

Second Ajyal Talk examines how adversity can inspire social movements and ignite artistic expression

Doha, Qatar; December 3 2017: The second session of Ajyal Talks, the insightful discussions held as part of the Ajyal Youth Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, shone a light on how periods of struggle can lead to the rise of powerful social movements and inspire compelling works of art.

Shoug Shaheen, broadcast journalist, Abdulaziz Youssef, artist and co-founder of Qartoon and Mirsad Purivatra, Director of the Sarajevo Film Festival, shared their experience of this phenomenon during a discussion entitled '**Overcome: How Art Beats Adversity**'. It was moderated by Moeed Ahmad, a journalist at Al Jazeera.

The evening began with a short film that captured the response of Qataris and expatriate residents to news of the blockade that the country is currently experiencing. It then focussed on the spontaneous response of the country's creative community, talking to the artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers who produced many of the films, digital artworks and installations that are currently on display in Katara Building 19 as part of the 5th Ajyal Youth Film Festival.

The exhibition, **LeBlockade**, features work that was created for the most part in the immediate aftermath of the blockade. It captures the artists' common desire to defend their country and to present its position accurately, particularly as propaganda and fake news began to spread.

Ahmad introduced the speakers by talking about the 'soft' power of Art and its ability to change perceptions at home and around the world. "As one of the people in the film mentioned, art was reborn in Qatar because of this blockade," he said, "and this is at the heart of what tonight's discussion is all about."

Shoug Shaheen began by recalling her initial reaction to the news and how it made her want to make the world understand Qatar's position. "I discovered so many new artworks as a result of the blockade. Let's look at the positive side. It revived art and united the people even more. The greatest evidence is that we are all here tonight."

Abdulaziz Youssef also talked about how he turned to art and began to draw caricatures when he knew about the blockade. Normally, he said, he might draw one in a day. That day he drew 30. "I understood that I had a lot to say," he explained, and added that the unfairness of the blockade gave him the energy to work harder and faster. "Before it used to take me two or three weeks to draw a 30-second animation. Now I do the same thing in 2 or 3 hours."

Mirsad Purivatra, who lived through the 4-year siege of Sarajevo in the 1990's said that the way that he heard people in Qatar talk about the blockade and the way he had seen them react, especially the creative community, reminded him of what his generation had done during the war years in Bosnia.

"When the National Library in Sarajevo was bombarded, artists, musicians, writers, actors and film directors realised we had to be united, that we had to do something." This began with installations at the city's badly damaged Cultural Centre, which gave residents something to look forward to and culminated in 1995, in the creation of the Sarajevo Film Festival, in the middle of the siege. "Twenty-three years later, we are the biggest film festival in Europe and the people

who started it are still together, united, working without arguments. We wanted to tell the world that even with no electricity, water or food, Sarajevo would face them with dignity.”

The discussion, emotional at times and often stirringly patriotic, resonated with the audience, who occasionally drowned speakers out with their applause. The panel discussion was followed by an interactive Q&A session between speakers and the audience also moderated by Ahmad.

More **Ajyal Talks** will be held today at 4:30 pm at Katara Drama Theatre. **LeBlockade** can be visited at Katara Building 19 on Dec. 2-3 from 10 am to 10 pm and Dec. 4 from 10 am to 4 pm.

The 5th Ajyal Youth Film Festival runs until Dec. 4. Tickets are priced QR25 for general screening, and can be purchased 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.

Katara Cultural Village is the Cultural Partner of the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; Qatar Tourism Authority is the Strategic Partner, and Occidental Petroleum Corporation and Ooredoo are the Principal Partners. For more details on the Ajyal Youth Film Festival, please visit www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival

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About Doha Film Institute:

The 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

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