

World Premiere: Locarno 2025 - Cineasti del Presente



BECOMING

A film by Zhannat Alshanova

Produced by

Films de Force Majeure (France)
Accidental Films (Kazakhstan)
Volya Films (Netherlands)
M-Films (Lithuania)

Co-produced by

Kjellson & Wik (Sweden)

94 min - 2025

Synopsis

In today's Kazakhstan, 17-year-old Mila can no longer bear the chaos of her family life.

When she discovers an open-water swimming team led by the enigmatic Vlad, she joins, drawn by the promise of structure and belonging.

But when her place is threatened, her fear of losing it starts to grow, and Mila must soon decide how far she's willing to go to preserve the fragile balance she's built.



Interview with the director

Zhannat Alshanova

What drew you to swimming as a central element in *Becoming*? Why did you choose it as the backdrop for Mila's journey?

I once read that swimming is one of the loneliest sports in the world. Unlike football, for example, there's little interaction with teammates or the audience—it's just you and the water. That really got me thinking about the mental space of swimmers, and what they find in that solitude. I initially started writing about pool swimmers but later shifted to open water, which I found even more interesting because it's less about speed and more about endurance—about facing constantly changing conditions. The weather can shift, the current can pull you off course, and the depth beneath you is unknown. You're always confronting fear and uncertainty. That felt like a powerful metaphor for a coming-of-age story.

Family dynamics and generational tension play a subtle yet important role in *Becoming*. What interested you in exploring those layers?

Kazakhstan is a relatively young country—just 34 years into independence, and we've already gone through several waves of change.

Each generation has tried to “get it right” within a constantly shifting political and social landscape. Mila's grandparents represent a stable middle class grounded

in traditional, conservative values. But that framework didn't work for their daughter, Dalida, who was drawn to a more open-minded and spontaneous way of living. She cut ties with them, convinced she could build a better future on her own terms, for herself and her daughters. She believes she's close to making it work and dreams of moving the family abroad, but the structure she provides is also unstable, in ways she cannot fully see.

I was interested in exploring how a young woman like Mila navigates these inherited expectations and contradictions in order to define her own truth and moral compass.

How did you approach shaping Mila as a character and what drew you to her journey?

Mila is a 17-year-old who's both strong and vulnerable, searching for structure in a world that constantly shifts around her. She absorbs the environment, processes it, and acts on it. Some of her choices are wrong, but she doesn't shy away from making mistakes.

I think we often expect characters to know exactly what they want from the start. But for me it's more interesting to explore how desire and direction emerge through trial, error and resilience. Mila doesn't have all the answers, but she is trying, falling and getting up to try again. She also slowly learns how to rely on herself when everything around falls apart.



What role does the swimming team play in Mila's journey?

The team represents the promise of order, attention, and possibility. It offers Mila something she has never had in her home life: structure and recognition. At first, the team's method appears modern and empowering, centered on each girl's potential. Mila doesn't see the red flags, because she's drawn in by the idea of belonging—and also, maybe, because Vlad's method promises a way to achieve without effort, skipping the slow, painful path most athletes endure. And this, for Mila, feels like a shortcut to a different life.

But once she joins, the contradictions appear. Supplements are given without clear information. The line between coaching and control becomes blurry. Mila signs a contract by forging her mother's signature. Ultimately, when she's benched, she bribes the coach to regain her place. She crosses moral lines, not just because of the environment, but because she's desperate to hold on to something that feels good for the first time in her life. That's a key theme in the film: how need can make us complicit.

The character of Vlad is fascinating: part mentor, part threat. How do you see him?

Vlad is a complex and intentionally ambiguous figure. He has a strong presence, he's charismatic, and he gives Mila the attention and validation she's been craving. In her eyes, he fills the role of the adult who finally sees her. But his moral compass is unclear. His investment in the team may come from both genuine belief and calculated ambition.



There's something real and tender in the way he interacts with Mila. On the other hand, the team is a project, if not a business, to him. When he learns that Mila's grandfather worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he sees her as a liability and distances her immediately—even though he's aware that she's emotionally dependent on him.

Their dynamic is charged. Mila doesn't fully understand her own desire yet. She confuses power with care, attraction with emotional safety. In one scene, she offers herself to him. He refuses, but not before that boundary has already been crossed inside her mind. It's a moment of intense vulnerability, but also clarity.

Why did you feel this was the right time to bring *Becoming* into the world?

Because the world is full of Milas—young people caught between expectations and emotional voids, between ambition and survival, the need to belong and the urge to escape. We talk a lot about empowerment but rarely acknowledge its emotional cost. That tension is at the heart of *Becoming*.

We're also living in a time of constant, accelerated change. Every day feels like a new reality, and we're expected to grow and adapt at the same speed. In that environment, it becomes even more important to pause, reflect, and ask: Where are we going, who are we following, and why? I believe many will recognize themselves in that, whether they live in Kazakhstan or anywhere else.

July 2025





Zhannat Alshanova

Zhannat Alshanova is a writer, director, and producer based between Almaty (Kazakhstan) and London (UK). drawn to stories of people in flux—caught between cultures, identities, and shifting narratives.

Her short films have screened at top-tier festivals including Cannes Cinéfondation (***End of Season***, 2018), Sundance (***Paola Makes a Wish***, 2019), and TIFF (***History of Civilization***, 2020), which won Locarno's Pardi di Domani award.

Zhannat is an alumna of Berlinale Talents, TIFF Filmmakers Lab, and Locarno's Directing Workshop (mentored by Béla Tarr). She holds an MA from London Film School and is a member of BAFTA Connect and Directors UK. She also runs Accidental Films, an independent company focused on emotionally driven, visually bold cinema.

Before premiering at Locarno 2025 (Cineasti del Presente), her debut feature ***Becoming*** was selected in multiple workshops and markets such as When East Meets West, Cinemart, TIFF Filmmaker Lab, Red Sea Film Souk, Gotham Week, or First Cut Lab.



Main cast

Mila Tamiris Zhangazanova (KZ)

Vlad Valentin Novopolskij (LT)

Lina Medina Sagindykova (KZ)

Dalida Assel Kaliyeva (KZ)

Madina Enlik Kozyke (KZ)

Amina Aleksandra Stambulova (KZ)

Zara Nursaule Aubakirova (KZ)

Akmaral Nazerke Zhumabek (KZ)

Vika Elina Ganshu (KZ)

Ira Yuliya Dyussebayeva (KZ)

Main crew

Written & directed by Zhannat Alshanova (KZ)

Cinematography Caroline Champetier (FR)

Editing Lila Desiles (FR)

Original score Emil Sana (FI/FR)

Production designer Aliya Odinayeva (KZ)

Casting director Nadine Choi (KZ)

1st Assistant director Simonas Šaineris (LT)

Costume designer Fausta Naujalė (LT)

Sound engineer Alexandr Khimich (KZ)

Line producer Anna Erastova (FR)

Unit production manager Yevgeniya Moreva (KZ)

Sound designer Ranko Paukovic (NL)

Sound mixer Gilles Benardeau (FR)

Colorist Julian Nouveau (FR)

Post-production supervisor Bénédicte Pollet (FR)

Delegate producer Jean-Laurent Csinidis (FR)

Producers Zhannat Alshanova (KZ)
Denis Vaslin (NL)
Marija Razgutė (LT)

Co-producer Marie Kjellson (SE)

Technical info

Title	Becoming
Length	94 min.
Year of production	2025
Languages	Russian, Kazakh
Format	Color, 16:9, 25 fps, 5.1/stereo
Countries of production	France, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Lithuania, Sweden
Supporting country	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Supported by	Aide aux Cinémas du Monde - Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Institut Français The Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the support of JSC State Center for the Support of National Cinema Région Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur The Hubert Bals Fund Netherlands Film Fund Lithuanian Film Centre Creative Europe Media Programme of the European Union Red Sea Film Fund Sacem City of Gothenburg
Executive producers	Adilzhan Tuyakbay, Kamila Serkebaeva, Assel Yerzhanova, Yevgeniya Moreva
Associate producers	Har Films, Dias Fels, Mariya Mun, Jérôme Nunes, Nora Bertone

Contact

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