

‘Our stories are part of a collective memory,’ says Hiam Abbass on Cinema and Her Palestinian Identity

Doha, Qatar; November 23, 2024: From the village of Deir Hanna in Galilee to Hollywood, acclaimed Palestinian actress Hiam Abbass has carried her heritage across continents and cultures. Speaking at the 2024 Ajyal, she underlined how her four-decade journey in cinema has reinforced the power of collective storytelling.

"Through cinema and our work, we are able to raise our voices and exist on our own terms – not as others want us to exist," said Abbass. "History and memory may be personal at first, but we are part of a collective memory and we have to remember that we are parts of a whole."

The veteran performer, known for her diversity of roles – from Arab cinema to Hollywood films and acclaimed series, said she has several upcoming projects, including collaborations with Danielle Arbid and a special role in Annemarie Jacir's period film, where she portrays a former Palestinian resistance fighter in a multi-generational story.

Abbass, who has worked with directors including Yousry Nasrallah, Hani Abu Assad, Steven Spielberg, Jim Jarmusch, Denis Villeneuve, Terrence Malick, Amos Gitai, Ridley Scott and more.

She described her career across different cultures and film industries as a beautiful and rich journey where she was able to collaborate with many great directors and great thinkers and connect her vision as an actor to the bigger vision of the director or the writer.

Abbass said acting has helped her learn about herself, about life, about people, about humanity, and has shaped her way of thinking. She recently appeared in her daughter Lina Soualem's documentary *Bye Bye Tiberias*, a project supported by Doha Film Institute. Despite initial apprehension about revealing intimate aspects of her life, Abbass said she is proud of Lina and the final result.

Her role in *Bye Bye Tiberias* felt like a responsibility she had as a mother and a Palestinian woman to tell the story of the Palestinian people. "I have been part of several North African films from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and I have a special connection with the women there through my work. We have the ideas, but the lack of financial support hinders the Palestinian film industry."

As a director, Abbass has also helmed an episode of *Ramy* and created a short film, *Le Donne della Vucciria*, for Prada's Women's Tales series.

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About Doha Film Institute

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the Arab film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar and the region. The Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

About Ajyal Film Festival

Ajyal Film Festival is an annual celebration of film designed to nurture young minds and support the development of mindful global citizens and thoughtful future leaders. 'Ajyal', Arabic for 'generations', builds on the Institute's history of community-based programming, and brings people of all ages together through screenings and events that inspire creative interaction and stimulate cinematic dialogue. Through its' jury programme, youth between the ages of 8 and 25 are given an opportunity to watch, analyse and discuss global cinema and culture, developing self-confidence, independent critical thinking skills, self-expression, and an appreciation of cinema, while making new friends and discovering global cultures.

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