

12 impactful features from 17 countries to spark curiosity and bridge cultures in 5th Ajyal Youth Film Festival Competition

- *Seven films in competition supported by the Institute through the grants and co-financing programmes*
- *Line-up includes festival award-winners and 10 MENA premieres*

Doha, Qatar; 19 November, 2017: From a heartwarming, animated portrait of an Afghan girl to the world's first fully painted feature film, an eclectic selection of 12 thought-provoking feature films are vying for top honours at the 5th Ajyal Youth Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute.

Set to inspire young audiences in the three jury categories of Mohaq, Hilal and Bader, this year's rousing feature films curated from across the globe brilliantly embody Ajyal's values of curiosity, empowerment, film, friendship and joy using creatively powerful narratives. All Ajyal jurors watch and analyse feature and short films in their respective categories, awarding Best Film prizes in all categories.

Underlining Doha Film Institute's commitment to support quality film productions, seven films in competition are backed by the institute, reinforcing Qatar's continued focus on promoting distinctive and compelling narratives of universal resonance.

Fatma Al Remaihi, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha Film Institute, said: "We have a fascinating range of feature films this year at Ajyal, selected for their ability to empower youth to explore their curiosity and find joy in new friendships through film. We are exceptionally proud that seven of these films are supported by the Doha Film Institute's commitment to film productions that stand out for their vision and creativity. These films truly represent the world we live in today – bringing us tales from far and near, about people and the sacrifices they make. Highlighting the healing power of storytelling, they are poignant takes on life that will inspire and move you."

Among the films in competition in the Mohaq category for jurors aged 8 to 12 are ***At Eye Level*** directed by Joachim Dollhopf and Evi Goldbrunner (Germany); ***Everyday Heroes*** by Anne-Dauphine Julliand (France); ***Liyana*** by Aaron Kopp and Amanda Kopp (Swaziland/ Qatar/ USA); and ***The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales*** by Benjamin Renner and Patrick Imbert (France).

In the Hilal category, to be evaluated by jurors aged 13 to 17, are ***Step*** directed by Amanda Lipitz (USA); the opening film of Ajyal, ***The Breadwinner*** by Nora Twomey (Canada/ Ireland/ Luxembourg); ***Walking Out*** by Alex Smith and Andrew J. Smith (USA); and ***Wallay*** by Berni Goldblat (France/ Burkina Faso/ Qatar).

Ajyal jurors aged 18 to 21 will evaluate four feature films in the Bader category. These are: ***Birds Like Us*** by Faruk Sabanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina/ Turkey/ UK/ USA/ Qatar); ***Disappearance*** by Ali Asgari (Iran/ Qatar); ***House in the Fields*** by Tala Hadid (Morocco/ Qatar); and ***Loving Vincent*** by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman (UK/ Poland), all co-financed by the Doha Film Institute.

The Mohaq Selection:

At Eye Level is a wonderful, at times humorous coming-of-age tale about acceptance and compassion of 10-year-old Michi, who is reunited with a father he has never known following the tragic death of his mother. After a brief stay in a less than pleasant group home for orphaned children, Michi gains the opportunity to meet his father, and despite his initial resentment, Michi comes around to find joy in love and acceptance.

Everyday Heroes presents the lives of five children, aged 6 to 9, who are relegated to living for the moment. With the humor and optimistic energy of childhood, they lead viewers into their world of play, joy, laughter, dreams, and illness. A film simply about life, from a child's eye view.

Supported by the Doha Film Institute, ***Liyana*** is the young heroine created by young orphans in Swaziland, where the scourge of AIDS has ravaged the population, leaving hundreds of thousands of children alone to fend for themselves. It adeptly transforms these children's real life adversity into a beautifully animated adventure story, paying tribute to the power of creativity, imagination and storytelling to heal.

The Big Bad Fox and Other Tales, by celebrated animator Benjamin Renner – known to Doha audiences for 2012's *Ernest & Celestine*, brings a combination of quick jokes, brilliantly timed silliness, the most unlikely of situations and the best in animated pratfalls, to deliver a rollicking laugh-a-minute movie. It charts the Honeysuckle Theatre playhouse, where a troupe of animal actors present three plays for the pleasure of the audience.

The Hilal Selection:

Ajyal's opening film, ***The Breadwinner*** is an animated drama executive produced by Angelina Jolie. Based on the best-selling novel by Deborah Ellis, the story is centered around the indomitable spirit of Parvana, a girl in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan who must disguise herself as a boy to work to support her mother and sister after her father is unjustly arrested.

Step documents the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, which is attempting to rectify the struggle that young girls endure to be successful in school despite their home life and the influence of their Baltimore community. It chronicles the trials and triumphs of the Senior girls on the high school's Step Team as they prepare to be the first in their families to go to college.

In ***Walking Out***, 14-year-old David and his estranged dad Cal are reunited for the first time in a year when David flies out to Montana for a visit. Clearly, there is a certain amount of friction between father and son – they communicate awkwardly. Cal has been tracking a moose but out in wilderness things don't go quite to plan, and a life-or-death battle between these would-be hunters and Mother Nature is set in motion.

In ***Wallay***, Ady is sent by his father to the family village in Burkina Faso. This will mark the first time the youth has trodden the soil of his paternal ancestors, and he is eager to go. However, the welcome he

receives from his Uncle Amadou is a rough one, and what Ady had imagined to be a holiday abroad becomes more like a forced stay.

The Bader Selection:

Loving Vincent brings the paintings of Vincent van Gogh to life to tell his remarkable story. Produced by Academy Award winning studios BreakThru Films and Trademark Films, each of the 65,000 frames of the film is an oil-painting hand-painted by 125 professional artists who travelled from across the world to the studios in Poland and Greece.

Birds Like Us is about the lovely bird Hupu, her silent husband Hasan, their ever-helpful baby-bird Mi and the bird tyrant Kondor, who are forced on an epic journey to find their way home. Guided by a blind and enigmatic bat, whose utterances only make the birds all the more anxious and angry, they come to rely on each other with utmost reluctance, as only together do they stand a chance of escape.

Set high in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, ***House in the Fields*** follows two teenage sisters as they discuss the possibilities and likelihoods of the future in an isolated rural Amazigh community that has changed little over the past millennium. Filmmaker Tala Hadid gained intimate access to this community in her quest to document their daily lives in visual form, preserving a culture constantly faced with the rapid changes of the larger society in which it exists.

Tickets are on sale and are priced QR25 for general screening. Tickets are available for purchase 24 hours a day at ajyalfilm.com or from the Ajyal Katara Main Box Office in Katara Building 12 or Ajyal FNAC Ticket Outlet, FNAC Qatar at Doha Festival City.

The Ajyal Youth Film Festival is made possible thanks to its partners: Cultural Partner, Katara Cultural Village, Principal Partners Occidental Petroleum Corporation and Ooredoo and Strategic Partner Qatar Tourism Authority. For more details on the Ajyal Youth Film Festival, please visit www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival

-END-

Note to Editors:

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 Youth 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.

Doha Film Institute

Twitter: @DohaFilm; Instagram: @DohaFilm; Facebook: www.facebook.com/DohaFilmInstitute