

## The Women of Essence

*Despite the short duration of their appearance in the film, and the fact that there is no conventional dialogue or obvious plot, all five female characters of Essence possess a back-story and a narrative arch – a starting point, a turning point, and a resolution. They are all fragments of the narrator's lived experience. They are all at different life stages, facing different challenges, yet they all share certain key features – the search for essence, and the transformative role of art and culture, of reading and listening. Here are five short portraits for the five Women of Essence.*

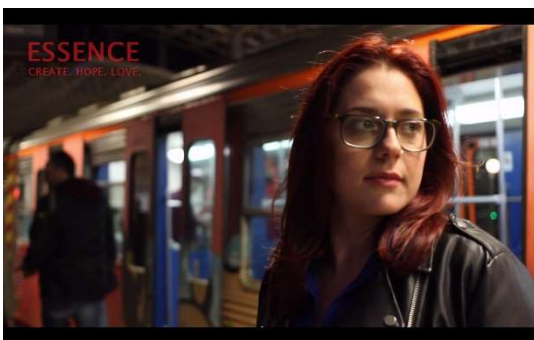
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***The Reader*** (Anahita Guha Choudhury) is in the first decade of her life and she is the youngest of the characters in Essence. She is an intelligent, inquisitive, happy child. She moves around the rich, mysterious spaces of an old palace, exploring, reading, creating, playing. Her experiences provide her with inspiration and guidance for the future. The Reader represents discovery, hope, innocence and creativity.



***The Book Fairy*** (Victoria Cunto) is in her 20s. She is a mysterious, dynamic, passionate woman who possesses strength and wisdom. There is something otherworldly about her. She sets out on a journey to discover the essence of things. She stands out from the urban canvas, moving around the space of a majestic bookshop with grace – floating, almost, between places and people. The Book Fairy represents exploration, inspiration, the quest for knowledge – the forces that drive us.



***The Passenger*** (Elissavet Anastasakou) is in her early 30s. We meet her at a dark, urban underpass and then at a busy metro station. She is at the same time one with the anonymous crowd and outside of it. She is having to face her demons, and gradually shifts from a state of anxiety to one of stillness and then to one of inner-peace. She ends up embracing others and, through that, herself. The Passenger represents fragility, vulnerability, reflexivity and empathy.



***The Pianist*** (Mara Kaisari) is in her 40s. She is a strong, passionate woman facing an important test of faith. She returns to a space that is charged with memories, hopes and fears – both her own and those of many others before her. Initially unsure of how to proceed, she faces her fears, raises to the challenge, and becomes one with the music. Schubert’s *Impromptu* becomes a manual – a key – to unlocking and navigating her next steps. The Pianist represents resilience, faith, hard work and truth.



***The Artist*** (Olga Damani) is in her 70s. She exists at the edge of the present, crossing the line between reality and fiction; between this world and an alternative universe. Her face, actions and transformation are an embodiment of the socially and culturally constructed narratives and roles, which we need to act out in order to survive – individually and collectively. The Artist represents memory, experience, wisdom, imagination, and beauty.