

## Short Filmmakers from the Region Share Perspectives on Arab Cinema at 8<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival

**Doha, Qatar; November 16 2020:** Shining a light on powerful voices from the Arab film scene, the Doha Film Institute's (DFI) 8th Ajyal Film Festival hosted short filmmakers from the region in a virtual discussion to speak on their compelling short films, narratives and personal inspirations.

Recipient of the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung for a German-Lebanese co-production and runner up for the Jury prize in the first Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region SundanceTV Shorts Competition, DFI-grantee ***How My Grandmother Became a Chair*** (Germany, Lebanon, Qatar/2020) by Nicolas Fattouh tells the story of an ageing grandmother that loses her five senses and in the process develops a closer bond with her faithful housekeeper.

At an online press briefing, Fattouh touched on the film's timeless reflection on age, family, and legacy: "My debut film originated from a personal life story that goes beyond the central story line of the grandmother and tackles notions of social justice, as well as the very concept of family. Its narrative highlights the condition of household staff and their role in the family, particularly in light of the added hardships resulting from the pandemic. Through animation film, I hope to convey these important topics to the youth, to make them understand that family is not only defined by bloodlines but rather through our shared humanity and kindness."

Palestinian filmmaker and cinematographer, Ibrahim Handal, spoke about his short ***Bethlehem 2001*** (Palestine/2020) which follows a young Palestinian's recollection of childhood memories of the military invasion and siege of Bethlehem. Handal said: "My story is inspired by my personal archive of pictures as well as my childhood memories living in Bethlehem – it's both a very intimate recollection and a reflection on life in Palestine today."

Ghadi Al Alam's experimental short ***Quarantine*** (Lebanon/2020) transports audiences to Beirut, which has become a veritable ghost town under quarantine orders. A former Ajyal Bader juror, Al Alam commented on the Festival's influence on his growth as a filmmaker: "Judging films and interacting with their creators at Ajyal gave me a new perspective and allowed me to view my own work through an analytic lens rather than a purely emotive one. I am honoured that my film is now featured as part Ajyal's culturally enriching, high-quality film lineup to inspire a new generation and tell my story to the world."

A blend of stop-motion animation with traditional and computer animation, ***Falafel Cart*** (Kuwait/2019) by Abdullah Al-Wazzan follows a lonely immigrant falafel vendor who stumbles upon a mysterious flower that whirls him into memories of his past. Al-Wazzan, a Kuwaiti film director, screenwriter and film producer, said: "The theme of the falafel, a typical food of the Levant, represents the notion of home and serves as a symbolic reminder that reconnects the main character with his far-away home and allows him to move forward."

Part of this year's Made in Qatar presented by Ooredoo programme ***Smile You Deserve It*** (Qatar/2020) by Ibrahim Albuainain follows a cheerful and upbeat farmer teaching his cynical neighbour a beautiful life lesson - that work done with joy and perseverance always bears the best harvest. Albuainain, a Qatari director, writer and producer, noted: "Through the juxtaposition of positive and negative, represented by the two main characters, the film

**AJYAL FILM FESTIVAL 2020**

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GOES ON**

**العرض يستمر  
GOES ON**

touches on the historic culture of agriculture in the region and conveys the central importance of optimism in overcoming life's challenges."

This year's carefully curated selection of Arab short films at Ajyal 2020 explores life through compelling cinematic dialogue – amplifying emerging storytellers from the region who deliver fresh perspectives to the silver screen to delight and inspire audiences of all ages.

For up-to-date information and ticket reservation, visit: [www.dohafilminstitute.com/festival](http://www.dohafilminstitute.com/festival).

2020 Ajyal Film Festival's Official Partners include: **Katara Cultural Village Foundation** – Cultural Partner; **Qatar National Tourism Council** – Principal Partner; **Novo Cinemas, Ooredoo** – Strategic Partner, **Msheireb Properties, Lusail, Qatari Diar** – Signature Sponsors.

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**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 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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