



Press Release

‘Movies cannot change the world but they can re-examine forgotten societal injustice’

Arab filmmakers share stories of personal sacrifice to pursue independent filmmaking at DTFF discussion

Doha, Qatar: November 21, 2012: At a discussion at the fourth Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF), the annual cultural event of Doha Film Institute (DFI), Arab filmmakers shared their stories of personal sacrifice to pursue independent filmmaking to explore the truth behind events that shook public consciousness.

Merzak Allouache, the director of the feature film *The Repentant* that delves into Algeria’s ‘black decade,’ said that he invested all the money he could gain from his first film to tell the fictional story of a young jihadist who is trying to resume a normal life.

“I believe that film projects must have an independent vision, as it enables us to tell stories that we are passionate about and believe in,” he said. “When I make films, I do not think of film festivals or awards. My dream is to take my movie to as many viewers as possible in my home-country, and I know it is a difficult task.”

Allouache said that as a filmmaker he is committed to the society and not to the government. “I do not believe that movies can change the world. But when I see victims of past injustice suffer in silence, I know that my movies will help reexamine their pain.”

Egyptian director Hanan Abdalla, whose documentary *In the Shadow of a Man* is screening at DTFF, said that even though the theme of her film was to see how women react to the new freedoms in the country, she had no intention of casting blame on men.

“They are victims of injustice as well and they also undergo tremendous pressure. My film presents different perspectives of women, who are drawn from different segments of the society. They were as much a part of the revolution, and it is important to tell their personal revolutions within.”

While the two filmmakers studied the impact of politics on individuals, two others accomplish similar results by drawing on art and intimate personal journeys. Laurent Ait Benalla derived inspiration for the documentary *O My Body* from hip-hop and dancing by presenting the behind-the-scenes of Algeria’s first contemporary dance troupe as they perform their first work.

“The film is not about dance,” said Ait Benalla. “Algeria has been independent since 1962, and over the years the country has witnessed intense internal turmoil. These have an impact on how people respond to their cultural expressions.” In *O My Body*, the protagonists are hip-hop dancers who discover new ways to use their love for art.



Brahim Fritah takes the journey of exploration through a personal journey, where he presents a ten-year-old boy, enacting the childhood of the young director, in the summer of 1980 in a French suburb. Through the boy's eyes, the various societal dysfunctions are viewed to draw personal inferences.

"My intention was to stay away from stereotypes and narrate a story honestly. I was exploring a lost kingdom from my childhood but I had no intention to recreate nostalgia. Since it was a personal story with no dramatic ups and downs, it was difficult to convince producers to support the project," said Brahim, who eventually received a grant from DFI for the project.

While presenting diverse themes, the one commonality that Arab filmmakers shared was the difficulty to win support for independent stories, and to execute the films, often working in hostile environments.

-ENDS-

[Images from the session are available here.](#) Just use the log in details below to access the file marked Arab Feature Film Competition in the Nov 20th file

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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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