

Intense films on human resilience and hope to be screened at the 9th Ajyal Film Festival on Wednesday

- Films such as *'Costa Brava, Lebanon'* and *'Little Palestine, Diary of a Siege'* present intriguing slice-of-portrayals
- Ajyal 2021 also presents the first Drive-in Cinema at Lusail experience of this year with the Qatar premiere of *'Maya the bee 3: The Golden Orb'* on Wednesday

Doha, Qatar; November 9, 2021: The ninth Ajyal Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, is bringing a diverse showcase of films for the community on Wednesday (Nov. 10), including slice-of-life stories from Palestine and Lebanon, as well as award-winning works that underline human resilience and reiterate the power of hope.

Among the highlights is the screening of ***Costa Brava, Lebanon*** (Lebanon, France, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Qatar/2021), directed by Mounia Akl. The winner of a NETPAC Award at Toronto International Film Festival this year, the film will be screened at 7 PM at Katara Opera House.

The movie, which makes its Middle East Premiere at Ajyal, is about the free-spirited Badri family, who escape the overwhelming pollution and social unrest of Beirut by seeking refuge in a utopic mountain home they built for themselves. Unexpectedly, an illegal garbage landfill begins construction right next door, and with it comes the very trash and corruption they were seeking to escape.

Addressing a press conference, director Mounia Akl said the film's title itself offers the stark irony with 'Costa Brava' being derived from the scenic coastal region in Spain, and the evolution of its namesake region in Lebanon of being a landfill. She said the film also conveys a message of hope, as she personally likes films "that provide a sense that something can change. *Costa Brava, Lebanon* is a love letter to my city and that I feel is a sign of hope."

Unlike her earlier and much acclaimed film, *Submarine*, which presented a dystopian vision of the future, she said in the making of *Costa Brava, Lebanon*, there was a strong sense of disturbing reality already closing in. "With *Submarine*, I was presenting how my own worst fears could manifest as reality and imagining what was the worst that could happen."

By 2020, she said, several depictions had already become real, such as the pandemic, people living with masks and the economic collapse. "When I started pre-production work, I realised that the present-day reality was worse than the dystopian view." For the film, the crew collaborated with a number of non-governmental organisations "to create green protocols as so much of the film was waste related. We started shooting a green mountain and then in a landfill in Lebanon, and then worked with visual effects stitching together the two," said Mounia.

Little Palestine, Diary of a Siege (Lebanon, France, Qatar/2021), also making its Middle East Premiere at Ajyal 2021, will be screened at 8.30 PM at Vox Cinemas at Doha Festival City. Directed by Abdallah Al-Khatib, it won the Interreligious Award at Visions du Réel Film Festival 2021. The film is set in Yarmouk in Damascus, which sheltered the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the world from 1957 to 2018. Filmmaker Al-Khatib, born in Yarmouk, documents the besieged inhabitants'

daily lives, who chose to face bombing, displacement and hunger with rallying, study, music, love and joy.

Do not miss the home premiere of **Orca** (Qatar, Iran/2021) directed by Sahar Mossayebi at 8 PM at Katara Drama Theatre. The film is about Elham, a divorced Iranian woman, who survives a horrific beating at the hands of her husband. Haunted by the traumatic experience and seeking to rediscover herself, she finds solace and salvation in the open expanse of water.

At VOX Cinemas at Doha Festival City, watch **Asteroid** (Iran/2021), directed by Mehdi Hoseinivand Aalipour, about Ebrahim, who is only twelve years of age but bears much of the responsibility for his household of five younger siblings with his mother. It is an earnest family drama with genuine heartfelt moments between a talented young cast. The winner of the Best Film Award at Fajr International Film Festival, it will make its Middle East Premiere at 5 PM.

Another not to miss film, which won the FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes Un Certain Regard 2021, is **Playground** (Belgium/2021), also a Middle East Premiere. Directed by Laura Wandel, the film is about 7-year-old Nora and her big brother Abel, who are back to school. When Nora witnesses Abel being bullied, she rushes to protect him by warning their father. A powerfully authentic look at the micro-society of a schoolyard, the film shows the realities of growing up and the integration of the self in broader society. It will be screened at Vox Cinemas at 8 PM.

Supported by the Doha Film Institute is **School of Hope** (Finland, France, Morocco, Qatar/2020), which won the Special Jury Prize at Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival 2021. Directed by Mohamed El Aboudi, the film is set in the vast expanse of desert, East of Atlas Mountains in Morocco, where seasonal rain and snow once supported livestock, but now the drought seems to never end. Families must travel to get water from a muddy hole in the ground. Yet the children willingly walk for miles to a “school of hope” built of clay. The film will be screened at 4.30 PM at VOX Cinemas

The Ajyal Drive-in Cinema at Lusail returns with the first screening on Wednesday at 6.30 PM of **Maya the Bee 3: The Golden Orb** (Australia/2021) which is making its premiere in Qatar. Directed by Noel Cleary, the film is about Maya, a headstrong little bee, and her best friend, Willi, who rescue an ant princess, but find themselves in the middle of an epic bug battle that will take them to strange new worlds and test their friendship to its limits.

Tickets for Ajyal 2021 and can be purchased at www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival.

The seven-day festival until Nov. 13, 2021, has a diverse mix of virtual and in-person events including film screenings, interactive discussions, multi-media art exhibit, Qatar’s largest pop-culture event Geekdom, and a drive-in cinema as part of a multisensory experience for all ages.

-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 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.

Ajyal Film Festival

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Doha Film Institute:

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About Ajyal Film Festival:

Ajyal Film Festival is an annual celebration of film designed to nurture young minds and support the development of mindful global citizens and thoughtful future leaders. 'Ajyal', Arabic for 'generations', brings people of all ages together through screenings and events that inspire creative interaction and stimulate cinematic dialogue.

Ajyal Film Festival builds on the Doha Film Institute's history of community-based programming. Through its jury programme, youth between the ages of 8 and 25 are given an opportunity to watch, analyse and discuss global cinema and culture, developing self-confidence, independent critical thinking skills, self-expression, and an appreciation of cinema, while making new friends and discovering global cultures.

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