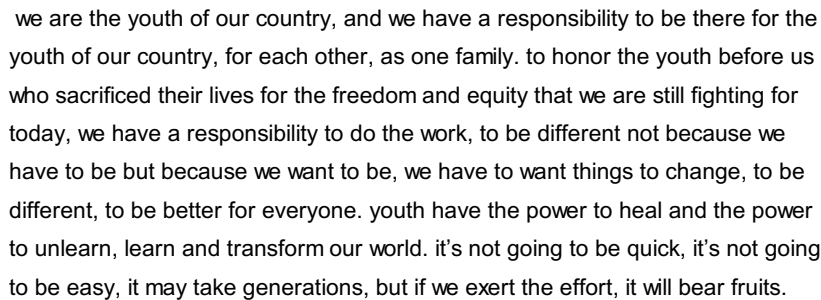
■ Can you give us some background on how and why you got into the film industry?

My story is quite long and detailed and takes a lot of twists and turns. I started using a film camera around the age of 13. Just documenting life, people I love, places and people I would move past. In retrospect, this became my first tool and method of training my eye. I loved the ability to influence how light was captured in a photograph using an analogue camera.

I did film study in high school and I fell more and more in love with the world of cinema. At the time, I became hugely inspired by filmmakers like Wong Kar-wai, Wes Anderson, Abbas Kiarostami and Stanley Kubrick, just to mention a few. The world of cinema and the art of storytelling became hugely fascinating to me.

“ I quickly realised the film was an amalgamation of so many facets of art that I love: music, beautiful writing, visual art. I was drawn to the power that film has to influence your heart and make you empathise with a reality that is so far from your own experience. ”





fer to as a 'year of service'. During 2017, I

focused on how I could serve my local community in Cape Town, Westlake, in which I had classes for children and youth focussing on spiritual and intellectual development. I had been holding these classes for two years in between school and I wanted to create time to give it a boost of intense focus. This is part of the worldwide community-building effort that Bahá'ís are taking part in because of the understanding that transforming our society starts with creating a better foundation for our youth and children. It provides a great opportunity to learn from other communities realities, hardships, experiences and unique ways of doing things.

I also spent half of the year doing Bahá'í-inspired work with youth in the world's largest school in Lucknow, India. In this way, one is able to cross-pollinate ideas from different communities around the world, and to start putting into practise the reality that we are in fact, one human family.

So during this period I also felt strongly that it was time I put my ideas into practise. Figure out if directing and filmmaking was something I was genuinely passionate about in action and not only as a concept. I made my first short film, [*Skin Diver*](#) during the first half of 2017, while still in South Africa, and a second short film titled [*The Poet*](#) during my six months in India.

[The Poet - A Short Film](#) from [Katya Abedian](#) on [Vimeo](#).

When I returned home to South Africa, I knew that I wanted to start making a mark in our local industry. And there is no greater place to start than the country that inspires me every day more and more and that truly feels most like home.

▣ ***Advice for other aspiring young filmmakers and creatives?***

- Just start
- Create the things you wish existed
- Believe in your ideas because no one else is going to do until you have
- Don't be afraid to ask for help, who and what you need are out there
- Redefine success
- Focus on the process instead of the outcome
- Cultivate moral imagination
- Listen to voices unheard
- You are the ocean in a drop
- Avoid anything that conforms to out-dated narratives
- Tell stories that matter
- Embrace the beautiful struggle
- Channel your challenges into your art

▣ ***Your top tip for sane during lockdown?***

- Say your prayers/meditations
- Speak to the people you love
- Be creative in whichever way excites you
- Find out new things about yourself and the world
- Educate yourself (read, watch, learn)
- Move your body
- Listen to your body
- Be kind to yourself and others, we all need more of it

■ ***If you could give a message to your younger self what would it be?***

Trust your process more, you'll start figuring it out. You won't always feel the way you're feeling now, it will get better and you'll start becoming a lot more comfortable and confident in your journey, you are always being guided, you are loved.



Katya Abedian

■ ***Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of film and the arts?***

I think it's unearthed a lot of hidden gems within ourselves and others. I feel it's teaching us how important diverse forms of creative expression are for our daily lives and spiritual well-being. Having a bit less time running around and more time at home, I think we are learning how things we rushed through as chores or to tick off our boxes are vital for our joy. Like cooking a meal, intentionally, alongside someone you love. Or just taking time to let your imagination run free, words spill onto your page. Or just how important it is to make time to work on your inner being, your thoughts and your emotions.

“ *I think more and more we have seen how, during times of crisis, we all turn towards art for inspiration, hope and restoration. Podcasts, films, music, painting. My hope is that art is no longer being seen as luxury but as an essential ingredient to fulfilment and peace as the creative human beings that we are.* ”



■ How do you hope humanity can come out of this pandemic better and stronger?

By not forgetting. Our biggest collective flaw is to not remember the lessons we are being encouraged to learn, until we are forced out of our own amnesia to learn them again properly. Like a repetitive cycle of pain. I am hopeful that this pandemic is flushing out of our systems the sicknesses that we have been keeping at bay for years. And bringing to our collective attention how much more work we have to do, transformation we have to enforce and that the real change will only happen when we start with ourselves, the thing we have the most power over.

I believe this pandemic, as painful as it is, is a God-sent growing pain that we either learn from, or we feel victims of. So I am opting for the learning mindset and I hope others can stay on the positive side too. Some days will be easier than others, but if this is all helping us become a more just and unified society, then it is ultimately for our own betterment and advancement. There is a great reason for things that is beyond our human ability to understand.

Follow Katya Abedian on [Instagram](#).

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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