

FREMONT

USA (2023) 92 minutes

Director: Babak Jalali

Cast: Anaita Wali Zada (Donya)
Gregg Turkington (Dr. Anthony)



Screening 5th February 2025 at Swindon Art Centre

Synopsis

Donya, a young Afghan woman who moved to Fremont, California after serving as a translator for the American army, spends her days working at a fortune-cookie factory and her nights wide awake battling between her desire to rebuild her life and the overbearing guilt she carries within. In a bid to connect with the world, she sends an unconventional message through a fortune-cookie.

Reviews



Shot in misty black-and-white and co-scripted by Jalali and Carolina Cavalli with a straight-faced sense of humour, *Fremont* is a quasi-comedy that strikes a vibe akin to the films of Jim Jarmusch. The biggest achievement of Jalali here is the precise tone that he strikes with his mild-mannered movie: never cutesy (an especially impressive feat considering the film's whimsically Sundance-y premise) and always several feet deeper in its themes and deliberations around human isolation than meets the eye.

Tomris Laffly, Variety

The script (co-written by Jalali) is especially sharp when it comes to examining the ways that refugees get pigeon-holed as saints or sinners. After being told that Afghans "seem nice, friendly people", Donya replies, "We are, I'm just not a good example".

With her chunky cheekbones and coolly appraising eyes, Zada often resembles the young Scarlett Johansson. A former journalist and refugee, she's never had an acting lesson in her life, which makes you wonder why people waste money on drama school. Her off-kilter naturalness is awesome, most obviously in her scenes with Jeremy Allen White (as Daniel, a jangled, James Dean-ish mechanic).

Charlotte O'Sullivan, The Standard

Film Facts

- Anaita Wali Zada escaped from Afghanistan in 2021 when the Taliban started taking over.
- *Fremont* won the John Cassavetes Award in 2024 and was nominated at the British Independent Film Award.

swindonfilm.org.uk