



Press Release

Arab filmmakers say drawing on past gives new perspective to current realities

Panel discussion of four directors in Arab Film Competition of DTFF highlights their perseverance and passion for cinema

Doha, November 19, 2012: While several Arab filmmakers today draw on the past for inspiration, they say that the painful settings used as subject material is not about tapping into nostalgia but about interacting with the present and making new discoveries of the society they live in.

The filmmakers, addressing a panel discussion with the media at the fourth Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF), the annual cultural event of Doha Film Institute (DFI), also shared a unified approach to filmmaking marked by painstaking research, a steadfast zeal to undertake their projects and a passion for cinema.

Directors Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, whose documentary *The Lebanese Rocket Society* is screening in the Arab Film Competition at DTFF, undertook a 12-year-long research for the project about Lebanon launching the first rocket in the Middle East in the 1960s.

“The project was inspired by a postage stamp, and over the course of research we came across several people who were involved with the event,” said Joana. However, for the filmmakers, the challenge was to re-enact the settings for which they had to negotiate with the concerned authorities for over nine months. “There was no nostalgia. We were reenacting the events in the present,” added Khalil.

For Tamara Stepanyan, the director of *Embers*, the journey was more personal, as she traced back her own lost childhood through the memories of her grandmother unveiled in conversations with her elderly friends in her hometown in Armenia. The filmmaker had left Armenia when she was 11 years old, and through the film she was also re-discovering the country, in addition to the notions of “generations, loss and missing.”

“Ultimately, the documentary evolved as a dialogue between generations, and in the process I discovered a part of my life that I had lost. I believe that every documentary is a fight – internal and external – as a well as a dialogue or even a monologue,” she said.

Maggie M Morgan, the director of the Egyptian feature narrative *Asham: A Man Called Hope*, said that her film is a spontaneous take on society around her, unveiled through the lives of six couples. She said her film is not political and does not condemn or condone the events that were happening, during the period of restlessness in the lead up to the 25 January Revolution. Through collective stories, the film brings diverse perspectives of how people responded to the confusing realities around them.



Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, the Tunisian director of *Professor*, which examines the state of human rights in the country during the 1970s, said the film was conceptualized before the revolution, adding that he received support from the Ministry of Culture even though a script screening committee was delaying the go-ahead. He said finding funding for the film was the biggest challenge, which also delayed its making.

All four films are part of the Arab Film Competition, the region's only dedicated festival competition event dedicated to Arab talent. This year's selection of entries for the competition marks the evolution in the cinematic sensibilities and approaches of the region's filmmakers. More than 27 films including seven documentaries, seven narrative features and 13 shorts from 10 Arab countries are competing for a total prize money of over US\$440,000.

With an expanded Festival format this year, DTFF 2012 will showcase over 87 films from across the globe under distinct themed sections including Arab Film Competition, Made in Qatar, Contemporary World Cinema, Special Screenings and Tribute to Algerian Cinema.

DTFF 2012 provides audiences a comprehensive and enriching cultural experience with new screening venues across Doha. Indoor and outdoor screenings will take place at Katara Cultural Village, Museum of Islamic Arts (MIA), and Souq Waqif.

Public participation will be central as the Festival is hosting an array of large community events, including Family Days, panel discussions, networking events and educational filmmaking programmes including Doha Talks and Doha Projects.

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About Doha Film Institute:

Doha Film Institute (DFI) is an independent cultural organisation established in 2010 to incorporate Qatar's film initiatives under one banner; organically supporting the growth of the local film community by enhancing industry knowledge, cultivating film appreciation and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. DFI's year-round platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films, educational programmes, film screenings, and the annual Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF).

With culture, community, education and entertainment at its foundation, DFI serves as an all-encompassing film hub in Doha, as well as a resource for the region and the rest of the world. DFI is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy. DFI has established a number of strategic cultural partnerships with leading local and international organisations including Tribeca Enterprises, World Cinema Foundation, Maisha Film Lab, Katara Cultural Village and Giffoni Film Festival.

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DTFF

Doha Tribeca Film Festival

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