

Doha Film Institute Awards 44 Diverse Projects From 32 Countries For its 2023 Fall Grants

- *Projects by Arab and international filmmakers continue the commitment of the Institute to promote independent voices in cinema.*
- *5 projects by Qatari and Qatar-based talent and 20 projects by women filmmakers, with 12 by returning filmmakers.*
- *DFI's Grants, the region's longest-serving film development initiative, has supported more than 800 films from 74 countries in a robust portfolio.*

Doha, Qatar; 22 January 2024: The Doha Film Institute announced the recipients of its 2023 Fall Grants cycle, the region's longest-serving film development initiative that identifies and nurtures first-and second-time filmmakers from across the world.

For the 2023 Fall Grants cycle, 44 films from 32 nations have been selected from hundreds of entries submitted by first- and second-time filmmakers and acclaimed MENA directors. Awarded in two cycles—Spring and Fall- the Institute's Grants programme has evolved as one of the flagship film funding initiatives in the MENA region focused on strengthening a vibrant creative ecosystem and supporting emerging voices worldwide to help them realise their cinematic aspirations.

To date, the programme has supported over 800 diverse film projects from 74 countries, including feature and short narratives, documentaries, experimental essays, and serial content for broadcast and streaming platforms.

In addition to Qatar, the 2023 Fall Grantees include projects from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Bhutan, Croatia, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Hong Kong, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tunisia, UAE, USA, and Zanzibar, among others.

The recipients include 20 women filmmakers, with 12 returning grantees and 5 projects from Qatar-based talent, reflecting the commitment of the Institute to nurture diverse, inclusive, and authentic voices from around the world to present stories that resonate across cultures and geographies.

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha Film Institute, said: "The volatility of today's economic, social, and political conditions adversely impacts the support for creative talent, especially for independent voices in cinema with limited access to film finance. We are on a mission to identify and support these voices because we believe that their stories mirror the harsh lived realities of many communities through creative visions that need to be realised."

Alremaihi continued: "It is our honour to support talented emerging filmmakers from across the globe, who with the incredible quality of their projects have made the selection process challenging in the best way possible. From heart-wrenching stories of life under occupation in Palestine to messages of hope, peace and harmony from Bhutan and Senegal, our 2023 Fall Grants projects reflect our world today. We

will continue to ensure that compelling new stories are told to the world and that cinema continues to play a powerful role in bridging understanding and empathy.”

The 2023 Fall Grants recipients are:

MENA – Feature Documentary – Development

- ***Après Tahar*** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Soufiane Adel is the story of the director’s large Algerian immigrant family against the backdrop of his grandfather, an infantryman in the French Army in Indochina.
- ***In The Shade of a Royal Palace*** (Egypt, Qatar) by Hend Bakr, the director attempts to discover her family history as 'the people of the cabins' through her musician father.
- ***House No. 7*** (Syria, Qatar) by Rama Abdi is a creative documentary in which three girls meet and rent rooms in an old Damascene house after escaping their abusive family homes.
- ***My Mother & I*** (Iraq, Egypt, Qatar) by Dilpak Majeed is about a woman in her seventies who is deeply connected with her sheep and embarks on a journey when her mother falls ill.

MENA – Feature Documentary – Production

- ***Khartoum*** (Sudan, UK, Qatar) by Miss R, Mr. S, Mr. and Mr. T is about a street boy, a civil servant, a tea lady, and a medic—whose lives are woven together in peace and war.
- ***In the Name of Safia*** (Algeria, Belgium, France, Qatar) by Safia Kessas unravels the story of the Algerian War of Independence, drawing out the threads of memories blurred, forgotten, and silenced by the ferocity of arbitrariness.
- ***Niemeyer 4 Ever*** (Lebanon, France, Germany, Qatar) by Aurélia Makdessi is about the now-shuttered International Fair created by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer and the local Lebanese who attempt to rehabilitate his imagined utopia.

MENA - Feature Documentary – Post-Production

- ***Abo Zaabal 1989*** (Egypt, Germany, Qatar) by Bassam Mortada, in which the filmmaker explores his father’s arrest and torture in 1989, reconstructing the experience that traumatized and divided his family.
- ***Sudan, When Poems Fall Apart*** (Tunisia, France, Qatar) by Hind Meddeb is a portrait of Sudan as a poem as well as a love letter to the country’s reassembled fragments of an ongoing revolution.
- ***Jodari Meno*** (Qatar Italy, Zanzibar) by Jamal Al Khanji and David Ochoais is about a Qatari spear fisherman who embarks on a journey of self-exploration by chasing his dream of catching a once-in-a-lifetime fish.

MENA Established Directors Post-Production

- ***2G*** (Algeria, Switzerland, Qatar) by Karim Sayad is set in Agadez in 2021—following the ban on unlawful migrant transportation by the Niger government, four former smugglers struggle to make a living by embarking on a journey through the Sahara.
- ***Arkala Gilgamesh’s Dream*** (Iraq, UAE, France, UK, Qatar) by Mohamed Jabarah Al Daradji is about Chum-Chum, a young, dreamy street kid who tries to convince his best friend, Moody, and a group of street children that the legendary Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, will help him bring his parents back to life from the underworld.

Non-MENA-Feature Documentary – Post-Production

- ***Blueberry Dreams*** (Georgia, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Elene Mikaberidze is set amidst political and military tensions near the disputed Abkhazian state, where a Georgian family is staking its future on cultivating blueberry fields.
- ***Naseem, Fight with Grace*** (UK, Qatar) by Ana Naomi De Sousa is a story of second-generation British history and identity told through the perspective of British-Yemeni featherweight boxer Naseem Hamed, who became a world champion in 1995.
- ***Hawa*** (Afghanistan, France, The Netherlands, Qatar) by Najiba Noori is about Hawa, who, after 40 years of arranged marriage, is eager to finally begin an independent life and become literate.
- ***Holidays in Palestine*** (France, Palestine, Qatar) by Maxime Lindon is about Shadi, a 30-year-old activist who returns to his native village in occupied Palestine to celebrate his French naturalization, while struggling with the guilt this entails.
- ***Untitled*** (Myanmar, Qatar) by Min Min Hein.

MENA - Feature Narrative – Development

- ***7 Waves*** (Qatar, Saudi Arabia) by Hamida Issa is a magical realist tale inspired by local Gulf mythology in which Laila, a young Qatari/Saudi photographer, travels the world documenting culture.
- ***Awdah*** (Palestine, Germany, Qatar) by Ihab Jadallah is about Amal and Yousef, who hope for a happy family life after Ibrahim's release from prison. However, Ibrahim's past pains and struggles with reality threaten their dreams.
- ***Bab El Sahra*** (Algeria, France, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, Qatar) by Salem Brahimi, in which a gendarmerie's brother returns to his hometown in the desert of an unnamed North African nation and sparks deadly events in a nearby mine — placing his brother in a dilemma between family and country.
- ***Trouble Magnet*** (Palestine, Germany, Jordan, Qatar) by Ahmad Saleh is about Ali, whose motto is 'what doesn't kill you gives you a story to tell.' His overconfidence leads him into hilarious, albeit hazardous, situations.

MENA – Feature Narrative – Production

- ***Eldorado, the Taste of the South*** (Morocco, France, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Qatar), by Alaa Eddine Aljem is a dark comedy about a group of migrants who are looking to reach Eldorado, a secret utopian island where everyone lives in peace.
- ***I Am Here but You Can't See Me*** (Lebanon, Spain, France, Qatar) by Feyrouz Serhal is a fantasy set in the fictitious city of Beirut about Viola, a musician and the leader of an underground movement that is assassinating its corrupt leaders.
- ***The President's Cake*** (Iraq, USA, Qatar) by Hasan Hadi is about nine-year-old Saeed, who must use his wits to gather ingredients for the mandatory cake to celebrate President Saddam Hussein's birthday or face the consequences — prison or death.
- ***The Return of The Prodigal Son*** (Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, France, Qatar) by Rani Massalha is about Salem, 25, a Copt working as a pig farmer in the rag-pickers district of Manshyet Nasser. When the swine flu virus appears abroad, psychosis takes hold of Egypt and puts Salem to the test.
- ***The Dream Betrayed Me*** (Syria, France, Belgium, Germany, Qatar) by Mohammad Shaikhow follows Mesto, a 17-year-old boy who has but one dream—to join his city's football club in Qamishli, Syria, in 2004. A dream quashed by the fact that he is an undocumented Kurd.

MENA - Feature Narrative – Post-Production

- ***Wear & Tear*** (Tunisia, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Sarra Abidi is about Ayda, a 40-year-old woman who has worked in a call centre for over ten years. Several events occur in her life, pushing her to reconsider her entire existence in all its emptiness.
- ***Al Baseer – The Blind Ferryman*** (Iraq, Switzerland, Qatar) by Ali Al-Fatlawi is about Ayoub, a blind ferryman who lives in the endless Iraqi marshes. One night, he falls in love with a mysterious woman. But no one believes she is real, and he must prove his love exists.

Non-MENA – Feature Narrative – Post-Production

- ***Celebration*** (Croatia, Qatar) by Bruno Ankočić explores the life of Mijo and the circumstances that lead to an expansion of fascism and extremism both in history and today.
- ***Demba*** (Senegal, Germany, Qatar) by Mamadou Dia captures a civil registration officer at the town hall of his small city who struggles to overcome his grief. As his mental health deteriorates, he draws closer to his adult son.
- ***Disco Afrika: A Malagasy Story*** (Madagascar, France, Mauritius, Germany, South Africa, Qatar) by Luck Razanajaona is a story influenced by the moods and fashions of the 70s, inviting the audience to return to that era when many values and civic movements emerged.
- ***Locust*** (Taiwan, USA, France, Qatar) by KEFF is set during the 2019 Hong Kong protests erupting across the strait, when a mute twenty-something in Taipei struggles to find meaning in the injustice of everyday life.
- ***Shambhala*** (Nepal, France, Norway, Hong Kong, Turkey, Taiwan, USA, Qatar) by Min Bahadur Bham is set in a Himalayan village where a pregnant woman endures societal judgment about her child's legitimacy.

MENA – TV Series – Development

- ***The Blue Weddings*** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Samia Dzair is set in France, where an Algerian family celebrates the union of their eldest son with a young woman from their community. The following day, he is found dead in the wedding bed.
- ***My Sister and I*** (Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Qatar) by Zaid Abu Hamdan is set against the backdrop of the establishment of female education in Saudi Arabia, with two sisters using education to escape crushing poverty and patriarchy.

MENA – Short Narrative – Production

- ***Grandma Swim*** (Bahrain, USA, Qatar) by Maryam Mir is about Rana, an ocean-loving girl who attempts to convince her grandmother, Bushra, to swim in the sea for the first time in 50 years.
- ***Not Dead But Sleeping*** (Jordan, Sweden, UK, Qatar) by Arwa Aburawa and Turab Shah is set in Palestine in 2073. As the country celebrates one year since its liberation, Hajar grieves all that is lost—hope for real change and the death of her friend.
- ***Sociophobia*** (Tunisia, Qatar) by Malek Hebiri is an animated short about a seven-year-old boy who finds himself alone in a crowded street when people around him merge and become a gigantic monster.
- ***Underneath The Fig Tree*** (Egypt, USA, Qatar) by Nada Bedair is about 14-year-old Layla, who struggles to deal with what is expected of her as a “woman” in a conservative Muslim Egyptian community.

MENA – Short Narrative – Post-Production

- ***Civilization of Equality*** (Qatar) by Ibrahim Albuainain is an animated musical where a colourful group of animals spontaneously unite to sing harmoniously in a heartwarming yet earnest attempt to educate their human counterparts on the value of peace and equality.

MENA – Short Experimental – Production

- ***Abode of the Blessed*** (Qatar, France) by Majid Al-Remaihi is a hybrid portrait of the deserted archaeological island Failaka, off the coast of Kuwait, self-exiled from history after the Gulf War.
- ***Rabbat El Bait*** (Qatar) by Fatima Ahmad Abuhaliqa is about a struggling widow facing her fears to raise her daughter. It provides a glimpse of her seven steps to bring about a new generation of women and success for her family.
- ***The Land Was Well Past its Zenith*** (Lebanon, Qatar) by Rita Mahfouz is an experimental essay that wanders the streets of Beirut in 2023, four years after the beginning of the (ongoing and worsening) economic crisis and three years after the port explosion of 4 August.
- ***La Nuit a Peine*** (Tunisia, France, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar) by Wiame Haddad immerses audiences into the settings a few hours before the tragic Sabra and Shatila massacre. This docufiction follows the ordinary routines of camp life, juxtaposing intimate moments with its meticulously reconstructed surroundings.

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