

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT AND VISUAL APPROACH

With *I Must Go Down by the Sea Again*, I wanted to explore the quiet struggles that shape many young lives: the search for identity, the ache of unspoken desire, and the tension between belonging and isolation. This is not only Vali's story. It is a portrait of anyone who feels suspended between the place they come from and the place they long for.

Vali's journey is personal to me. I know the weight of expectations, the pull of the city, and the pressure to carve out a space where you can exist as your true self. His relationships with the people around him reflect a mix of longing, confusion, and hope. Drini is magnetic and unpredictable. Tringa is distant but still connected to him. Luani and Andi carry their own doubts while offering friendship that is warm yet fragile. Each of them reveals a different angle of Vali's inner conflict.

The artistic approach grows from an atmosphere of suspended time. The film breathes through emotional pauses, fractured memories, and sudden moments of clarity. Reality shifts into dream. Youthful desire meets existential heaviness. Visually, the film moves between stark realism and soft surrealism. The rawness of daily life contrasts with the haze of late-night rooms, crashing waves, and fleeting visions that blur the line between truth and hallucination. These transitions show Vali's unstable emotional world, with the sea acting as a recurring symbol of escape, surrender, and loss.

The visual style shifts from grounded realism to gentle stylization. Daylight scenes use a soft and desaturated palette of greys, pale blues, and muted institutional tones to reflect Vali's emotional stillness. Nights erupt with color and intensity. Neon blue, deep red, and heavy shadows shape the parties, bedrooms, and private corners where performance and vulnerability coexist. The camera observes with calm attention, using long takes, slow movements, and intimate close-ups that allow feelings to surface without forcing resolution.

Reflections in mirrors, windows, and fractured glass highlight the idea of split identities and the fear of being seen. Inspired by the photography of Nan Goldin, Tobias Zielony, and Deana Lawson, the film treats bodies with honesty and tenderness. Grain, sweat, blur, and imperfection become part of the emotional texture. The look of analog photography is important. Each frame should feel close to memory, even as that memory slips out of reach.

My cinematic references draw from the temporal rhythm and physical intimacy of Gaspar Noé and Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson, the emotional exposure of *Mysterious Skin* by Gregg Araki, the charged physicality of *Beau Travail* by Claire Denis, and the radiant youth in the early work of Larry Clark. These films work with solitude, desire, and collapsing inner landscapes. I aim to reflect similar currents within Vali's world.

Sound plays a central role. The soundscape blends internal and external music with surreal interruptions: trance, ambient textures, post-war Kosovar pop, the muffled pressure of clubs, and the roar of sea wind entering sterile rooms. Silence is used as both burden and release.

The sound design follows Vali's shifting emotional state, moving from emptiness to excess, from numbness to a sense of collapse.

Key locations such as the classroom, the club, and the coastline function as emotional presences rather than simple settings. The sea is a living metaphor. It returns as myth, memory, and physical force. In the final act, the coastline becomes a threshold that feels both euphoric and mournful. It is the moment where Vali's dream weakens, and abandonment begins to take root. The color grading slowly flattens as fantasy drains from the frame.

This film is also an ode to silence. In a society that rewards masks and conformity, silence becomes both a form of protection and a source of pain. Vali's difficulty in speaking and in being seen mirrors my own history. Yet within that silence there is a strange beauty, a trembling resistance and a will to endure.