

The bold voice of Qatar's filmmakers is amplified at Ajyal Film Festival 2021

- *Young filmmakers from Qatar assert that their films are here to elevate 'a wide spectrum, unique experience of culture'*
- *'Without the patriarchal challenges common in the film industry in many other places, our young and vibrant cinematic culture is thriving,' they said*

Doha, Qatar; November 10, 2021: *Made in Qatar*, the popular showcase of film talent from Qatar opened last night in the presence of Her Excellency Sheikha Al-Mayassa, Chairperson of Doha Film Institute and other distinguished guests including this year's jury members Sheila Vand, Ahmed Al Baker and Farah Nabulsi.

DFI CEO and Festival Director Fatma Hassan Alremaihi said, "Year after year, amazing talents from Qatar tell compelling stories of, in and from our nation through film, and secure our place on the world stage. We have seen promising new talent create their first piece of cinema and continue to follow their evolution to become confident filmmakers with unique voices that resonate across the world. These films reflect the diversity of our nation and the region, the richness of our culture and traditions, and the evolution of our country to its rightful position on the world stage."

In a media conversation with Qatar's young filmmakers at the ninth Ajyal Film Festival, presented by the Doha Film Institute, the bar was raised with a clear understanding of cinema and strong passion and conviction to present stories that deliver a 'wide spectrum, unique experience of culture.'

The ten promising filmmakers who call the country home who will have their films screened as part of the Made in Qatar Programme, presented by Ooredoo, explained their thought processes on why they chose to be filmmakers, their aspirations and inspirations, and why Qatar's emerging cinema industry offers a compelling platform for youth to explore new frontiers in filmmaking.

Majid Al Remaihi, whose film ***And Then They Burn the Sea* (Qatar/2021)**, an ode to his mother who suffered from gradual and terminal memory loss over the course of many years, set the tempo by highlighting that the cinematic content they make reflects the vibrant youth and promise of the industry in Qatar. He stated that the work "needs to be nurtured, and if we rush into big production just to focus on international exposure, we may really hurt ourselves in the end."

About his own film, Al Remaihi said he didn't intend to convey just one message. "I was thinking on a couple levels: One, about what cinema as a medium allows me to express; secondly, as the son of a mother going through memory loss. Cinema is a language; it doesn't have to have a social or political message. It can be about evoking feelings and enriching experiences that go beyond the dramatic. It is sensory and transport you to other places."

Ania Hendryx Wójtowicz, the director of ***Fever Dream* (Qatar, Poland, USA/2021)**, a documentary about a reality that is stranger than fiction, said that Qatar offers an environment that encourages young people to continue to build on their passion for making films. "A lot of people on this panel [the Made in Qatar Programme] have been making films for years. There is consistency and that shows maturity." She said Qatar is "a melting pot, super-international and diverse and my film presents an

experience of the fears, isolation and uncertainty following the pandemic, which in a way unified everyone across the world. It speaks to a universal process.”

Echoing the sentiment of universality in the themes of their films was Shaima Al-Tamimi, whose film ***Don't Get Too Comfortable*** (Yemen, UAE, USA, Netherlands, Qatar/2021), contemplates the continuous pattern of movement amongst Yemenis in the diaspora. “My film comes from a personal perspective and everything that was said about Yemen. What I noticed is that we can be too afraid to take ownership of our narrative. I wanted to share space with the audience and the community and to see Yemen from personal perspectives rather than as statistical numbers.”

Fatma Zahra Abderrahim, whose film ***A Lens Under Water*** (Qatar/2021) takes an eye-opening and colourful dive into the teeming coastal waters of Qatar, said her film's theme – the environment - is also universal. “Diversity is not only about differences; it is also about with the various messages in our films or being able to receive a message in a various manner. Our project about the beauty of the environment and underwater life is something that matters on a big scale to everyone. Our environment unifies us all, and the important message is that as filmmakers, we help people understand us through our films.”

The filmmakers said they are not pursuing movies as a one-time endeavour. There is a lot of support in Qatar - especially from the Doha Film Institute to nurture local talent. “It takes a lot of research and inspiration, and our filmmakers don't participate in Ajyal just once.” They said they benefit from the absence of the patriarchal challenges common to the industry in other places. “Qatar has a bold young film culture and that encourages us to push boundaries.”

Other films in the Made in Qatar programme include: ***Border*** (Qatar/2021) by Khalifa Al Thani is a DFI supported film, set in an abstrusely dystopian future, where a man wishes to return to his family; ***Kan Fe Nas*** (Qatar, Lebanon/2021) by Mohamed Al Hamadi, which documents the stories of Lebanese people as they endure daily hardships; ***Virtual Voice*** (Qatar, Sudan/2021) by Suzannah Mirghani, a digital-savvy and satirical review of our online times; ***Atlal (Remnants)*** (Qatar/2021) by Balkees Al-Jaafari and Tony El Ghazal, which follows a wistful Palestinian man who embarks on a trip down memory lane to the pivotal locations of his life in Qatar; ***When Beirut was Beirut*** (Qatar, Lebanon/2021) by Alessandra El Chanti, an animated documentary; and ***Olayan*** (Qatar/2021) by Khalifa Al-Marri, follows a Bedouin boy named Hamad who forms a bond with a new-born camel.

Watch the next screening of the 10 Made in Qatar films on Thursday, Nov. 11, 8.30 PM at Vox Cinemas, Doha Festival City. Tickets for Ajyal 2021 and can be purchased at www.dohafilminstitute.com/filmfestival.

The seven-day festival, which runs 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.

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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

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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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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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