

Be authentic and focus on a story with global resonance, says shorts filmmakers at 9th Ajyal

Doha, Qatar; November 15, 2021: Short filmmakers from across the world, who showcased their films at the ninth Ajyal Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, urged young and aspiring filmmakers to be honest and authentic in their storytelling and to identify subjects that resonate with global audiences. It is not the length of the film that matters but how impactfully you can weave in a story; finally, you leave it open for audience interpretation, they said.

Addressing the media Joan Gratz, the director of *No Leaders Please* (USA/2020), an eloquently animated film based on a poem about self-discovery and reinvention by Charles Bukowski, said she was inspired by artists including Basquiat, Banksy and Haring, among others. Joan Gratz said making her film was relatively easy as “its form was explicit as I tried to interpret the message from his poems through artists, many of whom have evolved to become politically very active.”

Director Ahmed Saleh discussed how it was a personal mission of many years to bring to screen his short film *Night* (Germany, Qatar, Jordan, Palestine/2021), which is set in a city devastated by war. To ease a woman’s anguish, the film sees her being tricked into seeing her missing child one last time. He said it was an integration of reality with surrealism and ‘with the help of these two realms I try to convey my story in a short period of time.’

He said it is often good not to work with professional actors for short films as unknown faces lend a certain authenticity to the story. “It is harder to work with non-trained actors but audiences can relate to the strange face they see than a known actor because they immediately start associating the story with the actor.”

Ako Salemi said he did not have a clear intent when pursuing his film *Shadegan* (Iran/2020) about the day in the life of a 12-year-old fisherman on his boat in Shadegan Pond, Iran, which is the boy’s second home and his family’s livelihood. He said it could have been a feature or even much shorter than its 15-minute duration now, but he discovered the right length as he assimilated the footage to create a compelling narrative.

Director Eliza Płoceniak-Alvarez went on a personal journey to create the film *My Name is Fear* (Germany/2021), when she was pregnant. She was reading extensively at that time, which led to creating the short film centred on the emotion of fear that lives in your head. She explores if you can become friends with fear with the film, which gained great appreciation among the young Ajyal Jurors. “They were asking so many smart, important questions,” she said. Her starting point of the film was her research on the subject of emotions. “You eventually create a film that is authentic but you can never be sure how it will be understood, which is a good thing. We make short films and leave it to the audience for their interpretation.”

The seven-day Ajyal Film Festival featured a diverse mix of virtual and in-person events including film screenings, interactive discussions, multi-media art exhibit, Qatar’s largest pop-culture event Geekdom, and a drive-in cinema as part of a multisensory experience for all ages.

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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 local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. 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.

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