

Press Release

DFI-supported filmmakers highlight the power of cinema to address misconceptions, build hope and promote empathy

Doha, Qatar; October 3, 2022: At the Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival, two filmmakers who are screening their films, both supported by the Doha Film Institute, before 613 young Ajyal Jurors, underlined the power of cinema to address misconceptions, promote a deeper understanding of human suffering and build empathy.

The two films, *Kash Kash – Without Feathers We Can't Live* (Germany, Lebanon, Qatar/ 2022), directed by Lea Najjar, a compelling documentary set in Beirut; and *Rest in Piece* (Germany, France, Qatar/2021), a stop-motion picture by Antoine Antabi about the courage and resilience of displaced people, present a universal theme – of discovering hope amidst hopelessness.

“What matters,” said Antoine Antabi, “is to continue to make films that will help us take the message to new and wider audiences, so that we can change the way they look at some of the most pressing issues today, such as the refugee crisis.”

Lea Najjar said films are communicative tools that help build bridges, despite the different paths that people take in their lives. “After screening my film in Europe, I was surprised to learn that despite the viewers having no biological connection with the Middle East, they could still form an emotional bond. That is what films can do – create empathy and understanding – so that viewers do not feel it is someone else’s story. They feel the joy and suffering of the people who are far away from their cultures.”

Both the filmmakers said the support extended by the Doha Film Institute in realising their projects was invaluable. “At this time, after all that we have witnessed in the recent past – wars, the pandemic – we feel the support to art has been declining. DFI’s role in promoting filmmakers is important, especially in telling stories related to humanitarian and social issues. We are in dire need of shedding light on humanity’s issues through films, because as time passes and technology further evolves, our new generations will become increasingly alienated from these concerns,” said Antoine.

He added that his film is a message on the need to hold on to hope, look for new beginnings and stay optimistic. “Life will go on and we must be strong or else we will collapse as a society.”

Lea said her film also conveys the message of hope and resilience, presented through the eyes of three protagonists, who find peace and empowerment as they scale the roofs of Beirut’s building to pursue their passion for pigeon gaming. The film presents rich metaphors of how people are curtailed of personal freedom and builds on the innate wish of every individual to be free.

Antoine’s film was created over a period of five years, and the theme evolved from his own personal experiences of moving from Syria to Lebanon and eventually to Germany. He uses symbolism to present the challenges that refugees and emigrants face, especially the essentials that are often denied to them.

Lea’s documentary is edited from hundreds of hours of footage, and she focused on being character-driven even when a lot was changing in the country. “While we were shooting the movie, Lebanon was going through various difficult stages, all of which were impacting the protagonists too. With

pigeon gaming, they were finding hope – one of them is taking up the sport to feel like a winner amidst all the losses he was facing on the ground, the second finds his pastime as a meditation to have a moment of peace, and the third, a girl, discovers a sense of empowerment.”

Their advice to emerging filmmakers is to believe in themselves and stay stubborn about their dreams. “I would tell stop-motion filmmakers not to set limits to themselves. Everything is possible with genuine vision and support,” said Antoine.

“Today, you have filmmaking technology in your pockets – the mobile phone,” said Lea. “Every phone can help you shoot good enough videos to make a film. What is needed is a story worth telling, and to make films that you would like to watch, not films for other people. If you have a story that must be told, you are already on the right path.”

The Special Edition of the 10th Ajyal Film Festival will screen a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to Ajyal Jurors from 50 countries. They will also take part in the Ajyal Talks and Spotlight sessions in addition to taking part in lively discussions on cinema and critiquing the movies they watched.

Katara is the Cultural Partner of the Special 10th Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival. Contributing Partners include Darwish Holding, the Official Electronics Provider; with FNAC, Sony and 51 East; Qommunication is the Social Media Partner; and Friends of the Festival include Alkalive, the Official Water Sponsor; Giffoni, Qatar Museums, Leisure (Virtuocity).

-ENDS-