

Press Release

## Doha Film Institute Announces Fall 2015 Grant Recipients: 30 projects from 19 countries to receive funding

- *Represented MENA countries include Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia*
- *3 animation projects selected reflecting growing importance of genre in the region*
- *Filmmakers from Peru receive grant for the first time*
- *Submissions for next funding round open January 6 to 19, 2016*

**Doha, Qatar; December 21, 2015:** The Doha Film Institute today announced recipients of the Fall 2015 session of its grants programme following the Dubai International Film Festival, where 15 of the Institute's previous grantees, 4 of which are world premieres, were showcased.

Thirty projects from 19 countries – comprising 16 feature-length narrative films, 10 feature documentaries and 4 short films – will receive funding for development, production or post-production.

The Fall session marks the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the grants programme, which is dedicated to supporting new cinematic talent, with a focus on first- and second-time filmmakers.

Twenty-four of the projects are from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, while 6 are from the rest of the world. For the first time, filmmakers from Chile, Peru and Spain will receive funding from the programme.

Stories of displacement, physical or spiritual journeys, tales of family life, the power of nature and the importance of protecting the environment are highlighted in the selections this Fall.

Four projects from Qatar-based filmmakers were awarded grants – Hafiz Ali Abdullah's **The Search for the Star Pearl**, about a young pearl diver from Doha who discovers a map to the most valuable gem on Earth, and sets sail with three teenaged friends in search of it; Hamida Al Kawari's **To the Ends of the Earth** – the first Qatari feature documentary to receive a grant from the Institute – which follows a Qatari woman on an environmental expedition to Antarctica in search of hope; A.J. Al Thani's **Kashta**, a family drama about a father who takes his sons out into the desert to teach them about hunting and survival; and Hend Fakhroo's **The Waiting Room**, about an Arab and a Western family who find themselves sharing a hospital room.

Among the 30 projects selected for funding, 5 are from Morocco – Fyzal Boulifa's **Pagan Magic**, the story of a poor youngster working as a maid for a middle-class family; second-time grantee Uda Benyamina's **Bastard**, about a 15-year-old girl who lives with her mother in a rough Parisian suburb; Yakout Elhababi's **Behind the Doors**, which looks at family life and childhood set high in the Rif mountains of Morocco; Hind Bensari's **Weight Throwers**, a documentary look at the struggles of two young athletes as they train for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro; and **Behind The Wall**, by Karima Zoubir, a short film set in a Casablanca slum.

Also featuring strongly are three animation projects – established filmmaker Haifaa Al Mansour's **Miss Camel**, the story of a teenage Saudi camel who challenges the deep-rooted restrictions of her culture by travelling across the kingdom to compete in the Miss Camel beauty pageant in Doha;

Mortada Gzar's **Language**, about a blind man on the streets of Baghdad who wakes up as a giant and reads the devastation of the city by touch; and Hafiz Ali Abdullah's **The Search for the Star Pearl**.

As in several previous sessions of the grants programme, powerful projects from Argentina have also secured funding. Milagros Mumenthaler's Swiss/Argentinian film **The Idea of a Lake** is about a photographer who undergoes a personal exploration of her past and the absence of her father while creating a book of her work, while Maximiliano Schonfeld's **The Black Frost** is a drama set on a plantation where a pernicious black frost threatens to devastate the countryside until a mysterious woman arrives.

Continuing the environmental theme, Heidi Brandenburg and Mathew Orzel's **When Two Worlds Collide** is the story of an indigenous Peruvian man and his people, and of the fate of one of our planet's most valuable natural resources – the Amazon rainforest. The film, which has its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in January, is the first-ever Peruvian recipient of a grant from the Institute.

Fatma Al Remaihi, CEO of the Doha Film Institute, said: "Our Fall grantees cover a broad range of subjects and represent some powerful new voices in cinema, especially from Qatar and North Africa with several projects supported from Morocco and Algeria."

"Animated films are very popular in our region so it is very encouraging to see an acclaimed filmmaker like Haifaa Al Mansour turn her skills to this important genre; we support two other animated projects in this grants cycle as well."

"Our grantees represent the core of the Doha Film Institute's mandate to support emerging filmmakers and contribute to the development of the regional film industry. We have supported more than 255 films since the inception of the grants programme and we continue to seek out projects with a strong directorial vision that are challenging, creative and thought-provoking. Our new round of grantees is no exception and I am delighted to welcome this outstanding crop of projects to our growing community of grantee alumni."

Submissions for the next funding round open January 6 and close January 19, 2016. Funding is available to projects by filmmakers from around the world, with an emphasis on support for filmmakers from the MENA region. Certain categories of funding reserved for MENA and Qatari filmmakers.

The fund is primarily for first and second-time filmmakers. Post-production funding is available to established filmmakers from the MENA region.

For more information about eligibility and submissions, please visit <http://www.dohafilminstitute.com/financing/grants/guidelines>

A full directory of past grant recipients is available to view at <http://www.dohafilminstitute.com/financing/projects/grants>

The Doha Film Institute Grants Programme funding recipients for the Fall 2015 session are:

## **Feature Narrative / Development**

### **Death Street by Mohanad Hayal (Iraq)**

Tariq, the sniper of Haifa Street in Baghdad, kills Ahmed on his wedding day. While Tariq prevents anyone from approaching the corpse in the street, an intimate and telling drama unfolds.

### **Miss Camel by Haifaa Al Mansour (Saudi Arabia)**

A teenaged Saudi camel challenges the deep-rooted restrictions of her culture by travelling across the kingdom to compete in the Miss Camel beauty pageant in Doha.

**Pagan Magic by Fyzal Boulifa (Morocco, France)**

A young, poor and uneducated girl works as a maid for a middle-class family in contemporary Morocco. Her use of pagan rites to confront her entrapment and make sense of her world ultimately corrupt her.

**The Search for the Star Pearl by Hafiz Ali Abdullah (Qatar)**

Ali, a 17-year-old pearl diver from Doha, discovers a map to the Star Pearl of Abu Derya, the most valuable gem on Earth, and sets sail with three teenaged friends in search of the pearl. Along the way, they face mythological beasts that challenge their skills and friendship.

**Feature Narrative / Production**

**Cactus Flower by Hala Elkoussy (Egypt)**

A flood leaves three Cairenes homeless. As they journey across the city in search of shelter, they depend upon one another to survive and keep their dreams alive.

**Poisonous Roses by Fawzi Saleh (Egypt)**

The world has left nothing to Taheya apart from her brother Saqr. When he disappears, Taheya pursues him in desperation.

**The Return by Meyar Al-Roumi (Syria, France)**

A love story blossoms between Taysir and Lina, exiles from Syria, while they drive across their homeland to bury Taysir's brother, a victim of the armed conflict.

**Till the Swallows Return by Karim Moussaoui (Algeria, France)**

This is the story of three characters who are a product of the conflicted Algeria of the 2000s. Their ideals shattered and their moral strength drained, each now faces a difficult life choice.

**Feature Narrative / Post-production**

**Bastard by Uda Benyamina (Morocco, France)**

Fifteen-year-old Dounia lives with her mother in a rough Parisian suburb, where she has been saddled with the nickname "bastard".

**The Black Frost by Maximiliano Schonfeld (Argentina)**

Soon after a mysterious woman arrives on a plantation, a pernicious black frost ceases to devastate the countryside. Hope emerges. Might she be a saviour?

**Blue Bicycle by Ümit Köreken (Turkey)**

Young Ali saves up all the money he can working at a tyre repair shop to buy a coveted blue bicycle. Meanwhile, at school, his love for his schoolmate Elif leads him to defend her dismissal as school president. A story of childish love, dreams and resistance.

**The Dark Wind by Hussein Hassan (Iraq)**

Radical Islamists attack a village in Iraq where two young Yazidis are preparing for their marriage. At that moment, their lives become a nightmare.

**The Idea of a Lake (*note: previously titled Air Pocket*) by Milagros Mumenthaler (Switzerland, Argentina)**

Inés, a photographer, is creating a book of her work. Gradually, the process becomes a personal exploration of her past and the absence of her father, who was disappeared during the military dictatorship in Argentina.

**The Mimosas by Oliver Laxe (Spain, Morocco, France)**

In the Atlas Mountains in the past, a caravan searches for the path to take a Sufi master home to die. Among the party is Ahmed, a rascal who eventually becomes inspired to lead the caravan to its destination. Along the way, he is assisted by Shakib, a man sent from contemporary Morocco to guide Ahmed on his journey.

**Rey (King) by Niles Atallah (Chile)**

In 1860, a French lawyer dreamed of becoming the King of Patagonia – and he did just that. Or so it seemed.

**Suspension by Ala Eddine Slim (Tunisia)**

N is a candidate for an illegal crossing of the Mediterranean from Tunisia. A supernatural voyage, during which N will confront Nature and himself, begins.

## **Feature Documentary / Development**

**Agnus Dei by Karim Sayad (Algeria, Switzerland)**

In Algeria, Ali and his sheep, bought for slaughter on Eid Al-Adha, are getting ready for the fight. Once the bets are in, the referee invites the owners into the ring...

**Behind the Doors by Yakout Elhababi (Morocco)**

High in the Rif mountains of Morocco, the people survive by growing kif. Beneath the shadow of the ambiguous legality of the crop, 'Behind the Doors' tells the story of a family through its children and their mirroring games.

**The Great Family by Eliane Raheb (Lebanon)**

In 1976, at the age of four, Marlene was put up for adoption in Lebanon and raised in France. In delving into her past, she discovers she is a survivor of the massacre at the Tal Al-Zaatar Palestinian refugee camp, and a family of survivors grows around her.

## **Feature Documentary / Production**

### **The Colonel's Stray Dogs by Khalid Shamis (Libya, South Africa)**

While director Khalid Shamis watched television in his suburban London home, his father was plotting the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in his study. When the regime fell, Shamis sought answers about Libya under Gaddafi and his father's role in its failed liberation.

### **Ibrahim by Lina Alabed (Jordan)**

'Ibrahim' uncovers the long journey of the director's father as a young man, when he was a secret member of Abu Nidal, a militant Palestinian revolutionary organisation.

### **Searching for Janitou by Mohamed El Amine hattou (Algeria)**

A journey to unravel love in past and contemporary Algeria by exploring the unique phenomenon of a Bollywood film that swept the country in the 1980s.

### **To the Ends of the Earth by Hamida Al Kawari (Qatar)**

A Qatari woman travels on an environmental expedition to Antarctica in search of hope, before returning to the Gulf and finding unity and inspiration for positive change.

### **Weight Throwers by Hind Bensari (Morocco)**

'Weight Thowers' follows the struggles of Azzedine and Youssef, disabled members of Morocco's unemployed and disillusioned young generation, as they struggle to train for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

## **Feature Documentary / Post-production**

### **Tadmor by Lokman Slim, Monika Borgmann (Lebanon)**

A group of Lebanese men re-enact the ordeals they experienced as detainees in Syria's notorious Tadmor prison. An ode to the human will to survive.

### **When Two Worlds Collide by Heidi Brandenburg, Mathew Orzel (Peru)**

A story of a man and a people, and of the fate of one of our planet's most valuable natural resources – the Amazon rainforest.

## **Short Narrative / Production**

### **Behind the Wall by Karima Zoubir (Morocco)**

Nadia, a little girl, lives in a Casablanca slum that is surrounded by a wall. One day, the municipality begins to paint the wall – but why this sudden interest?

### **Kashta by A.J. Al Thani (Qatar)**

A father takes his two sons out to the desert to learn about hunting and survival, but the results are not quite what he was expecting.

### **Language by Mortada Gzar (Iraq)**

An old blind man walks through the streets of Baghdad, then falls asleep while reading a book in Braille. When he wakes up, he finds he has become a giant and reads the devastation of the city by touch.

**The Waiting Room by Hind Fakhroo (Qatar)**

An Arab family and a Western family find themselves sharing a hospital room; the only thing that separates them is a curtain.

**-ENDS-**

**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

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