

18 Qatari Directors and Qatar-based Filmmakers Foster Artistic Dialogue at 8th Ajyal Film Festival

Doha, Qatar; November 18 2020: A one-of-a-kind platform for aspiring local filmmakers, the 8th Ajyal Film Festival, presented by Doha Film Institute (DFI), features 16 inspiring films by 18 Qatari directors and Qatar-based filmmakers as part of the 2020 **Made in Qatar** programme presented by Ooredoo.

Suzannah Mirghani, director of ***Al-Sit*** (Sudan, Qatar/2020), remarked that her short is about female empowerment in Sudan where young village women often become the head of the household once their husband dies, creating a surprising culture of matriarchy.

Obada Yousef Jarbi, director of ***Woman of Steel*** (Jordan, Qatar/2020), about a tireless mother who takes to the streets collecting and selling scrap metal as a means of providing for her family, emphasised that “we have a certain description for women especially in the Arab world, but it is the woman who defines herself and makes her own choices. With the film, I wanted to challenge the image of women in the Middle East and focus on their true agency.”

Abdulaziz Yousif, director of ***Ya Hoota*** (Qatar/2019), the story of a curious little girl and her cousin attempting to save the moon from a gigantic whale, said: “The film is set at a time when kids still had personal relationships and communications without mobile phones to showcase the benefits of reduced screen time.”

Speaking on the value of short films, Muhammed Noufal, director of ***Shringar*** (Qatar/2020), said: “Children often cannot digest long feature films, so shorts are a perfect medium to communicate important messages to the next generation. My story spotlights the topic of child labour and exploitation, and I am hopeful that Ajyal’s international exposure will help raise awareness.”

Hissa G. Al-Mannai, director of ***Beyond Broken Walls*** (Qatar/2020), about an artist’s internal struggle with self-expression, noted that “as a filmmaker, I can relate to the artist in the story and his creative struggle to find a way to authentically express himself.”

On her artful coming-of-age story ***Under Her Skin*** (Qatar, France, Algeria/2020), Meriem Mesraoua said: “When you recreate a very personal story through film, it is important to find a balance between the personal and fictionalising it to gain relevance for a wider audience.”

Yasser Mustafa, director of ***Stranger*** (Qatar, France/2020), praised DFI’s support to local filmmakers, saying: “We have a wonderful artistic community here in Qatar, which generates positive competition and mutual support. Through DFI, we can all grow as creatives and derive inspiration from one another. Through the filmmaking process, I soon learned that I had to reveal my own narrative to understand the character and allow him to unfold on camera.”

Noor Al-Asswad, director of ***Under the Lemon Tree*** (Qatar, Palestine/2020), touched on the relationship between the main actress and the character: “I wanted to cast someone who not only understands the Palestinian history but also truly believes in our right of return. Her authenticity, nostalgia and real-life memories came alive in the film.”

Joining the press briefing virtually, Mariam Al-Dhubhan discussed her latest film **No Words** (Yemen, Qatar, UK/2020), which was remotely shot in the heavily contested city of Taiz in Yemen. She commented: “By telling our stories from our own perspectives, we serve our communities and depict the reality of our home-country – not the image the media creates. Shooting the film from a fisheye perspective without being in the country myself, amidst the pandemic, posed a new challenge, particularly filming in a place where militia would rather have people hold weapons than cameras. In many ways, the filmmaking experience and the audience perspective – observing without being able to act – reflects the realities for the people on the ground.”

The **Made in Qatar** programme at Ajyal 2020 celebrates the exciting state of filmmaking in Qatar with a thrilling short narratives, animations and documentaries that captivate audiences of all ages and deliver enduring messages of hope and perseverance.

For up-to-date information and ticket reservation, visit: 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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