

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Miu Miu speaks to fighting for a dream with acting-themed short

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Miu Miu's *Shako Mako* stars Alia Shawkat. Image credit: Miu Miu

By SARAH JONES

Prada's Miu Miu is examining war through a feminine lens in the latest edition in its Women's Tales series.

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"Shako Mako," directed by Hailey Gates, tells the story of Laila, an aspiring actress who feels stuck as she plays a civilian role in a staged training program for U.S. troops. Through the story, the film explores themes as wide-ranging as Islamophobia and the theatrics of war, as well as the roles women play in both entertainment and real life.

"By showing a typically male-dominated environment such as a military training exercise from a woman's perspective, Miu Miu emboldens its stance as being more than a fashion brand, but one that is purpose-driven as well," said [Jim Gentleman](#), independent marketing consultant for lifestyle brands. "And while immediate sales may not always result from this kind of effort, it no doubt helps the brand remain relevant and admired by its core audience."

Mr. Gentleman is not affiliated with Miu Miu, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Miu Miu](#) was reached for comment.

Battlefield scene

Prior to directing this film for Miu Miu, Ms. Gates appeared in the brand's advertising campaign ([see story](#)).

For her commissioned work, Ms. Gates decided to turn her attention towards an army base in California, where soldiers train in a replica village.

"I became fascinated by instances of people acting, but in real life, and how that affects the psyche and your emotional state," Ms. Gates said in a statement. "This type of military exercise was innovated by a TV producer.

"I thought it was so interesting that we were sending soldiers to Iraq and training them in a Hollywood-esque facility," she said.

Ms. Gates wrote the lead role for Actress Alia Shawkat, whose father hails from Baghdad.

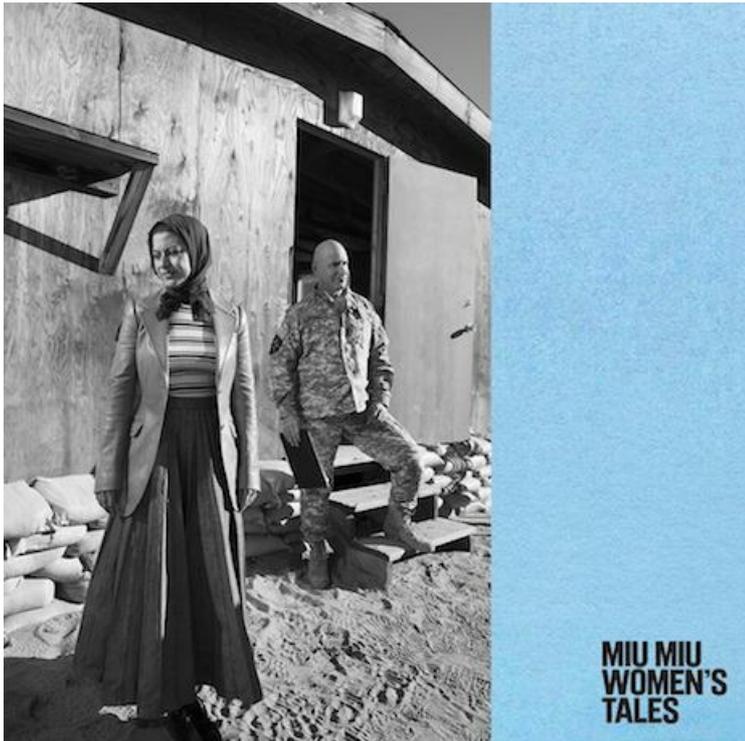
Shako Mako opens on Ms. Shawkat's Laila as she carries a basket of bread to an open market in what appears to be the Middle East.

Laila reaches a stall and greets her friend before asking a man in a neighboring stall, "Shako mako?" or Arabic for "How is it going?" He replies that she is not supposed to talk to him.

Suddenly a tank comes through the village, and an explosion goes off. Laila takes off her hijab and uses it as a tourniquet for man who lost his leg, and she lets out a wail.

After the title screen, it is revealed that Laila is an actress rather than a Middle Easterner dealing with war. As she grabs lunch, she chats with a fellow civilian about her Iraqi heritage and asks him to help her with something before a party that evening.

Through the film, viewers see Laila's tedium at having played the same role each day for more than a year. To cope, Laila creates elaborate backstories for her bread seller.



Miu Miu's Shako Mako. Image credit: Miu Miu

Her friend tells her she is taking the role too seriously, and that the women in the exercises are merely "set dressing."

The film also tackles issues such as stereotypes and the lack of understanding of the Islamic world. Laila hands out costumes to women, telling them that the coverings are actually worn in Afghanistan, rather than the imagined Iraq that the set is meant to portray.

Laila is later seen filming an audition for a role. Going against the training ground's rule on cameras, she asks her new friend from lunch to tape it and keep her secret.

She confesses to feeling like her talent is being wasted in the desert, where no one sees her act. Laila also opens up about hoping for a life-changing call about getting a part.

Later, as Laila is heading out the door to the party, she stows the memory card from the camera in her pocket.

The next day, the villagers are tasked with gathering paraphernalia from the soldiers, testing their awareness. As Laila hands the gathered items to the military commander, she accidentally gives him the memory card.

In the final shots, the military leader is shown watching the footage. While Laila has finally been seen performing, she also is likely losing her job.

Miu Miu Women's Tales #17 - Shako Mako

"Shako Mako portrays the Miu Miu woman as creative, smart, strong and irreverent consistent with the namesake brand's persona," Mr. Gentleman said. "With an unexpected twist, it also provides an engaging hook for the viewer."

Feminine films

Miu Miu previously explored the cultural revolution happening in Saudi Arabia through a film that takes place decades in the past.

"The Wedding Singer's Daughter" was the 16th installment of Miu Miu's Women's Tales, which shine a spotlight on female film talent through commissioned shorts. Directed by Saudi Arabian filmmaker Haifaa Al-Mansour, this film speaks to the increasing rights of citizens in the strict society, which has recently opened its first movie theaters and given women the right to drive ([see story](#)).

Miu Miu also continued its narrative in support of women's issues with the thirteenth installment of its Women's Tales film series directed by Chlo Sevigny that focuses on comedy.

Stand-up comedienne Carmen Lynch takes the stage in Miu Miu's latest Women's Tales film written in partnership with herself and Ms. Sevigny. The eight-minute film takes a look at Ms. Lynch's day on the road, which is paired with clips from her standup set ([see story](#)).

"As the 17th short film in Miu Miu's Women's Tales series, Shako Mako further positions the Italian fashion label as a progressive, female-first lifestyle brand," Mr. Gentleman said. "In an increasingly crowded high-fashion market, branded content like this helps a brand separate itself from competitors."

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