



INDEPENDENT SHORT FILMS AND MEDIA ART



Sprache, Kultur, Deutschland

ARAB SHORTS: INDEPENDENT SHORT FILMS AND MEDIA ART

A VISUAL ARTS INITIATIVE OF THE GOETHE-INSTITUT IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

IMPRESSUM

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EDITORIAL NOTE

All films from Arab Shorts 2009, 2010 and 2011 have been included in this publication. Apart from the introduction, all texts in this book were taken from www.arabshorts.net and from festival booklets and handouts produced in the project.

The editors wish to thank the curators, the filmmakers, the guests, our audiences, our assistants, and our colleagues at the Goethe-Institut head office Munich, in Cairo and in the Middle East and North Africa and all friends and supporters. Special thanks to Fabian Mühlthaler.

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INTRODUCTION ARAB SHORTS

It all started with an encounter, an idea, and an experiment. On December 9, 2009, the Goethe-Institut Kairo opened a "film festival" entitled Arab Shorts. Over three days, eleven Arab curators presented nine film programs, showcasing a previously little known cultural production: so-called "independent" films from the Arab world that are not feature-length but develop their themes in the span of three, twenty or forty minutes, using unusual and partly experimental forms. In a single event, the festival thus brought into focus and made visible a surprisingly large cultural scene that had been little noticed, widely dispersed and working mostly in isolation. It had been there and yet it was new, even to arts and culture professionals.

The idea for Arab Shorts had been discussed in the months leading up to the festival with a group of Arab film experts. Marcel Schwierin, a Berlin-based film curator working with the well-known German festivals in Oberhausen, Halle, and Berlin, had come to Cairo with an idea. Schwierin was interested in online formats that were just starting to become popular in the film world. His idea - showing films not just in movie theaters, but putting them on the worldwide web and thus making them accessible to everyone with Internet access - caught on. Technological developments had made it possible and conceivable to reach an unprecedented number of people. The experiment moved in a promising direction: After the close of the festival, more than sixty films had been uploaded to the new website www.arabshorts.net, with the number of films growing to almost 100 by 2011. A newly curious audience had been gained, an innovative "tool" had become available.

The next obvious step was to imagine all the new and exciting possibilities that this project opened up for the international cultural exchange. In the past, European festival curators (filmmakers, film critics or film aficionados) had to go to great lengths to get hold of a preview copy, whereas now the material was just a mouse click away.

Cultural exchange, however, is based above all on real meetings between real people. We had merely taken a first step and began to think about how to activate a longer-term process of open exchange. It seemed worthwhile to expand the Arab Shorts project. Over the course of three years, curated programs were developed by new and old contributors from almost all Arab countries, who were free to choose their thematic focus. Two more "festivals" took place in Cairo, individual viewings were held in Helsinki, Damascus, Berlin and elsewhere, and new components were added. Arab film curators visited German festivals and film institutions as part of the Goethe-Institut's Visitors Program. In turn, German festival representatives and film experts traveled to Cairo, where they presented guest programs, talked about their festivals, and, in a project-related "Viewing Lounge" (that took its cue from the film market databases at big festivals), viewed additional productions from the world of independent Arab shorts.

What began as a tool for filmmakers developed into a driver of cultural exchange which spawned a vast number of contacts, visits, events, publications, and stays. Although the "festivals" in Cairo were undeniably modest in terms of aspiration and size, five-day events with some forty international guests from the world of film and a sold-out audience created a social space where it was possible to learn from each other and create something new.

From the perspective of cultural policy, independent shorts originate in a milieu outside of state structures, with little or no economic support. What counts most of all is the determination the filmmakers bring to their projects. Working under adverse circumstances, they aim to give aesthetic form to narratives that are dear to their hearts. That this particular aesthetic practice also meets a social function can be seen clearly from the 139 films that make up the Arab Shorts project. It is a well-worn truism that globalization creates a tendency to homogenize cultural production. And yet it is also accompanied

by a complementary development, pitting the specificity of concrete individual, social, and political situations against the uniformity of global media images. The films that form part of the Arab Shorts project attest to the poignancy of these efforts, providing images that we normally don't get to see, capturing a reality that would otherwise be closed to us. Through their thematic and formal breadth, they show us an "Arab world as it really is – humane and diverse" (Süddeutsche Zeitung). It is our hope that these film images make it possible for the viewer to arrive at a more differentiated perspective on "the Arab world" – a perspective that, since 2011, has become more important than ever.

One of the most serendipitous consequences of the project is a collaboration with the Berlin-based Arsenal - 'Institut für Film und Videokunst' (Institute for Film and Media Art). Starting in summer 2012, a selection of Arab Shorts will be made available through its distribution arm, "arsenal distribution." Arab Shorts has not only strengthened the cultural exchange within the North Africa and Middle East regions, but also between Germany and the Arab world.

It would be impossible to list the innumerable encounters and communications that occurred in the context of the Arab Shorts project over the course of three years. We are grateful to every single person who has contributed to the project, in particular to the 21 Arab curators, the 118 filmmakers, the artistic director Marcel Schwierin, the representatives of Arab and German film festivals, and Stefanie Schulte Strathaus from the board of 'Arsenal.' Their commitment and friendliness, their openness and enthusiasm have been a huge encouragement and have brought the project a long way.

Cairo, spring 2012

Günther Hasenkamp Ghada El-Sherbiny Antje Klesse

ASSEMBLING, FRAMING, COMPOSING



INTERVIEW (2010) WITH MARCEL SCHWIERIN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF ARAB SHORTS

Marcel Schwierin is a Berlin-based filmmaker and curator. As a filmmaker he has made a name for himself both in Germany and abroad with his film Ewige Schönheit. Vision und Todessehnsucht im Dritten Reich (Eternal Beauty: Vision and Death Wish in the Third Reich) (2003). He co-founded the Werkleitz Festival in Halle (Saale) and the Internet database cinovid, works as a freelance curator for the transmediale Berlin and curates regularly for the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

The Arab Shorts project entered its second round in 2010 and is to be continued in 2011. How did the idea for the project originate in 2009?

I spent a few months in Cairo in 2009, during which time I also contacted the Goethe-Institut. We talked about several possible projects, including a platform for young, independent Arab film. It was clear to me from the beginning that such a platform today needs to offer full-length films, because the future of short film distribution is on the Internet. I showed an online film program entitled 'Amerika' (America) [http://www.werkleitz.de/amerika-virtual], which I curated for Werkleitz in 2008. From these ideas, and many conversations with local experts, in particular curator Aleya Hamza, developed the Arab Shorts project.

Arab Shorts is not your first project as a curator and artistic director. You have a wealth of experiences to draw on. How did you originally come to curating film programs?

While studying film at the Braunschweig University of Arts. I became interested in National Socialist film. At the time, these films were hard to come by. My professor, Birgit Hein, who, among other things, had curated the documenta6, suggested to develop a series of events on National Socialist film aesthetics. By chance, we also received external funds, which meant that the event grew quite big: 14 presentations spread out across two semesters, open to the university public. The series was so successful that it spawned a whole series of interdisciplinary follow-up events, which is how I gained my first experiences as a curator. Because of this event and my own film, the Goethe-Institut invited me to Moscow to curate the first German-Russian experimental film festival. Shortly afterwards, Peter Zorn invited me to come to Werkleitz where I co-developed the Werkleitz Biennial. Still, it would not have occurred to me to become a film curator, because at the time neither the term nor the profession actually existed. It just happened to turn out that way over the years. Today, my curatorial activities are more important to me than making films.

What does it take to be a good curator? What makes a good program?

First of all, a curator has to know many films, both historical and contemporary, and have a sure feeling for the quality of a film – regardless of the filmmaker's profile. In order to make a program out of very different works, he/she also has to be able to see thematic or formal threads linking the immensely

varied and diverse films. Here, two aspects are particularly important: The contents of the individual films have to form a narrative thread in the program. And the rhythms of each individual film have to sequentially make for a good rhythm of the whole program. These two elements combined make for a good short film program. Curating feature-length films is much easier, as every film stands for itself. Short film programs, on the other hand, are always a compilation. Basically, compiling short film programs is a bit like working with archival material when making a film: You assemble, frame and compose material you haven't made yourself. Because this has always been my approach in my own films, it was not such a big step for me from being a filmmaker to becoming a curator.

The Arab Shorts programs in 2009 and 2010 represent a broad and diverse section of young, independent Arab short film. What do you see as its characteristic elements? Are there similarities?

The Arab-Islam world and its cultural production is as diverse as the European-Christian world. Independent film production in the Maghreb has very little in common with the situation in Palestine or Syria. This also reflects completely different conditions of production: Some countries systematically promote film, while others systematically frustrate film production through censorship. But there are, of course, a few similarities. All in all, independent film in most Arab countries is a very young phenomenon, with "independent" having a double meaning in the Arab world: On the one hand, it means, like in the West, independent of government or private corporate structures, on the other hand it also means independent of the colonial powers and their cultural influence. The young Arab film is very much defined by the new digital technology that can be bought rather cheaply and thus makes it possible to produce in a truly independent and sometimes also inconspicuous manner. What is interesting is that the formal exploration of the medium video, which is very important in the West and also in Asia. plays hardly a role in the Arab world. Arab films tell stories, often very powerful and emotional stories, even if all you see is a plastic bag, as in the film Wahab. This may also reflect the traditional dominance of script over image in the Arab world. In addition, the young Arab filmmakers use their structural independence to openly criticize social and political realities. The closer the filmmaker is to Israel, the more this conflict and its effects become the focus of attention.

Has Arab Shorts influenced your work?

For me it is the first time that I have been working for a longer period of time in a non-Western context. Usually, I get to know this context mostly through its films, i.e. the results. What has become very tangible – and what otherwise may always remain a bit abstract – is that any cultural production mirrors the society in which it takes place. So when you get to know these societies, it changes your view of their works, in this case the films. Ideally, as a curator I should be able not only to read about the context of the films, but actually experience it. Of course, this is only possible to a certain degree. But I have become more aware of these cultural limitations, and this is also changing my work.

The Werkleitz Festival 2010 in Halle, which you co-curated, was entitled "Angst hat große Augen" (Fear Is Wide-Eyed). The transmediale 2011 focused on the topic of 'Response: Ability.' Can you tell us something about the genesis of these topics?

Werkleitz festivals traditionally explore contemporary social issues such as the future of work ("real[work]"), immigration ("Zugewinngemeinschaft" [community of surplus]) or religion ("Happy Believers"), always focusing on the guestion of what perspective the artists and their works take on these issues. In recent years, fear has become such a dominant theme in the media; we seem to be permanently living in a world of announced catastrophes, and that's why Werkleitz chose this theme. The transmediale, on the other hand, is an annual festival of digital art and culture, exploring themes and issues central to this technological field. 'Response: Ability' is devoted to the permanent "live status" of our society, e.g. in social networks. If everybody is constantly online and always communicating in one way or another, what is left for the individual to do? What are his/her options? What is his/her responsibility?

The interview was conducted by Antje Klesse.

PROGRAMS AND FILMS. A COMPLETE OVERVIEW 2009-2011

ARAR SHORTS 2009

MOI 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	JNES KHAMMAR: INDEPENDENT FILM IN ALGERIA Lyrics, by Khaled Chiheb, 2007, Algeria, 8min Total Eclipse (Eclipse totale), by Yacine Mohamed Bendoranges, by Yahia Mouzahem, 2003, Algeria, 8min Algiers Bays (Les baies d'Alger), by Hassen Ferhani, 20 The Door (El baeb), by Yasmine Chouikh, 2006, Algeria Khti, by Yanis Koussim, 2007, Algeria, 15min The Daily Robots (Le quotidien des automates), by Abogoulili, by Sabrina Draoui, 2008, Algeria/France, 17min What We Must Do (Ce qu'on doit faire), by Karim Mous C'est a Constantine, by Bahia Bencheikh-El-Fegoun, 20	elhadj, 2007, Algeria, 8min 06, Algeria, 17min 1, 8min del Ghani Raoui, 2004, Algeria, 13min saoui, 2006, Algeria, 24min	20
EM# 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19	AD MABROUK: INDEPENDENT FILM IN EGYPT Call Center, by Mohamed Hammad, 2006, Egypt, 18min The Awaited, by Mohamed Mamdouh, 2006, Egypt, 17min Elevator, by Hadeel Nazmy, 2004, Egypt, 12min Her Man, by Ayten Amin, 2006, Egypt, 10min ID Number, by Mohamed Mohsen, 2006, Egypt, 12min The Commercial, by Amr Salama, Egypt, 15min Rise and Shine, by Sherif El Bendary, 2006, Egypt, 8mi One in a Million, by Nadine Khan, 2006, Egypt, 12min A Glance at the Sky, by Kamila Abu Zikry, 2003, Egypt,	nin n	28
HAI 20 21 22 23 24 25 26	G AIVAZIAN: INDEPENDENT FILM IN THE GULF RI Belooh, by Amer Al Ruwass, 2008, Oman, 4min PG+, by Mohamad Al Tamimi, 2009, Saudi Arabia, 2min Mama, by Laila Marafie, 2008, Kuwait, 5min Badri?, by Aldo Makki, 2008, Saudi Arabia, 13min Bint Maryam, by Saeed Salman Al Murry, 2008, UAE, 2 Oh Torment (Wa Wailah), by Monira Al Qadiri, 2008, Ku Sharq, by Erik Sandoval, 2008, Kuwait, 23min	n 7min	36
ALA 27 28 29 30 31 32	YOUNIS: INDEPENDENT FILM IN JORDAN My Beloved Homeland (Watani Habibi), by Abdallah Ka The Shoes, by Mohammad Alloh, 1986, Jordan, 12min Full Bloom, by Sandra Madi, 2006, Jordan, 46min Remind Me to Remember to Forget, by Oraib Toukan, 3 Shawahed, by Firas Taybeh, 2009, Jordan, 12min Deaf Countries, by Eyad Hamam, 2009, Jordan, 2min		42
	HA SALTI: INDEPENDENT FILM IN LEBANON A Circle Around the Sun (Un cercle autour du soleil), by Faces Applauding Alone, by Ahmad Ghossein, 2008, L		48

35 36 37 38	The Purple Umbrella, by Sarmad Louis, 2004, Lebanon, 10min Lemon Flowers, by Pamela Ghanimeh, 2007, Lebanon/Denmark, 35min The Coffee Smell, by Fadi Dabaja, 2008, Lebanon, 23min Tomorrow 6:30, by Gilles Tarazi, 2008, Lebanon, 23min	
BOU 39 40 41 42	Exit, by Simohammed Fettaka, 2008, Morocco, 12min My Lost Home, by Kamal El Mahouti, 2002, France/Morocco, 19min Wahab, by Toni Serra (aka Abu Ali), 1994, France/Morocco, 4min Your Dark Hair Ihsan, by Tala Hadid, 2005, Morocco/USA, 14min	54
LAR 43 44 45 46 47 48	The Diver, by Jumana Emil Abboud, 2004, Palestine, 4min The Shooter, by Ihab Jadallah, 2008, Palestine, 8min Like Twenty Impossibles, by Annemarie Jacir, 2003, Palestine, 17min Arafat and I, by Mahdi Fliefil, 2007, UK/Palestine, 15min The Last Station, by Ghada Terawi, 2007, Palestine, 7min We Began by Measuring Distance, by Basma Al-Sharif, 2009, UK/Palestine, 19min	58
ORV 49 50 51 52 53 54 55	Point, by Rami Farah, 2005, Syria, 3min Silence, by Rami Farah, 2007, Syria, 37min Before Vanishing, by Joude Gorani, 2005, France/Syria, 13min Bird of Stone, by Hazem Hamwi, 2007, Syria, 35min Farewell, by Joud Said, 2008, Syria, 13min The Pot, by Diana El Jeiroudi, 2005, Syria, 13min A Short Visit to Say Goodbye, by Rami Hanna, 2007, Syria, 20min	64
1KB. 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63	AL ZALILA: INDEPENDENT FILM IN TUNISIA Abdelkrim's Battleship (La cuirasse Abdelkarim), by Walid Mattar, 2003, Tunisia, 8min Conversations, by Mohamed Kaïs Ben Zaied, 2007, Tunisia, 11min Fundo, by Abdelbar Mahmoud, 2008, Tunisia, 13min Madame Bahja, by Walid Tayaa, 2006, Tunisia, 14min The Crossing, by Nadia Touijer, 2008, Tunisia, 15min The Drowning Fish, by Malik Amara, 2007, Tunisia, 19min The Fall, by Ala Eddine Slim, 2007, Tunisia, 14min The Tank, by Lassaad Weslati, 2007, Tunisia, 13min	70
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EM/ 64 65 66 67 68	AD MABROUK: EGYPT – POST-REALIST REALITY Pale Red, by Mohamed Hammad, 2009, Egypt, 15min Atef, by Emad Maher, 2009, Egypt, 6min The Maid, by Heidi Samaan, 2008, Egypt/USA, 19min Solo, by Laila Sami, 2009, Egypt, 6min A Gown and Shoes, by Ahmed Nour, 2007, Egypt, 29min	84
69 70 71	AL ZALILA: FORMALISM BEYOND REALISM Le rendez-vous, by Sarra Laabidi, 2006, Tunisia, 16min Hikayetou Imraa (A Woman's Tale), by Karim Souaki, 2005, Tunisia, 6min Ayan Ken (Anyone), by Ridha Tilli, 2007, Tunisia, 20min Eddoussi (The File), by Maidi Lakhdar, 2009, Tunisia, 16min	90

73 74 75 76 77	A YOUNIS: TO KNOW THE ARAB TERRAIN: MOVEMENTS TO, FROM, AND WITHIN Aesthetics of Disappearance (Shadow Sites I), by Jananne Al-Ani, 2010, Iraq/Jordan/UK, 15min Two Sides of One Piece, by Mohssin Harraki, 2010, Morocco/France, 2min Telematch Shelter, by Wael Shawky, 2008, Egypt, 4min Linge sur terrasse (Linen on Terrace), by Fadma Kaddouri, 2007, Morocco/France, 4min Tokyo Tonight, by Ziad Antar, 2003, Lebanon, 3min Step by Step, by Ossama Mohammed, 1979, Syria, 22min Vacuum, by Adel Abidin, 2006, Iraq/Finland, 9min No Title (excerpts from films from the family archive), by Mufid Younis, 1978-1980, Kuwait/Jordan, 2min (video)	96
81 82	II SERRA (AKA ABU ALI): BROKEN FILMS Ça sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love), by Waël Noureddine, 2005, Lebanon/France, 29min July Trip, by Waël Noureddine, 2006, France, 35min Vue aérienne, by Bouchra Khalili, 2006, France/Spain, 9min	104
ABII 84 85 86 87 88 89 90	R BOUKHARI: ONCE UPON A TIME IN ARAB COUNTRIES Everywhere Was the Same, by Basma Al-Sharif, 2007, Palestine, 12min Resonances, by Ismaïl Bahri, 2008, Tunisia, 7min The Third Vision: Around 1:00 pm, by Khaled Hafez, 2008, Egypt, 7min Wide Power, by Khaled Ramadan, 2007 (new edition 2009), Spain/Lebanon, 14min Accident, by Nisrine Boukhari, 2009, Syria, 3min Subtitles for Stolen Pictures, by Rheim Alkadhi, 2007, Iraq/USA, 8min Arab Army, by Fawzy Emrany, 2007, Jordan, 6min Habba, by Younès Rahmoun, 2008, Morocco, 7min	110
ARA	AB SHORTS 2011	122
92 93 94 95 96 97 98	A GALAL AND AYMAN HUSSEIN: PERSONAL FREEDOM – FICTION WITHIN THE TRUTH Under the Iron, by Agathe Dirani, 2011, Egypt, 6min Karim, by Omar El Shamy, 2011, Egypt, 12min Four Seasons, by Noha El Maadawy, 2011, Egypt, 9min 04:02:2011, by Mahmoud Faraq, 2011, Egypt, 6min Suspended Freedom, by May El Hossamy, 2011, Egypt, 11min Our Weapon, by Ziad Hassan, 2011, Egypt, 7min Payback, by Omar Khaled, 2011, Egypt, 16min I Am Asser, by Ramy Rizkallah, 2010, Egypt, 18min	124
100 101 102 103	Checkpoint, by Ruben Amar, 2010, France, 19min Amal, by Ali Benkirane, 2004, France/Morocco, 15min Short Memory, by Marwan Khneisser, 2010, Lebanon, 9min Album, by Shiraz Fradi, 2010, Tunisia, 16min Roos Djaj, by Bassam Ali Jarbawi, 2009, Palestine/USA, 15min	132
105 106 107 108	BIBA DJAHNINE: TRANSCEND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF FEAR Djoûû, by Djamil Beloucif, 2010, Switzerland/Algeria, 25min El Berrani, by Aboubakar Hamzi, 2010, Algeria, 35min Un aller simple (A One-way Ticket), by Ammar Bouras, 2007, Algeria, 5min Instants/Alger (Instants/Algiers), by Amina Djahnine, 2008, Algeria, 1min Hysteresis, by Tahar Kessi, 2010, Algeria, 16min	136

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 ALA YOUNIS: EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT, OFFICER 114 Le monde sous la table (The World Under the Table), by Mohssin Harraki, 2010, Morocco/France, 8min 115 2026, by Maha Maamoun, 2010, Egypt, 10min 116 Children of Fire, by Mohammed Al Hawajiri, 2009, Palestine, 3min 117 Merely a Smell, by Maher Abi Samra, 2007, Lebanon, 10min 118 Paper Dress, by Kasem Kharsa, 2009, Jordan/Egypt, 7min 119 Sans titre (Untitled), by Neil Beloufa, 2010, Algeria/France, 15min 120 Al Wadi (The Valley), by Firas Taybeh, 2011, Jordan, 13min 121 With Soul, With Blood, by Rabih Mroué, 2006, Lebanon, 4min 	148
 MASOUD AMRALLA: PATHS TO SOLITUDE 122 Land of the Heroes, by Sahim Omar Kalifa, 2011, Belgium/Iraq, 19min 123 Heaven's Water, by Abdullah Boushahri, 2010, Kuwait, 23min 124 The Power of Generations, by Mohammed Jassim, 2011, Bahrain, 2min 125 Sabeel, by Khalid Al-Mahmood, 2010, UAE, 20min 126 Spices, by Amer Alrawas, 2011, Oman, 11min 	156
 MAHA MAAMOUN AND SARAH RIFKY: A STATE OF FLUIDITY 127 Rice City, by Sherif El Azma, 2010, Egypt, 19min 128 Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright, by Akram Zaatari, 2010, Lebanon, 12min 129 Tarahi II, by Haris Epaminonda, 2006, Cyprus, 4min 130 Giza Zoo, by Solmaz Shahbazi, 2010, Germany, 6min 131 Short Wave/Long Wave, by Vartan Avakian, 2009, Lebanon, 7min 132 80 Million, by Eslam Zeen El Abedeen/Mohamed Zayan, 2009, Egypt, 4min 133 My Father Looks for an Honest City, by Basim Magdy, 2010, Egypt, 5min 134 Images of a Center, by Iman Issa, 2005, Egypt, 5min 	162
LARA KHALDI AND YAZAN KHALILI: IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER 135 My Father is Still a Communist: Intimate Secrets to be Published, by Ahmad Ghossein, 2011, Lebanon, 33min 136 As They Say (Kif Ma Yi Qulu), by Hicham Ayouch, 2011, Morocco/UAE, 13min 137 Be Quiet, by Sameh Zoabi, 2006, Palestine, 19min 138 Moustache, by Meqdad Al-Kout, 2010, Kuwait, 15min 139 The Forty Second Winter, by Ehab Tarabieh, 2009, Syria, 17min	170



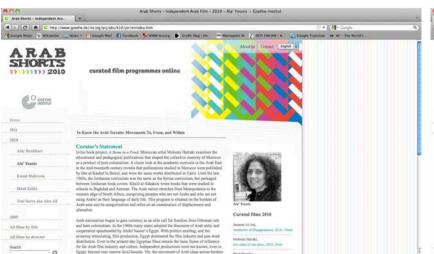














































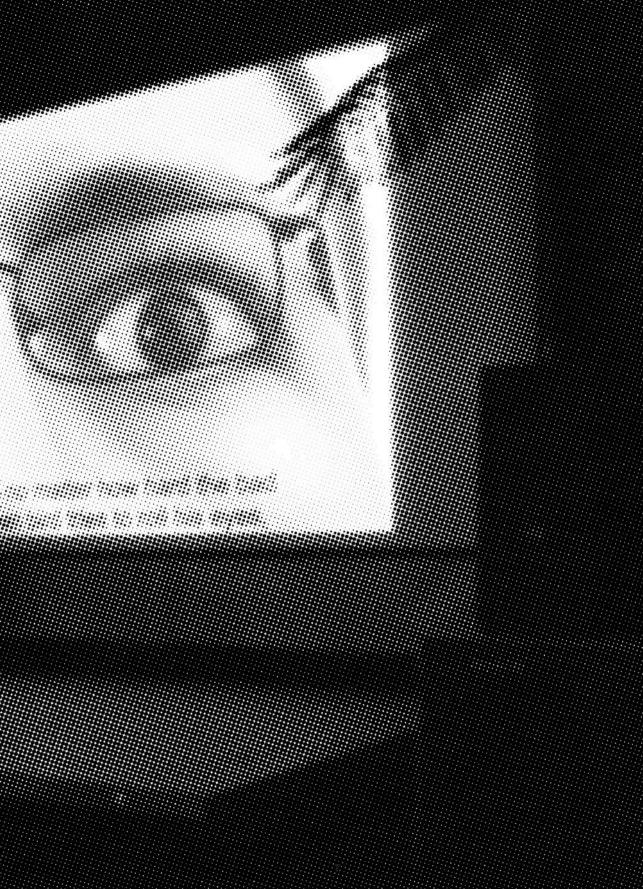
WWW.ARABSHORTS.NET

Launched in December 2009, the Arab Shorts website was designed to make an offer rarely found until then: free previews of films from the Arab Shorts programs in combination with information on the curators, all film programs, the individual films and the filmmakers represented.





ARAB SHORTS 2009



ON ARAB SHORTS 2009

Arab Shorts is a project designed in 2009 by the Goethe-Institut Kairo and Berlin curator and filmmaker Marcel Schwierin. In December 2009 nine curated film programs compiled by eleven curators from the Middle East and North Africa were established online and also presented on a cinema screen at a Festival event at the Goethe-Institut Kairo.

The project makes use of the vast potential of the Internet as a powerful and alternative platform for the presentation and circulation of independent films beyond the festival circuit and beyond conventional distribution networks. For the first time, viewers can have unlimited access to a large pool of films and information that they would otherwise not have the chance to peruse.

Bringing together more than sixtythree short fictional films, documentaries, animations, video art, experimental films and everything in between, www.arabshorts. net presents a multiplicity of perspectives on independent film making featured from the point of view of each curator. Moreover, the curators themselves wear multiple hats, from actors, directors and producers to critics and artists.

Each film program limits itself to the productions and co-productions of one country, with the exception of the Arabian Gulf region. Film programs are composed of a selection of four to ten short films (less than sixty minutes), predominantly produced in the last ten years. The films are accompanied by newly commissioned texts by the curators, curatorial statements, films synopses and biographies of filmmakers and curators. The discursive layer of the project is an integral component in an attempt to present a nuanced account of each scene, and to delve deeper into its

historical, economic, social, political and cultural specificities.

Collectively, this exciting and novel compilation raises pertinent questions about a broad range of topics and issues such as the definition of independent production, censorship, migration and mobility national identities, gender politics, urban trajectories and post-war conditions. www.arabshorts.net provides a provisional map of independent film production in this complex region.

Based on a text by Aleya Hamza, 2009.

ARAE SHORIS >>>>>>>.NET

MOUNES KHAMMAR: INDEPENDENT FILM IN ALGERIA



Part of the new generation of young filmmakers in Algeria and in the Arab world, Mounes Khammar comes from a communications background and moved into cinema during the rebirth of the film scene after the "black decade." He worked as an assistant director and producer on the following films: Rêve algérien by Jean-Pierre Lledo (2003), Viva l'Algérie (2004) by Nadir Mokneche, Les suspects by Kamal Dahane (2004), Morituri by Okacha Tonita (2004), and Écrit by Yasmina Khadra (2006). In 2003, he directed his first experimental short film N'rouhou, which was selected and awarded prizes at several international film festivals. In 2004, he was chosen by FEMIS to take part in their international workshop and then created Saphina, the first production company to be run by a young filmmaker in Algeria. The same year, he was in charge of the location management for the film crew La Trahison by Philippe Faucon. This was the first feature film shot entirely in Algeria for 30 years. He was also associate producer of the film. In 2005, he co-produced in partnership with Les films Pélléas a documentary by Cyril Leuthy called La nuit s'achève. Following this, he produced several short films by the new wave of Algerian filmmakers such as Yaniss Koussim and Khaled Benaissa. In 2007, he was producer and artistic director of the first Algerian film in HD, Houria, which starred several well-known artists and became the most awarded film of the year. In addition, he was production director of the documentary show El Gusto by Saphinez Bousbia which had Damon Alban (Blur/ Gorillaz) as guest star. In 2008, he continued to work on many professional and personal projects such as Like a Bee (Comme une abeille) which he made using a minimalistic approach (video camera and mobile phone).

RATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

If we adopt the definition of independent film that says it depends on escaping production restrictions and commercial distribution by using other more modest means, as well as departing from the norms of artistic creativity, we can say that Algeria is a special case.

Following the impressive start of the young postindependence Algerian cinema and the setback of the 1990s, the last ten years can be considered a second starting point. Almost all films produced, even those that benefited from state funding, were made with additional financial support found by the directors and producers. As support was often used to activate cultural life, and not to follow the logic of the market, we can say that these films have created some kind of independent cinema because the majority can be considered cinema d'auteur. As such they are subject to the personal preferences of each director, far from the general style of art - especially so in the absence of a commercial cinema and distribution market. There has been a wave of movie theater restorations (there were about 400 during the 1960s, but many had been abandoned or their scope of activity changed) and while these featurelength and short films are shown in restored theaters in major cities, they particularly have a public at festivals and on television.

I have chosen a selection of short films that reflect the dynamics animated by this new generation. This diversity of films – that have either received funding or been produced by private means – reflects a younger generation of filmmakers that represents Algeria and deals with the Algerian reality in new ways. The second common denominator in this group is that they are all self-made filmmakers and resident in Algeria, so it is a sample of young artists in today's Algeria with all the implications and realities of current developments and the accumulated past.

In making this choice, I am not denying that the films of young Algerians who reside abroad and film in Algeria reflect and effectively address Algerian reality, as they win the admiration of observers inside and outside the country. We can list notably *Masquerades* by Lyes Salem and *In Land* by Tarik Tegia.

Despite the fact that many Algerian filmmakers are living abroad, the majority reside in Southern Europe and especially France, as the proximity helps them to not feel isolated from the reality of the motherland.

Mounes Khammar, 2009

THE FILM PROGRAM

MOUNES KHAMMAR: INDEPENDENT FILM IN ALGERIA

- 1 Lyrics, by Khaled Chiheb, 2007, Algeria, 8min
- 2 Total Eclipse (Eclipse totale), by Yacine Mohamed Benelhadi, 2007, Algeria, 8min
- 3 Oranges, by Yahia Mouzahem, 2003, Algeria, 8min
- 4 Algiers Bays (Les baies d'Alger), by Hassen Ferhani, 2006, Algeria, 17min
- 5 The Door (El baeb), by Yasmine Chouikh, 2006, Algeria, 8min
- 6 Khti, by Yanis Koussim, 2007, Algeria, 15min
- 7 The Daily Robots (Le quotidien des automates), by Abdel Ghani Raoui, 2004, Algeria, 13min
- 8 Goulili, by Sabrina Draoui, 2008, Algeria/France, 17min
- 9 What We Must Do (Ce qu'on doit faire), by Karim Moussaoui, 2006, Algeria, 24min
- 10 C'est a Constantine, by Bahia Bencheikh-El-Fegoun, 2007, Algeria, 30min

Lyrics, by Khaled Chiheb

2007, Algeria, 8min

The Film

Ney is a character from the world of animation (noisy and in motion) who finds herself in the world of comics (silent and static). Because of her incompatibility with this world, she creates anomalies around her. She meets Rooh, a character from the world of comics, and they get involved in a debate about the media narrative of comics and animation. Their discussion is interrupted by the appearance of the guardian of the balance of the world of comics and a chase takes place. The general atmosphere is dark, an Alice in Wonderland of sorts.

The Filmmaker

Khaled Chiheb was born in 1979 in Algiers. In 2007 he graduated in graphic design from the School of Fine Arts in Algiers. Since 2005, he has been working as an art director in Algiers. Apart from that, he has directed several videos and commercials in a professional setting. His series of children's cartoons *l'Miky* were aired on national television in Algeria. His main short films include: *Lie* (2005), which went to various festivals internationally (e.g. FIAV, Barcelona, 2005); *Lyrics* (2007), which was screened in various countries (Italy, Tunisia, France) and won the jury prize of the International Festival of Animation of Meknes (FICAM), Morocco in 2008.



Total Eclipse (Eclipse totale), by Yacine Mohamed Benelhadj

2007, Algeria, 8min

The Film

An amnesiac goes back through the course of his memory with visual and auditory assistance, until reaching an essential memory that he knows about but does not remember.



The Filmmaker

Yacine Mohamed Belhadj, born in 1981, took a degree in medicine but then followed his interest in scriptwriting and film making. His work *Total Eclipse* was created without any financial means. Belhadj has also written three feature-length films and has been working on a medium-length film entitled *Rani Myet*.

Oranges, by Yahia Mouzahem

2003, Algeria, 8min

The Film

The film tells the story of two men who fight for no reason. The battle begins in a market overflowing with colorful fruits and vegetables. It continues in increasingly austere and stripped sets, while the physical state of the two belligerents deteriorates visibly...



The Filmmaker

Yahia Mouzahem has created diverse film works, such as the fictional documentary Tinhinan, the television series Zenka Story, ten cooking shows entitled 'Flavors of Africa' and a number of short films, both documentary and fiction (Statoil, Oranges, One Day Two Nights, New Adventures 1 and New Adventures 2, Me, Her and Others, Vengeance, Moh Avenger, Imagination). He also directed and produced the fiction 100% Cows, co-produced Ben Boulaid Mestapha by Ahmed Rachedi, and produced The Broken Wings by Roshd Djigouadi, and Aliens, a fiction by Rabia Mohamed Fateh.

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Algiers Bays (Les baies d'Alger), by Hassen Ferhani

2006, Algeria, 17min

The Film

An audio-scape of Algiers in an extensive panorama of the city, the camera scanning different buildings and districts downtown with an intimate approach.



The Filmmaker

Hassen Ferhani was born in 1986 in Algiers. In 2004, he worked as a scriptwriting assistant for the film Cousins by Lyes Salem, which won the Cesar Prize for best short film. In 2006, he was assistant director and supporting actor in the short film What We Must Do (Ce qu'on doit faire) directed by Karim Moussaoui. In 2008, he directed Le Vol du 140 as part of the FEMIS documentary training course which was followed by other documentary projects. His short film Algiers Bays (Les Baies d'Alger) was developed and produced within the Katia Kameli project 'Bledi in Progress'.



The Door (El baeb), by Yasmine Chouikh

2006, Algeria, 8min

The Film

The story of Samia, a young woman going about her daily housework. The light coming through a window fascinates her. Each time she tries to reach the light she is called upon by some member of her family to tend to his or her needs...



The Filmmaker

Born in 1982 in Algiers, Yasmine Chouikh studied literature, sociology and educational sciences. She appeared as an actress in La Citadelle (1987), in *Hamlet of Women* (2004) by Mohamed Chouikh, and also in a television film by Djamel Bendedouch (1990). She has worked as a journalist and, since 2005, as a TV presenter for a cinematographic television program. Apart from that, she has been art director of the International Taghit Short Film Festival (Algeria) and responsible for the short film section of the International Arab Film Festival of Oran (Algeria). Chouikh has written no less than seven short film scripts, among them the script for The Door.

Khti, by Yanis Koussim

2007, Algeria, 15min

The Film

The police have assigned Salima, a mental patient to be taken care of by Lamia, a psychiatrist. The two young women, of the same age yet so different, should never have met. Two different worlds, symbols of the Algerian paradox, size each other up, confront one another and finally join in regained freedom.



The Daily Robots (Le quotidien des automates), by Abdel Ghani Raoui 2004, Algeria, 13min

The Film

After sunrise, a young person awakes abruptly, then follows another person through a series of surrealist, yet banal events – a maelstrom of visual and sound madness ensues...



The Filmmaker

Yanis Koussim is a young independent Algerian film director. He changed from studying law to film making and started out creating short documentaries, working in his hometown and in Paris. He has worked as an assistant director in several productions (e.g. Costa Gavras and Philippe Faucon), and wrote scripts for the successful Algerian television series Nass M'lah City 3. After two first short film projects, his first professional film Khti was shot in 2007. It won two awards in Algeria and has been selected by various festivals abroad (Morocco, Spain, Egypt). Koussim's first feature film project is entitled Bahara.

The Filmmaker

Born in November in 1979 in Algiers, Raoui Abdelghani discovered his passion for cinema at the early age of ten. After seeing Scorcese's Taxi Driver at twelve, he decided to become a screenwriter. He studied painting and screenwriting at the Fine Arts Academy of Algiers and wrote a number of screenplays. The Daily Robots (Le quotidien des automates) was the first work written and directed by himself. He also created a video clip for the local rock band Litham, several artistic videos, and has worked as an editor on several documentary and fiction films. More recent film projects are the shorts Hunger and Technically Hard.

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Goulili, by Sabrina Draoui

2008, Algeria/France, 17min

The Film

Two women friends are chatting before going out. Within their intimate visions of life, talking about love and sex is not as simple as it seems. I turns out, the two women are both alike and different at the same time...



The Filmmaker

Born in Batna, Algeria, Sabrina Draoui studied chemistry, photography and infography. She has worked as an assistant on several independent short and long films and has been awarded two awards (e.g. prize for best artistic photography in the international competition at Palazzo Valentini in Rome, 2006), Goulili is the first short film directed by her. It has been officially selected for numerous film festivals around the world, winning various prizes (e.g. 'Sab'art' for the best short film at Dakkar International Short Film Festival, Senegal: the 'Big Prize' of the Plein Sud Festival, France; the jury award and the best film in the section 'Woman Directed by Woman' at Ismailia International Film Festival for Documentary and Short Film, Egypt.

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What We Must Do (Ce qu'on doit faire), by Karim Moussaoui

2006, Algeria, 24min

The Film

Hakim goes on a search through Algiers hospitals to look for a man that he punched and knocked down. His search leads him to a secret place where an unexpected encounter awaits him...



Born in 1975 in Algeria, Karim Moussaoui is an active member in the independent film association Chrysalis, promoting its 'Cineclub'. He has directed two short films, *Breakfast* and *What We Must Do*, and has worked on a number of plays and films including *Paloma Delight* (with Nadir Mokneche).



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C'est a Constantine, by Bahia Bencheikh-El-Fegoun

2007, Algeria, 30min

The Film

The author left her hometown Constantine and did not return until eight years later. Through three close relatives (her sister, her friend, her father) she searches for reasons for this cut and act of abandoning in her life, exploring individual and collective responsibilities. She digs deeply into her roots exploring what bonds one can have with his place of origin...



The Filmmaker

After taking a degree in geological engineering, Bahia Bencheikh-El-Fegoun worked in an advertising company before moving to cinema. She started out as an assistant director on feature-length films, e.g. Manara by Blkacem Hadjaj, Morituri by Okacha Touita, Once upon a Time in the Wadi (II était une fois dans l'oued) by Djamel Bensalah, Betrayal (La trahison) by Philipe Faucon, Barakat by Djamila Sahraoui, Arabic Nights (Nuits d'arabie) by Paul Kieffer). Through working with filmmakers like Jean-Pierre Lledo, Serge Lalou, Richard Dindo Jacques Debs she developed an interest in documentary film. A scholarship took her to the Ateliers Varan in Paris for training courses in editing, writing and film making. Her first documentary C'est a Constantine was shot in 2008 in the context of the Bejaia documentary workshop 'Cinema and Memory'.

EMAD MABROUK: INDEPENDENT FILM IN EGYPT



Emad Mabrouk was born in Alexandria and has worked as a filmmaker and cultural programmer since 2003. He has directed a number of films: The Dead Won't Mind (El-Maivet Mesh ha Yiza'al). The Grocer's Daughter (Bent El Ba'al), The Color of Life (Loun El-Hayat), and other films. He won a scholarship to study creative documentary film at the Arab Film Institute in Jordan, followed by another scholarship to study direction for multiple cameras from the National School of Cinema, Denmark, in collaboration with Semat Production and Distribution, Cairo. As a member of the viewers' committee he has worked with the Cairo Independent Film Festival at the Goethe-Institut, and has coordinated and managed a number of film making programs in various places, among them the 'The Film making Workshop' at Jesuits Cultural Center in Alexandria.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Every year in Egypt, independent film production increases at a high rate, and so does the quality and the diversity of films. Since independent cinema has appeared in Egypt in the form of an unorganized movement towards renewing an artistic cinematic framework in the last ten years or so, many landmark films have been produced with this new cinematic paradigm and a number of Egyptian films have won local and international awards. Every year, new forms are introduced into independent film making in an attempt to build and reshape the film scene in Egypt. With this trend, the commercial film industry has been lured into rethinking modes of commercial production and has benefited from the experience of the independent film scene.

This film program is an attempt to shed light on some of the most salient characteristics of independent film making in Egypt, such as: ideas, means of implementation, quality, producers, means of production, objectives of production, medium and awards. The selection process took into consideration the various dynamics of independent production, whether by individuals, private institutions, or graduation projects within film making workshops, or state productions. I have intentionally excluded graduation projects by students of the Higher Institute of Cinema in Egypt since they are made under very specific circumstances, and there is no scope to show them in this context. This selection represents different years of production and includes films that were produced up to 2007. The last two years have been excluded from the program because these new films are still circulating in festivals, and the online nature of this project would necessarily preclude their festival participation.

All of the films are under twenty minutes, in order to offer the opportunity to explore patterns of short film making, and to explore how to deal with the time element when introducing ideas, working with a mediator, improving the product, and other relevant issues. The films selected are shortlisted from a longer list that included about twenty films, with some filmmakers not allowing their films to be viewed online for a variety of reasons. Screening these films on the internet allows viewers and critics

to gain a better understanding of the present status of independent cinema in Egypt, and is an attempt to articulate a model for an independently structured art scene in Egypt. Moreover, it projects the future of a cinema that has started to gain power over recent years. I'd like to thank all those who helped me either in selecting the films or drafting the written texts.

Emad Mabrouk, 2009

THE FILM PROGRAM

EMAD MABROUK: INDEPENDENT FILM IN EGYPT

- 11 Call Center, by Mohamed Hammad, 2006, Egypt, 18min
- 12 The Awaited, by Mohamed Mamdouh, 2006, Egypt, 17min
- 13 Elevator, by Hadeel Nazmy, 2004, Egypt, 12min
- 14 Her Man, by Ayten Amin, 2006, Egypt, 10min
- 15 ID Number, by Mohamed Mohsen, 2006, Egypt, 12min
- 16 The Commercial, by Amr Salama, Egypt, 15min
- 17 Rise and Shine, by Sherif El Bendary, 2006, 8min
- **18** One in a Million, by Nadine Khan, 2006, Egypt, 12min
- 19 A Glance at the Sky, by Kamila Abu Zikry, 2003, Egypt, 10min

11

Call Center, by Mohamed Hammad

2006, Egypt, 18min

The Film

A veiled single woman working at a shop where people can make phone calls eavesdrops on customers' conversations in order to relieve the boredom of the job. Her unflinching response to the dark, duplicitous and occasionally depraved behavior of seemingly innocuous callers provides material for a grim look at contemporary Egyptian society.

The Filmmaker

Born in 1981 in Cairo, Mohamed Hammad graduated with a degree in literature from Helwan University. He is an independent screenwriter and filmmaker. Hammad wrote the scripts for *The Fifth Pound* (El-Geneih el-Khames, 2005), by Ahmed Khaled, and Mersal al-Marasil (2005), by Hilmi Abdel-Magid, and he directed a short experimental film, *Tawaf* (2004), and several documentaries, including Mulid al-Sayeda Nafisa (2004).



The Awaited, by Mohamed Mamdouh

2006, Egypt, 17min

The Film

The desire for a male child remains at the core of mind and imagination in all Arab families. What happens when this dream comes true and the mother herself begins to experience morphological transformations...?



The Filmmaker

Mohamed Mamdouh works as a film director, screenwriter and producer. Having started as a self-taught director, he later enrolled in the independent study program at the High Institute of Cinema in Cairo. He has also worked as an art critic, and is a board member in the Association of Cinema Critics. For Al Jazeera Channel he wrote scripts and directed documentary films. His script Angel Blood won the Abdel Hay Adeeb prize for scriptwriting. His work as a film director includes What's to Come (2006), an independently produced fiction, and Less than an Hour (2009), produced by the National Center for Cinema.

Elevator, by Hadeel Nazmy

2004, Egypt, 12min

The Film

A short voyeuristic thriller set in a trapped elevator and developing via suggestive cell phone calls, Elevator negotiates the tensions of the ambiguous, grey areas between public and private spaces, repulsion and desire, fear and longing, and seclusion and surveillance.



The Filmmaker

Born in 1977, Hadeel Nazmy is an artist based in Alexandria. Her process-oriented multidisciplinary art projects include videos, films, texts, photography, and site-specific installations, investigating marginalized concepts of the image and projected imagery. Nazmy's art addresses issues related to identity, loss, signification and memory as they arise in Egyptian cultural contexts. Her film Elevator has won more than twenty local and international awards.

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Her Man, by Ayten Amin

2006, 10min

The Film

Based on Ahdaf Soueif's short story about the rivalry between two wives over the same man, as they wait for their husband's return one night.



The Filmmaker

Born in Cairo, Ayten Amin studied commerce at Cairo University and film directing at the Art Lab. Her film Her Man participated in the 2007 National Film Festival in Cairo and, in the same year, was awarded the Mohamed Shebl First Film prize. Apart from other festivals, it was selected for the Clermont Ferrand Film Festival. Amin has also worked as an assistant director on a number of feature films (e.g. Alive).



ID Number, by Mohamed Mohsen

2006, Egypt, 12min

The Film

Unable to communicate, he has become somehow invisible: not real to the world around him, and simply a number to state and bureaucracy. Only when he dies, he begins to be perceived by others – and we, as onlookers, discover that the narrator who is providing us with information is the same person who is investigating his death. As the case closes, the life of our protagonist becomes a file in a forgotten archive. What are the social, political and economic pressures at play here?



Born in 1979 the Egyptian filmmaker Mohamed Mohsen graduated from Raafat El Mihi's Art and Technology Academy for Cinema Studies. He worked as an assistant director on a number of long feature films and directed commercials and documentaries. He won the award for a first film at the 'Rencontre de L'Image' at the French Cultural Center. For two documentaries he directed for Al Jazeera Channel he won the Golden Prize for Best Film at the Avenue Festival in France.



The Commercial, by Amr Salama Egypt, 15min



Rise and Shine, by Sherif El Bendary 2006, Egypt, 8min

The Film

The film shows a woman searching aggressively for her lost apartment keys. During her search, she is visited by some unsavory memories she has been repressing. A short drama, based on a theater play by Dario Fo.



The Filmmaker

Born in 1982 in Egypt, Amr Salama has worked as a self-taught graphic artist and film director. To date, he has directed four short films and a documentary on AIDS in Egypt, and created a number of commercial and video clips.

The Filmmaker

Sherif El Bendary was born in Cairo in 1978. He studied film directing at the High Institute of Cinema in Cairo and has worked on a number of feature projects as an assistant director. As a director, he first appeared with the film 6 Girls (2006), which won the prize for best documentary at the Goethe-Institut Student Film Festival in Cairo. His fiction Rise And Shine (2006) has won awards at festivals in Egypt and in Rotterdam.

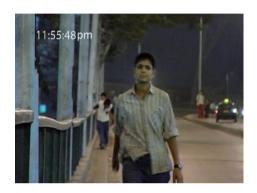
<u> 18</u>

One in a Million, by Nadine Khan

2006, Egypt, 12min

The Film

On a stifling night in Cairo, a wedding party drives across a bridge honking loudly; roaming adolescents comment on people they encounter; two guards play cards while a third sips tea and watches a soap opera. A brief meditation on the arbitrariness, fluidity and intensity of lived experience.



The Filmmaker

The Egyptian filmmaker Nadine Khan holds a BA in film directing from the High Institute of Cinema in Cairo. Khan has worked as an assistant director and producer with several Egyptian directors, such as Yousry Nasrallah, Nabil Ayouch and also her father, Mohammed Khan. She has directed a number of short films and music videos including Heidi (2007), The Outsider (2006), Here and There (2003) and Dream On (2002).

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A Glance at the Sky, by Kamila Abu Zikry

2003, Egypt, 10min

The Film

A secret love story between a boy and a girl. When the girl is confronted by her uncle, who has seen the young couple together by accident, she denies the relationship...



The Filmmaker

Born in Cairo in 1974, Kamila Abu Zikry took a BA in film making from the High Institute of Cinema Cairo in 2006. She directed the fiction 6 O'Clock Train which gained her a number of prizes, and the documentary Palestine in Egypt. More recently, she has worked on long feature films.



HAIG AIVAZIAN: INDEPENDENT FILM IN THE GULF REGION



Born in 1980 in Beirut, Lebanon, Haig Aivazian holds a BFA from Concordia University in Montréal. Canada. In 2005, he returned to Dubai, his home since the early 1990s. His subsequent work has explored the complexities that arise between the migration of bodies and that of consumer goods, e.g. in the mixed media installation FUGERE (A Series of Olympiadic Moments) that was commissioned by the 9th edition of the Shariah Biennial. Aivazian had a four year curatorial association with Dubai's The Third Line gallery working on interdisciplinary exhibitions and themed film series. He has published articles and reviews in publications such as Bidoun, Adbusters and others. More recently, Aivazian was enrolled at Northwestern University in Chicago, pursuing an MFA in Art Theory and Practice.

CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Movie Has the Right to Children. Soft strategies of dissent and exercises in gentleness by young filmmakers from the Arabian Gulf.

I don't remember when my father had left us in Lebanon to go work in the Gulf. Crossing from East to West Beirut every day to go to work had become too dangerous and, like many other young men in those days, my father left his beloved behind to fulfil his role as the family's provider in what was often referred to as "the desert." I do however remember very clearly my mother, myself and my sister boarding a large ship to Cyprus, in order to fly to Dubai from there. The year was 1989 (or 1990, I forget). It was on that ship that I recall one of my most memorable cinematic encounters; an erotic Kung-Fu film that some teenagers were watching. My mother was furious. There were no cinemas in Dubai. Though there were many theaters screening Bollywood films, English and Arabic films were a rarity until the mid-nineties. Cinemas very quickly became social centers where youth, love and the sense of being in tune with an outside world were negotiated. Even though I have spent significant portions of my life in Dubai, I somehow always associate the place with childhood, and also, though it was a rare luxury, cinema. In fact, one often talks about Dubai and the Gulf at large in terms of youth: a "young country", a "young economy", and especially a "young cultural scene". This is of course when the Gulf is not being framed within the polar brackets of lack or excess. In response to being asked to put together a program of independent films from this region, it therefore seemed fitting to theme it around childhood.

Most of the filmmakers selected – as well as filmmakers in the region generally – are themselves young and use the idiom of cinema and video in order to examine closely the societies and realities in which they live. The chosen cineasts do so with a layered, complex voice that allows for open-endedness and subtlety. A large portion of the films use the allegedly innocent gaze of a child, which allows for a critical perspective that eludes detection. This is certainly the case of Erik Sandoval's *Sharq*, where a group of boys venture out to the city in search for the perfect football, only to be

lost in a maze of a large shopping mall. Other films are more direct in their approach and depict the hardships faced by the youth of the Gulf, so for instance in Saeed Salman al Murry's *Bint Maryam*, while the plot follows the perspective of a child, the eloquence and poetry of the discourse cannot be dismissed as juvenile.

In many instances, the geographic setting of the story enables a distancing from the subject at hand. The desert is a frequent location in these films, small villages are often cast as microcosms which become metaphors of the larger world out there in the city, as in Laila Marafie's Mama, or Amer al Ruwass's Belooh. Anggi Makki uses a similar strategy of displacement in Badri? only here, the microcosm is in an urban setting, but closed off from the rest of the world, in a gathering of friends in the main protagonist's basement. Monira Al Qadiri veils her gender-bending choreography in the language of the mystical and absurd as she tackles the dynamics of the sexes in Wa Wailah (Oh. Torment) while Mohamad Al Tamimi takes on issues of censorship with humor in his blitz animation PG+. Independent cinema in the Gulf is confronted with daunting challenges, not least being censorship. However, film making has provided a platform to address issues, in a voice that is young and perhaps still awkward, but one that is resolute, courageous and speaks softly.

Haig Aivazian, 2009

HAIG AIVAZIAN: INDEPENDENT FILM IN THE GULF REGION

- 20 Belooh, by Amer Al Ruwass, 2008, Oman, 4min
- 21 PG+, by Mohamad Al Tamimi, 2009, Saudi Arabia, 2min
- 22 Mama, by Laila Marafie, 2008, Kuwait, 5min
- 23 Badri?, by Aldo Makki, 2008, Saudi Arabia, 13min
- 24 Bint Maryam, by Saeed Salman Al Murry, 2008, UAE, 27min
- 25 Oh Torment (Wa Wailah), by Monira Al Qadiri, 2008, Kuwait, 10min
- 26 Sharq, by Erik Sandoval, 2008, Kuwait, 23min

20

Belooh, by Amer Al Ruwass

2008, Oman, 4min

The Film

The film portrays the camaraderie between two young girls who like to play outside in the village, overlooking a larger city. From one day to the next, the girls move from drawing simple lines in the sand that delineate the playing area, to drawing much more severe lines that represent their social pressures and duties as one of the girls is made to marry. Time becomes treacherous from one day to the next, as one of the girls remains growing up, while the other takes leaps and bounds into adulthood.



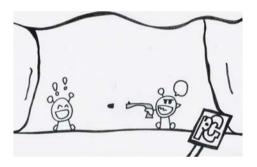
<u>22</u>

PG+, by Mohamad Al Tamimi

2009. Saudi Arabia. 2min

The Film

Sex, love, obscenities, violence and plenty of silliness in this student animation, where director Mohamad Al Tamimi explores the various criteria that qualifies a film for PG rating. Set out in three acts, this very short film also takes sideways jabs at issues of censorship within Middle Fastern media and cinema.



Mama, by Laila Marafie

2008, Kuwait, 5min

The Film

A seemingly banal day in a village neighborhood suddenly turns eerily disturbing. A girl, clearly too young to be a mother, mimics the motions of murdering and burying her children. The children are absent and their presence implied only through the use of sound. It is unclear if this is an exercise in the recollection of a trauma that actually occurred, or simply an imagined scene. Using the symbolism of simple gestures, Marafie's debut poignantly highlights the issues faced by young girls in the Gulf region, and acts out scenarios of rebellion.



The Filmmaker

This short animated film marks Mohamad Al Tamimi's debut as a filmmaker. Regularly working as a draughtsman, he has been involved in various projects, both drawing and animation.

The Filmmaker

Laila Marafie graduated from the Gulf University for Science and Technology with a BA in English literature. A devoted activist, she has been working in projects advocating minority and women's rights in the region. After experience as an actress (in: *Paradoxes*, by Meqdad Al Kout) she took up film making in 2008. Her film *Mama* was selected for the competition of the Gulf Film Festival.

Badri?, by Aldo Makki

2008, Saudi Arabia, 13min

The Film

It is the end of the school year in Jeddah and Bassem is throwing a farewell party for his American friend Maria whom he is secretly in love with. A student film, *Badri?* inadvertently takes a glance into the life of middle class youths in Saudi Arabia as a cosmopolitan and bilingual group of friends are invited to say goodbye to Maria in Bassem's basement. Conversations and situations unfold as Bassem tries to work up the courage to reveal his true feelings. Shot with aesthetic sensibility and an attention to dialog and dialect, Makki reminds us of a time when a crush could take up epic and paralyzing proportions.





Bint Maryam, by Saeed Salman Al Murry

2008, UAE, 27min

The Film

The film begins with the body of an old man being washed in preparation for burial, Bint Maryam's dead husband. Prose and poetry are combined as Bint Maryam tells the story of her ordeal that started when the entire village turned a deaf ear to her crying as she was made to marry at a young age. The story follows the path of the girl Maryam who was placed in the custody of her blind and loveable uncle Maatouq far away from home. A number of characters and symbolic elements are introduced in this biting yet lyrical critique of the practice of arranged marriages, and, more generally, of the treatment of women in traditional societies.



Oh Torment (Wa Wailah), by Monira Al Qadiri 2008. Kuwait. 10min

The Film

A series of repetitive choreographies are set to Abdul Wahab Al Rashid's woeful folk song of love and lament. Complete with over-the-top costumes, props and make-up, Wa Wailah is lodged somewhere between a Shakespearean play and an MTV music video as rich and colorful contemporary visuals are mixed with traditional attire. Al Qadiri scrutinizes gender roles and conventions (be they social, musical or cinematic) by switching the roles of the sexes: thus the filmmaker herself plays the role of the male singer, while all of the female dancers are played by cross-dressing men. Eroticism and sensuality are played out through scripted moves as notions of the majlis, the harem and the convoy, among other social practices, are alluded to.



Sharq, by Erik Sandoval 2008, Kuwait, 23min

The Film

The film opens in the desert outside of Kuwait City with a group of rowdy young boys playing football. When the ball is damaged, the boys decide to go on an escapade to find a new ball: a mission in search of the legendary Sharq Street. They steal a car, but it breaks down midway. Hitch-hiking, they are picked up by a trucker - but again do not reach their destination: A discussion about the role of the US in the Gulf region escalates into heated guarreling, and the boys get kicked out of the car. They manage to make their way to a shopping mall where they get lost in a maze of shops and import products. When they finally discover the ball they had been looking for in one of those shops, they find themselves face to face with an American salesman who does not speak their language...



The Filmmaker

Monira Al Qadiri was born in Senegal in 1983. Influenced by her mother, a notable Kuwaiti artist and writer, she started painting at a young age and developed a special interest in Japanese animation. In 1999 she moved to Tokyo under a national scholarship. Upon graduating in 2005 she completed her first animated film *Visual Violence* and since then has created various films, animation, and graphic designs.

The Filmmaker

Born in California, USA, to Mexican immigrants, Erik attended the University of Southern California in Los Angeles where he studied screenwriting and history. The production of *Sharq* originated in the acquaintance with Abdulaziz Alsharhan and Fahad Bishara, with whom he collaborated in writing the script. Sandoval was a finalist for the 2008 Shasha Screenwriting Grant for his feature script *Jose*, and has been writing, directing and editing comedy.

ALA YOUNIS: INDEPENDENT FILM IN JORDAN



Ala Younis is an independent artist and curator based in Amman. Through art, film, and publication projects, Younis investigates the position of individuals in a politically driven world, and the conditions in which historical and political failures of the collective become personal ones. In 2011, Younis curated 'Maps, Timelines, Radio Programs' for La Galerie, Contemporary Art Center in Noisy-le-Sec (Paris), 'Out of Place' with Kasia Redzisz for the Late Modern (London) and Darat al Funun (Amman), and 'Momentarily Learning from Mega-Events' for Makan (Amman).

CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

"My Beloved Homeland" - I chose the title of the first film presented, My Beloved Homeland, to be the title of the film program. Jordan emerged amidst hard circumstances and at turbulent times, witnessing being ruled and occupied. No sooner had it acquired its independence in 1946 than the Palestine Nakba befell the Arab World, and millions of refugees were displaced from Palestine. The majority of these refugees were placed in Jordan. In the 19th century, the current capital Amman began a period of prosperity as a result of trade with Syria and Palestine in addition to earlier influxes of Circassians who at the time arrived with the Ottoman army. Subsequent generations of Palestinians were born in Jordan; the Nakba was followed by the setback Naksa in 1967, and then the Iraqi wars, which have all contributed to enriching the diverse fibre of the Jordanian community.

My Beloved Homeland was directed by Abdallah Kawash in 1964. Only a trailer of the film is included, and demonstrates the vision and nature of film making during the sixties, which, undoubtedly, persisted until the early nineties. The films are committed to the Arab Palestinian cause, and joined ranks in resisting the alien entity which cultivated itself in the heart of the Arab Nation, hindering its growth and causing its progress to derail to the armament race and successive wars, which exhausted its powers at a time when it was high time to establish a renaissance after ridding itself of the heavy burden of occupation. In the second film, the protagonist Kamal is viewed by his brother Hosni as a hero, and the limp he developed due to the heroic act he did on the front is a disfiguration that he is proud of. Hosni bought Hussein, Kamal's son, a military suit as a present, establishing in the kid's mind the inevitability of struggle.

However, the little kid in *My Beloved Homeland* has a neighbor at the periphery of the camp that will grow up in poverty and destitution. When he goes to school on a rainy day, his bare feet will be covered with dirt on the muddy road of the camp. This child – in *The Shoes* – can't help feeling joy with shoe donations that have just arrived to refugee schools. However, this joy will vanish into thin

air together with the pair of shoes when he fails to estimate the size of his feet. The plot of this second short film, *The Shoes*, directed by Mohammad Alloh in 1986 and featuring Al-Baqa'a camp, was inspired by a story written by Mohammad Tommalieh entitled 'About Shoes.'

Farai Darwish was also born and grew up in Al-Baga'a Camp. Yet, he grew up to be stout-hearted and strong until he managed to acquire the title of Jordan Golden Champion in boxing, when he was not yet twenty-one. In Sandra Madi's documentary Full Bloom we get acquainted with Faraj, the depressed champion, languidly and helplessly facing the decision of the Olympic commission, suspending and banning him from training with the national team. Faraj refused to fight against an Israeli boxer in a game held in Turkey. He is paying the high bill of his choice and is saving no effort in his attempt to be reinstated in the team. He soothes himself by dreaming up hopes of leaving his homeland, imagining that another team would adopt him and he would become an Olympic champion, because an Olympic champion is unforgettable.

Remind Me to Remember to Forget by Oraib Toukan (2006) is a video about the collective memory of Palestinians whose identities have been colored by relocation, but also about the collective memory of the entire Middle East. After the Israeli assault against Lebanon in 2006, Oraib, using a pen that erases rather than writes, tries to forget the memory of the reality, and the skewed media coverage, of the war while she was in the USA. This time, Israel will attack Gaza.

In Shawahed (2009), Firas Taybeh, who considered himself fully local and from Amman, won't be able to create a symbolic cemetery with three friends to commemorate the Gaza martyrs. He discovers that his artistic expression notwithstanding its form depends on the time, place and conditions. Meanwhile, Eyad Hamam in his film Deaf Countries uses the eloquent sign language to summarize the state of Arab countries by representing the shapes of their names.

Ala Younis, 2009

ALA YOUNIS: INDEPENDENT FILM IN JORDAN

- **27** *My Beloved Homeland (Watani Habibi)*, by Abdallah Kawash, 1964, Jordan, 3min (trailer)
- 28 The Shoes, by Mohammad Alloh, 1986, Jordan, 12min
- 29 Full Bloom, by Sandra Madi, 2006, Jordan, 46min
- 30 Remind Me to Remember to Forget, by Oraib Toukan, 2006, Jordan, 3min
- 31 Shawahed, by Firas Taybeh, 2009, Jordan, 12min
- 32 Deaf Countries, by Eyad Hamam, 2009, Jordan, 2min

<u> 27</u>

My Beloved Homeland (Watani Habibi), by Abdallah Kawash

1964, Jordan, 3min (trailer)

The Film

My Beloved Homeland (Watani Habibi) addresses an important period during the struggle between the Arab Jordanian army and the Jewish underground militia, which took over Palestinian territories in 1948. In the film, Kamal, the protagonist, leaves his family to fight for Palestine. After a fierce battle in Nahalin, a Palestinian village, he manages to rescue Soad, a young Arab woman kidnapped by the enemy. The heroic rescue battle leaves Kamal with a bullet in the leg, a permanent limp, and a future bride. To protect his younger brother from the atrocities of war Kamal sends him to study medicine in Beirut. Meanwhile the rescued wife dies while giving birth to Kamal's son, Hussein. Hussein's uncle brings him one gift from Beirut: a military outfit. Minimal dialog, frontline battles, the Jordanian army scene, local landscapes, and nightlife are the main features of this 52-minute film, shot over the course of two years.



The Filmmaker

This film is considered as an early beacon in the Jordanian film industry being only the second Jordanian film produced locally, by self-taught voung filmmakers. It was written. produced and directed by the brothers Abdallah and Mahmoud Kawash, then sank into oblivion until 2008 when Jordanian critic Adnan Madanat found a rare negative copy of the film kept by the family of the lead actor. The damaged and technically outdated copy was sent for restoration, editing, and conversion at a specialized film restoration laboratory in Cairo, supported by Jordan TV and the Royal Film Com-

The Shoes, by Mohammad Alloh

1986, Jordan, 12min

The Film

When it rains, misery escalates in the Palestinian refugee camp. A barefooted boy runs through muddy streets under heavy cold rain to catch a lesson in a room packed with barefooted classmates. The schoolteacher, a nightmare in his own right, is lecturing on the beauty of mixing colors when the school administration starts pulling students out of class. They are sent to the administration to receive a donation that will bring joy to some of the boys - but not all of them. Shot in Al Baqa'a refugee camp in 1986, the film is based on 'About Shoes', a short story by Jordanian writer Mohammad Tommalieh which was published in his second book of short stories, 'The Enthusiastic Bastards', in 1984.



Full Bloom, by Sandra Madi

2006, Jordan, 46min

The Film

Faraj Darwish, 21-year-old winner of the 2004 Arab boxing championship in Algeria, lives in a modest house with his poor family in Al Baqa'a, a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. He dreams of an Olympic medal, because "an Olympic hero will never be forgotten," yet he is banned from training in the first team because he refused to fight an Israeli in an international championship in Turkey in 2006. As a result, the boxing federation in Jordan banned him for life. Every day he wonders if he's going to fight again, or if he can grab some chance to be a professional boxer abroad. The film visits the dreams and lives of the former boxing heroes who lived and trained in Al Baqa'a camp.



The Filmmaker

Mohammad Alloh took a BA in film making from Cairo in 1977, adding another course in film making in 1987 in Poland. His first film, *The Shoes*, was produced on a very low budget raised by Alloh in 1986. Its timely release, preceding the first Intifada, facilitated a wide festival tour and a number of awards and honorary mentions, including the special diploma award at the Krakow Festival. Alloh worked at Jordan TV for 11 years before relocating to the Emirates in 1990 to work at Sharjah TV.

The Filmmaker

Sandra Madi was born in 1976 in Amman, Jordan. She won various awards as a film director and has produced and researched several documentaries. In 2006 she graduated from the Arab Institute of Film and directed the short film Far Away from Here, about Jordanian writer Mohammad Tommaleih. Her third documentary, Perforated Memory, won the prize for best scenario at Al Arabiya Channel Documentary Workshop in 2007 and best documentary film at Docudays in Beirut, 2009. A more recent project is her documentary Gaza Gaza.

Remind Me to Remember to Forget, by Oraib Toukan

2006, Jordan, 3min

The Film

Entranced by the US media coverage of the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, Oraib Toukan obsessively wrote and re-wrote the phrase 'remind me to remember to forget' in a split screen video that depicts two separate but synchronized performances. On one half of the screen, a phrase is frantically written in gold glitter and then inhaled through a red, white, and blue nozzle. On the other half of the screen is a close-up shot of a throat that consecutively breathes in and out. Set to the mindnumbingly hypnotizing sound of stifled breathing, the artist is suggestively remembering to forget. The video features Middle Eastern memory as a memory that has somehow been "made-to-forget," a "memory" that has become accustomed to being raped, eradicated, and disposed of right before it shifts from present to past.





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Shawahed, by Firas Taybeh

2009, Jordan, 12min

The Film

Firas Taybeh and three other artists decided to protest against the Gaza bombings in early 2009 by installing a symbolic cemetery in Al Rabieh neighborhood, in the heart of Amman, Each tombstone was marked with a number and the word "Gazzawi" (Gaza Native), and the cemetery grew each day with the increasing number of casualties in the aggressively bombed city. Al Rabieh was the most critical area to be chosen for this installation as it houses the Israeli embassy, and had previously witnessed several acts of violence between protestors and the riot police. One Friday, a massive demonstration took off from a mosque in Al Rabieh and the police was ready to control the angry crowds. Serious confrontations took place, and the camera caught severe acts of violence made to oppress the protestors, the journalists and the installation of the cemetery.

The Filmmaker

Oraib Toukan was born in 1977 in Boston, USA. She took a degree in film making from Bard College. New York and, from 2003 onwards, attended photography courses at the Speos Photography Institute. Paris. Toukan works across media in photography, video, and installation. She is a recipient of various fellowships, awards and international residency placements, including Jacob Javits, Triangle, ART OMI and Pro Helvetia, along with production grants by Mawred and AFAC. Her work has been shown in many international shows such as the 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009), the Euro-Mediterranean Tunis Biennial and the Valencia/Sao Paulo Biennial (2007).

The Filmmaker

Firas Taybeh was born in Libya in 1983 and studied directing and cinematography at The Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts in Aqaba. He started his artistic career studying sculpting before turning to film making in 2007. Taybeh has worked as an independent producer, director of photography, actor and art director in many Jordanian productions, and is one of the creators of Aramram, Jordan's first web TV. His films include *Pigeon Boy* (2010), *Shawahed* (2009), and *Invisible Face* (2007).



Deaf Countries, by Eyad Hamam

2009, Jordan, 2min

The Film

Sign language across the Arab World has been recognized and documented. Many efforts have been made to unify sign language used in individual countries, standardize the language and spread it among members of the deaf community and those interested. Such efforts produced many sign languages, almost as many as Arabic-speaking countries, yet with the same sign alphabets. The same can be applied to the different political positions of the Arab countries. The film presents the Arabic country names in Jordan's local sign language.



The Filmmaker

Eyad Hamam works in film making and postproduction. In his *Clash of the Titans* he explores the phenomenon of stadium "rivalry", eg. in Jordan, between Jordanians and Palestinians. He also co-directed *Man in a Cup* with Yahya Al Abdallah in 2005 and *Arabizi* with Dalia Al Koury.

RASHA SALTI: INDEPENDENT FILM IN LEBANON



Rasha Salti is an independent curator and freelance writer, dividing her time between Beirut and New York City. She is also the creative director of the New York based non-profit ArteEast (www. arteeast.org). She has administered a number of events, including a tribute to Edward Said titled 'For a Critical Culture' (Beirut, 1997), and '50, Nakba and Resistance' (Beirut, 1998), a three month cultural season for the fiftieth commemoration of the tragedy of Palestine. In 2006, she curated a retrospective of Syrian cinema that toured worldwide, and on that occasion edited 'Insights into Syrian Cinema: Essays and Conversations with Filmmakers' (ArteEast and Rattapallax Press). Salti writes about artistic practice in the Arab world, film, and general social and political commentary, in Arabic and English, in 'The Jerusalem Quarterly Report' (Palestine), 'Nagd' (Algeria), 'MERIP' (USA), 'The London Review of Books' (UK), 'Afterall' (US). In 2009, she collaborated with photographer Ziad Antar on an exhibition and book titled 'Beirut Bereft, The Architecture of the Forsaken and Map of the Derelict.'



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

In Praise of Excentricity: A Selection of Short Videos and Films from Post-war Lebanon.

In spite of the rich diversity of short films and videos in post-war Lebanon, whether in genre, content, approach, choice of medium, generally, they share discreetly, in slight of hand, at times with intention and others without, the disposition of being marginal, eccentric, or more literally, ex-centric. Some Lebanese visual artists and filmmakers have had no qualms making videos that dwell agreeably in the ambiguous terrain between video art and experimental cinema, as with Ali Cherri's A Circle Around the Sun, or Ahmad Ghossein's Faces Applauding Alone.

Some, if not most, blur without restraint the boundaries between the fiction and non-fiction genre. At one level, there is an explicit motivation to cast real-life stories and non-professional actors in a fictional setting, as with Fadi Dabaja's *The Coffee Smell*, one of the rare short films set in a Palestinian refugee camp, inspired from everyday stories. Same for Gilles Tarazi's *Tomorrow 6:30* that casts an all too familiar conundrum of the disillusioned Lebanese youth aspiring to make a better living outside the country. Similarly, there is an equally explicit motivation to extract poetry and fictional dimensions from real-life characters filmed in non-fictional format, as with Sarmad Louis's *The Purple Umbrella* and Pamela Ghanimeh's *Lemon Flowers*.

At another level, the distinctively unabashed delving into the personal, intimate and subjective muddies the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction more profoundly. Specifically, the use of "first person" proposes a re-constitution and critical interrogation of collective memory, public and private space, official discourse and political imperative, as in *A Circle Around the Sun*. Meandering in the subjective and intimate often resorts to innovative and bold use of archival material, whether personal or public, as in *Faces Applauding Alone*.

Some Lebanese filmmakers have liberally substituted one medium for another, again without qualms. So for lack of means, video was used instead of 16mm

or 35mm. But similarly, the rules and mindset for filming in 16mm or 35mm have changed, as with Sarmad Louis's *The Purple Umbrella*.

At the risk of seeming profoundly idiosyncratic, Lebanese short videos and films are utterly embedded in the locality of their universe, the lived experience of the moment, its contradictions, wounds, unspoken secrets, intimate vocabulary. In other words, or reversely, the motivation to tell a "universal" story, one that abides by the paradigms of mainstream production is almost wholly absent, as with all the works included in the selection. There is a genuine concern for communicability, however the terms of narrative, plot, character construction, manufacture of image and meaning are different, enraptured with poetry and proudly excentric.

Rasha Salti, 2009

RASHA SALTI: INDEPENDENT FILM IN LEBANON

- 33 A Circle Around the Sun (Un cercle autour du soleil), by Ali Cherri, 2005, Lebanon, 15min
- 34 Faces Applauding Alone, by Ahmad Ghossein, 2008, Lebanon, 7min
- 35 The Purple Umbrella, by Sarmad Louis, 2004, Lebanon, 10min
- 36 Lemon Flowers, by Pamela Ghanimeh, 2007, Lebanon/Denmark, 35min
- 37 The Coffee Smell, by Fadi Dabaja, 2008, Lebanon, 23min
- 38 Tomorrow 6:30, by Gilles Tarazi, 2008, Lebanon, 23min

33

A Circle Around the Sun (Un cercle autour du soleil), by Ali Cherri

2005, Lebanon, 15min

The Film

"I was disappointed the day they announced the war had ended. I used to be elated by the idea of living in a city that was eating itself, like excess stomach fluid that digests and gradually eats away the stomach." How to live in Beirut, a city that is always already in ruin?



The Filmmaker

Ali Cherri was born in Beirut in 1976. He studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut, and performing arts at 'DasArts' in Amsterdam. His works include the videos Untitled (2006), Un cercle autour du soleil (2005), and the performances 'Give Me a Body Then' (2006) and 'As Dead as Ever' (2005). Cherri has also worked as a set designer on a number of performances and plays such as 'The Anthem' (2006) by Gabriel Yammine, 10/20 'Irrelevant' (2003) by Abla Khoury, and 'Biokhraphia' (2001) by Lina Saneh and Rabih Mroué.

Faces Applauding Alone, by Ahmad Ghossein 2008. Lebanon. 7min

The Film

Combining video footage filmed in the 1980s and a voice-over of letters between Rachid Ghossein and Mariam Hamadeh (the artist's family), this short non-fiction video ponders on the time lag between remains and ruins.



The Purple Umbrella, by Sarmad Louis

2004, Lebanon, 10min

The Film

This silent, single-shot non-fiction film is a poetic meditation on the anodyne abstract choreographies of the quotidian, involving a green garbage receptacle, a hungry cat, a gleaner with his bicycle, a dislocated cradle, and a purple umbrella.



The Filmmaker

Ahmad Ghossein graduated from the Lebanese University with a diploma in theater. He has worked in film and video art as well as contemporary dance. Video works include Operation n... (2003), Ashoura (2004), Faux-Raccord (2006), An Arab Comes to Town (2008).

The Filmmaker

Sarmad Louis studied audio-visual arts at the IESAV-Université Saint Joseph and photography at the USEK-Université St. Esprit. He has worked as a light designer and/or set designer on plays by Roger Assaf and Issam Bou Khaled and as a cinematographer on commercials, documentaries and fiction films. Apart from that, he has done teaching at the IESAV-Université Saint Joseph. His film work includes cinematography for Ghassan Salhab's Posthumous (2007) and 1958 (2008) by Ghassan Salhab, as well as Jihane Chouaib's Le Pays Rêvé (2009). He has written and directed several films including Aqui e Agora (2006) and The Suicided (2008).

Lemon Flowers, by Pamela Ghanimeh

2007, Lebanon/Denmark, 35min

The Film

With the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, the Christian communities of Haret Hreyk, a neighborhood in Beirut's southern suburbs, began to move to other neighborhoods. Ghanimeh's family was among the last ones to leave. In the same period, the area witnessed a construction boom fueled by the displacement of Shiites from the south of the country to Beirut's suburbs, due to attacks by the Israeli army. For Ghanimeh's family, all that remains from their life in Haret Hreyk are a few memories.



The Filmmaker

Pamela Ghanimeh graduated from IESAV in 2003. She has worked with the renowned Lebanese directors Mohammad Soueid and Michel Kammoun. Films written and directed by Ghanimeh include Very Nice (Helo Kteer, 2002), The Distance of a Ride (Masefit Tarik, 2003), A Day in my Life (Yom Min Omri, 2002) and Lemon Flowers (Zahr el-Laymoon, 2007).

37

The Coffee Smell, by Fadi Dabaja

2008, Lebanon, 23min

The Film

Set in Burj el-Barajneh, and inspired by everyday incidents and subjects, the film tells the story of a couple that tries to enjoy a cup of coffee together, in quiet intimacy and in spite of relentless intrusion – a fiction, dealing with common reality in a camp: lack of space and excess proximity.

The Filmmaker

Fadi Dabaja is a Palestinian artist and a dedicated social activist living and working in the camp of Burj el-Barjaneh.



Tomorrow 6:30, by Gilles Tarazi

2008, Lebanon, 23min

The Film

Farid, a young Lebanese, has finally received his visa to emigrate. On his last night in Beirut, he bids farewell celebrating with his friends.



The Filmmaker

Gilles Tarazi is a graduate of the ESEC (École Supérieure des Études Cinématographiques). He worked as an assistant director in several Lebanese and French feature productions.

BOUCHRA KHALILI AND HICHAM FALAH: INDEPENDENT FILM IN MOROCCO





Bouchra Khalili is a Moroccan artist, born in Casablanca. She is the program director and a board member of the 'Cinémathèque de Tanger,' an artistrun organization established in 2006. The mission of the 'Cinémathèque de Tanger' is to develop film culture in Morocco and to provide Tangier's public with quality programs that reflect the diversity of film production. As an artist, Bouchra Khalilii's work has been shown extensively internationally, including shows at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Musée Nationale du Grand Palais (Paris), the Caixa Forum Foundation (Barcelona), the Studio Museum and Queens Museum of Art (New York), and the Reina Sofia National Museum (Madrid).

Hicham Falah graduated from Louis Lumière National School of Cinematographers. After completing his MA in cinema at La Sorbonne, Paris, he worked as an assistant for various directors of photography and filmmakers in France and Morocco. He directed the short films *L'attention* (1997) and *Balcon Atlantic* (selected in Clermont-Ferrand 2004, Cannes and Venice Film Festivals). A cameraman for French TV channels, he has also worked with many news and cultural magazines, and directed short programs and a dozen documentaries, mainly about art and politics. He has been programmer for the Salé International Festival of Films by Women (Morocco) and coordinator of the International Documentary Festival in Agadir (Morocco).

RATOR

CURATORS' STATEMENT

Here and There: Explorations in Contemporary Moroccan Short Film

Moroccan cinema is a young and post-colonial cinema, and since its inception has been nomadic and characterized by restless wandering and exile. Its first steps consisted largely of short pedagogic films. And after independence, there was a need to educate a young nation facing new challenges. During the 1960s and the 1970s the nature and vocation of Moroccan cinema, and its relation to itself and to society, were under question. But since the 1990s, and with the closing of the borders, the guestion of passing through and crossing became one of the major issues it tackled. Thus, the 1990s and the beginning of the new century witnessed the emergence of a generation of scriptwriters who commuted between two countries or lived in the diaspora, and participated in the recent renewal of contemporary Moroccan cinema.

The proposed program is an exploration of that new national cinema, with the diversity practised by its scriptwriters: fiction, documentary and documentary essay, and also experimental cinema. The main issue tackled by this program is how during the last ten years Moroccan cinema has tried to deal with the thorny reality of the country through a precise cartography of questions shaking the core of society: immigration, returning to the homeland, urban changes, social mutations and the position of women.

Thus Kamal Al-Mahouti, with his *My Lost Home*, set out to reveal a possible archaeology of immigration, attempting to define its path: the departure, the gap between the territory of origin and that of the new life, the unique situation of children born and raised in this fragmented space who resist their truncated genealogy because the history of such a departure cannot be transmitted. On the other hand, *Your Black Hair Ihsan (Tes cheveux noirs Ihsan*, 2005) by Tala Hadid positions itself at the path of returning to the origins. The visible simplicity of the story allowed Hadid to test the capacity of images to withhold memory, to extend a territory invested by memories into a pure mental and sensory dimen-

sion where immediate reality and reminiscences become progressively indistinct. The beauty of the film is due precisely to this issue of return considered as a return to oneself, to an existential loneliness that cannot be relieved by the return he is trying to intensify.

Abu Ali with Wahab reveals with a poetic and poignant melancholy the restless wanderings of a plastic bag in the streets of Tangier. At the crossroads of many approaches – documentary, artistic and experimental cinema – the artist who modestly pursues an anecdotal reality reveals a fragment of urban space infected by emptiness and melancholia. In blurring the margins, he succeeds through a hallucinated vision of ghostly silhouettes, to refer to the vision of the candidates for exile literally caught by a vision of elsewhere, so close but still faraway.

The films proposed x-ray, each in its own way, the status of modern Moroccan society, but also demonstrates the anxious and vigilant vitality of young Moroccan cinema.

Bouchra Khalili and Hicham Falah, 2009

BOUCHRA KHALILI AND HICHAM FALAH: INDEPENDENT FILM IN MOROCCO

- 39 Exit, by Simohammed Fettaka, 2008, Morocco, 12min
- **40** My Lost Home, by Kamal El Mahouti, 2002, France/Morocco, 19min
- 41 Wahab, by Toni Serra (aka Abu Ali), 1994, France/Morocco, 4min
- 42 Your Dark Hair Ihsan, by Tala Hadid, 2005, Morocco/USA,14min

<u>39</u>

Exit, by Simohammed Fettaka

2008. Morocco.12min

The Film

A documentary about a grave digger and a chamber maid in a northern Moroccan city – who have one thing in common: an exit without a way out.



The Filmmaker

Simohammed Fettaka is a young Moroccan filmmaker based in Tangier. He has produced various short documentaries and experimental videos. He trained in Morocco and La Femis, Paris. He has been involved in the 'Cinémathèque de Tanger' project and is also working as a musician and a composer.

<u>40</u>

My Lost Home, by Kamal El Mahouti

2002, France/Morocco,19min

The Film

On the eve of the demolition of a housing project in Saint-Denis, France, the Moroccan-born filmmaker Kamal El Mahouti revisits the place where he was taken to live as a child. His delicate, impressionistic document probes the graffiti-covered walls, broken windows and empty stairwells of a bleak apartment block to retrieve the memories of an immigrant family.

The Filmmaker

Kamal El Mahouti was born in Casablanca in 1963, but his Family moved to France when he was six years old. He studied film at the Université Paris VIII, where he completed the 16mm short film Once Upon a Time, the 14th of July 1945. He directed the short film My Lost Home (2002) and a few years later wrote and directed The Past Is Dead. In April 2006, he initiated a film festival, 'Panorama des Cinémas du Maroc et du Maghreb', in Saint-Denis, Paris.

Wahab, by Toni Serra (aka Abu Ali)

1994, France/Morocco, 4min

The Film

The wanderings of a plastic bag in a Tangier street.



The Filmmaker

Toni Serra aka Abu Ali was born in Barcelona in 1960 and divides his time between Duar Msuar, Morocco and Barcelona, Spain, Most of his works explore the borderline between inner experience and the social environment, taking into view phenomena like the increasing loss of control, the manipulation of identities and communities and the role and force of media (such as video games). Abu Ali is also a founding member of OVNI Archives - Observatorio de Video No Identificado. He has done research and programming in Spain, Morocco, and beyond.

Your Dark Hair Ihsan, by Tala Hadid

2005, Morocco/USA, 14min

The Film

A young Moroccan man returns to his native city in Northern Morocco after having received a phone call informing him that his mother has died. Hadid intersperses the contemporary journey with childhood scenes of the boy and his widowed mother, Ihsan, who tried to negotiate a better life for her little son.



The Filmmaker

Tala Hadid was born in 1974 in London to a Moroccan mother and an Iraqi father. In 2001, she directed *Windsleepers*, a film set in St. Petersburg. In 2005 Hadid completed her graduation film for Brown University: *Your Dark Hair Ihsan* (shot in Northern Morocco and in the Rif Mountains) won several prizes, such as the 2005 Cinecolor/ Kodak Prize and the Panorama Best Short Film Award at the Berlin Film Festival 2006.

LARA KHALDI AND YAZAN KHALILI: INDEPENDENT FILM IN PALESTINE





Lara Khaldi was born in Jerusalem sometime in the eighties, and received her BA in archaeology and art history with a minor in English literature in 2005. She recently resigned in protest as assistant director for programs at the Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE, and decided to work alone elsewhere. She worked as assistant curator for the Sharjah Biennial 8 (2007), as co-editor for the Sharjah Biennial 9 publications, and has also worked on the Sharjah Biennial 10. In 2007, she was assistant director at Al Riwag Art Gallery in Bahrain, and worked as assistant curator for the exhibition 'Disorientation II' at Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, in November 2009, and for the exhibition 'Never Part', Bozar, Brussels, 2007. In addition, she co-curated the exhibition 'PALESTINA: Tierra, Exilio, Creacion: Reconsidering Palestinian Art', Fundacion Antonio Perez, Cuenca, Spain 2006.

Yazan Khalili was born in 1981, and lives and works in and out of Palestine. Yazan Khalili received a degree in architecture from Birzeit University in 2003 and in 2010 graduated with a master's degree from the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmith's College, University of London. He was one of the founding members of Zan Design Studio (2005) and a finalist in the A.M.Qattan Foundation's Young Artists Award (2006), as well as an artist-in-residence at The Delfina Foundation in London (2008) and production coordinator for Sharjah Biennials 9 & 10. Yazan Khalili's photography explores the relationship between the social and spatial elements of the built environment and the contextual landscape alongside which they are perceived. Solo shows include 'Landscape of Darkness' at Transit Gallery, Belgium (2010), 'Urban Impression' at French Cultural Centers in Palestine (2007/08), and 'Margins' at The Delfina Foundation, London (2008). Selected group shows include 'Invisible', Ramallah, Amman and Rome (2006/07); 'No Man's Land' at Video Art, Granada (2008); 'Mapping' at Art Dubai, UAE (2009). The Jerusalem Show (2010) and 'External: New Art from Further East' at Newertown | Art, London (2010). Additionally, Khalili was one of the participants in Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti's project 'Ramallah Syndrome' at the Palestine c/o Venice Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009) and, with the Belgian group tg STAN, in the performance show 'The Tangible'. In 2008 and 2009, he was nominated for the KLM Paul Huf Award. He is one of the artists showing at the Future of a Promise Pavilion in Venice in 2011. His writings and photographs have been featured in several publications, including Frieze Magazine and Race & Class. In 2009, Khalili co-curated, with Lara Khaldi, 'We Are Never Heroes' as part of the Jerusalem Show. Some of his works have been acquired by the British Museum.

CURATORS' STATEMENT

We would like to begin by "measuring the distance" to where we stand in relation to the program we "present." We have been invited to present/represent Palestinian films by Palestinian filmmakers through a program, and this leads us to a series of questions about the meanings of representation.

The act of representation is somehow an act of constructing and reconstructing; it carries with it a form of repetition, a redefinition and the making/imagining of an image. But it also carries with it a political tone, in the sense of giving the right "to stand in" the place of others. We do not represent Palestinian films; Palestinian filmmakers do not represent Palestine or Palestinians. Rather, we think that – we/they – could present maps of representations, in a plural but not in an exclusive and collective sense.

Our selection showcases films that question and negotiate representations and structures of power that inform the production of images and notions about Palestinians. These films have an element of self-reflection, and criticism of the socio-political borders that make up the category of "Palestinian." but most importantly, they are films that are constantly conscious of being representations. The focus on the autobiographical in recent years in Palestinian cinema and art could be read as an attempt to remake an image not only in relation to the influence that media hold on it, but as a repositioning, a distancing that produces difference, and an exploration into how to "represent" or - even to go further - how not to represent. Through those short films we pose questions about space, and about how we construct our own maps. The frames in which these films are taken are intentional, the landscape/map is constructed consciously. They somehow retrace their own maps; reconstruct their own identities.

Our question goes back to a larger project in which we started thinking about mapping Palestinian cinema. We tried to do it spatially, chronologically, by genre... But in the end we decided to leave this question to the films themselves. We chose films that attempt to recreate themselves, filmmakers that are constantly conscious and constantly cor-

recting themselves and testing themselves against an imagined landscape. They measure distances; they shoot against their wishes, dive, and dig deep, retracing maps and landscapes.

Lara Khaldi and Yazan Khalili, 2009

LARA KHALDI AND YAZAN KHALILI: INDEPENDENT FILM IN PALESTINE

- 43 The Diver, by Jumana Emil Abboud, 2004, Palestine, 4min
- 44 The Shooter, by Ihab Jadallah, 2008, Palestine, 8min
- 45 Like Twenty Impossibles, by Annemarie Jacir, 2003, Palestine, 17min
- 46 Arafat and I, by Mahdi Fliefil, 2007, UK/Palestine, 15min
- 47 The Last Station, by Ghada Terawi, 2007, Palestine, 7min
- 48 We Began by Measuring Distance, by Basma Al-Sharif, 2009, UK/Palestine, 19min

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The Diver, by Jumana Emil Abboud

2004. Palestine, 4min

The Film

This video narrative tells the story of a 'Diver' whose gender, name, and nationality are ambiguous, and who is on an endless search to find 'the Heart'. The places the Diver visits are nameless, referred to only as "earth, sea, sky, and snow." They are unclaimed territories that the Diver passes through on the guest for 'the Heart'. Using the diving suit as the ultimate veil, disguise or defence mechanism, the Diver's world (and identity) is somewhat unknown. On one level, the Diver is an outcast: it is certain that he/she has a home but it is not known where. The Diver seeks the advice of others and wanders from one place to another, committed to the guest. Yet, on another level, the Diver is portrayed as a kind of "superhero," applauded for being unique: an independent traveler ready to venture into "unknown places" with relentless will and calm solitude.

The Filmmaker

Jumana Emil Abboud was born in Palestine in 1971 and was educated in Canada. Back in Palestine. she graduated from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. She uses drawing, video art, installation and performance. Salient themes animating her practice include memory, loss and resilience. Abboud's group exhibitions include: 'Disorientation', House of World Cultures, Berlin (2003), 'Women Artists', Museum of Contemporary Arts, Algiers (2008), the 53rd Venice Biennial (2009) and the 11th Istanbul Biennial (2009). Workshops and artist-in-residence participation include Guestatelier Aarau, Switzerland (2002); Liminal Spaces workshop, Ramallah, Qalandiya and Jerusalem (2006); and the Artists Initiative Tokyo (2005 & 2008).



The Shooter, by Ihab Jadallah

2008, Palestine, 8min

The Film

The film questions the Palestinian resistance struggle and its decadence, as it reaches a point of actual chaos and an absolute lack of control. Palestine is occupied by the international media and is the stage for sensational news stories; Palestinians have become "performers" of dramatic international evening newscasts. *The Shooter* is an attempt to subvert this staged representation by rebelling against the image it is made into – the performer becomes active, diverting from his script, slowly breaking out of character.



Like Twenty Impossibles, by Annemarie Jacir 2003, Palestine, 17min

The Film

When a Palestinian film crew decides to avoid a closed checkpoint by taking a remote side road, the political landscape unravels: the passengers are separated from each other by the mundane brutality of military occupation. Both a visual poem and a narrative, *Like Twenty Impossibles* wryly explores artistic responsibility and the politics of film making, while documenting the fragmentation of a people.



The Filmmaker

Ihab Jadallah (1980) was born and raised in a small village called Beit Safafa, near the occupied city of Jerusalem and is currently based in Palestine. After his graduation from high school in East Jerusalem, he moved to Valencia, where he attained his BA in audiovisual communication. He won a three-vear scholarship in film making at the Catalonia Cinematographic Studies Center, Barcelona. Jadallah has worked as a barman. DJ. translator. gaffer, set designer for short films and as an assistant director. He has directed several short films and documentaries, and also co-founded Krishna Films, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Middle East. A recent film project has been the feature-length film Dead Sea.

The Filmmaker

Annemarie Jacir has been working in independent film since 1994 and has written, directed and produced a number of films including A Post Oslo History (1998), The Satellite Shooters (2001), Like Twenty Impossibles (2003) and her first feature, Salt of this Sea, her second work to debut at the Cannes Film Festival. Jacir co-founded Philistine Films, an independent production company. focusing on productions related to the Arab world and Iran and has been chief curator and co-founder of the Dreams of a Nation project. dedicated to the promotion of Palestinian cinema. She has taught courses at Columbia, Bethlehem, and Birzeit University. She also works as a freelance editor and cinematographer. Having been banned from returning to Palestine, she now lives in Amman, Jordan.

Arafat and I, by Mahdi Fliefil

2007, UK/Palestine, 15min

The Film

A comedy about Marwan, a Palestinian in love, and Lisa, the girl he wants to marry. He thinks everything about her is perfect – she was even born on the same day as Chairman Arafat! But how will he make Lisa understand the significance of this coincidence?





The Last Station, by Ghada Terawi

2007, Palestine, 7min

The Film

The film explores Terawi's perception of and attitude towards the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the 1982 departure of the PLO, the second diaspora in the Arab countries, and the return to and reunion with Palestine and its symbols. The film is neither biographical nor historical, intertwining the filmmaker's personal story and view and collective history.



Mahdi Fliefil took a BA in film production from the International Film School of Wales. In Wales he also wrote and directed his first short film Shadi in the Beautiful Well, a story set in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain El-Helweh, South Lebanon, The film won numerous international prizes, including the prestigious DM Davies Award. His second short, Hamoudi & Emil. won the Best Foreign Short Award at the New York International Film Festival, In 2006 Mahdi Fliefil graduated with an MA in screenwriting from Royal Holloway, University of London. At the National Film and Television School in London he wrote, directed and acted in comedies, most notably Arafat & I. The film won the Best Film Prize at the Pisek Student Film Festival in the Czech Republic.

The Filmmaker

Ghada Terawi was born in Beirut in 1972 to a couple of Palestinian militants. She grew up meandering between Beirut, Tunis and Cairo and graduated from the American University in Cairo in 1995 with a BA in international relations. She currently lives in Palestine. In 1998 she started working in the field of documentary film making and produced her first film, *Staying Alive*, in 2001.



We Began by Measuring Distance, by Basma Al-Sharif

2009, UK/Palestine, 19min

The Film

Long still frames, text, language, and sound are weaved together to unfold the narrative of an anonymous group who fill their time by measuring distance. Innocent measurements become political ones, drawing an examination of how image and sound communicate history, tragedy, and the complication of Palestinian nationalism. We Began By Measuring Distance explores the ultimate disenchantment with facts when the visual fails to communicate the tragic.



The Filmmaker

Basma Al-Sharif was born in 1983 in Kuwait. She spent her early childhood in Brittany, France, and was educated in the US, earning a degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Art & Design. In 2004 she stayed at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University Sweden as a quest student. In 2009-2010 she was on a grant of the Fundación Marcelino Botín Visual Arts Grant developing a series of new projects in photography, film, and text. Her work has been shown internationally, e.g. at the 'Rencontres Internationales', Centre Pompidou, the Chicago Underground Film Festival Gene Siskel Film Center, the 31st Festival International Cinéma Méditerranéen Montpellier, 'Homeland': Exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center of Southern Australia, the 9th edition of the Sharjah Biennial, the Jerusalem Show in 2008, 'Images du Moyent-Orient Musee Jeu Du Paume'.

ORWA NYRABIA: INDEPENDENT FILM IN SYRIA



Orwa Nyrabia is a Syrian independent film producer, filmmaker and a co-organizer/program director of DOX BOX International Documentary Film Festival in Syria. A graduate from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus with a degree in acting, Orwa Nyrabia played the main role in Yousri Nasrallah's The Door to the Sun (Cannes Official Selection 2004) and worked as a first assistant director in several fiction films. From 1997 to 2002, he wrote for Assafir newspaper on Youth and Cultural subjects. In 2002 he co-founded Proaction Film, an independent film production and distribution company. Trained as a film producer at INA/Sorbonne in France, he is now producing fiction and documentary internationally such as the documentary film Dolls - A Woman from Damascus (IDFA, Nyon 2008). He regularly participates in panels and juries at festivals around the region and in Europe.



ORWA NYRABIA: INDEPENDENT FILM IN SYRIA

- 49 Point, by Rami Farah, 2005, Syria, 3min
- 50 Silence, by Rami Farah, 2007, Syria, 37min
- 51 Before Vanishing, by Joude Gorani, 2005, France/Syria, 13min
- 52 Bird of Stone, by Hazem Hamwi, 2007, Syria, 35min
- 53 Farewell, by Joud Said, 2008, Syria, 13min
- 54 The Pot, by Diana El Jeiroudi, 2005, Syria, 13min
- 55 A Short Visit to Say Goodbye, by Rami Hanna, 2007, Syria, 20min

Point, by Rami Farah

2005, Syria, 3min

The Film

A short test for a fixed camera, for a silent desert, and a young man trying... with full determination.



The Filmmaker

The young Syrian filmmaker Rami Farah studied dance in Damascus and Film at the Amman Arab Film Institute. He participated in many additional training courses and workshops in contemporary film and dance. In 2004 Rami created his first film ZamKan, a short video about a dialog between a ceiling fan and a chair in a silent room. His next production, *Point*, was presented in a number of exhibitions and at international festivals.

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Silence, by Rami Farah

2007, Syria, 37min

The Film

A close-up image and tightly constructed work of two Syrian men's memory of displacement from the Golan Heights in 1967. One of them is a host of an educational television show called "Our Folks in Golan" broadcast on Syria's National Television, the figure who represents Golan in the memory of young Syrian men. The second is an old man who witnessed and lived the displacement with all its consequences to date and sees nothing left to lose...



The Filmmaker

The young Syrian filmmaker Rami Farah studied dance in Damascus and Film at the Amman Arab Film Institute. He participated in many additional training courses and workshops in contemporary film and dance. In 2004 Rami created his first film ZamKan, a short video about a dialog between a ceiling fan and a chair in a silent room. His next production, Point, was presented in a number exhibitions and at international festivals. His film Silence won the Golden Falcon Award for the best short documentary in Rotterdam Film Festival for Arabic Cinema in 2007.



Before Vanishing, by Joude Gorani

2005, France/Syria, 13min

The Film

Showing a special and sharp understanding of cinema and life, being precise, and, at the same time, allowing for ambiguity, Gorani looks at the Bardy river. It is the river that has seen the rise of Damascus, the river which her family, writers and historians have used, with its floods and droughts, to reflect the life of Damascus. And now, as the river is drying out, Gorani walks by its banks to discover life around it discretely and with absolutely no allegations.



The Filmmaker

Joude Gorani studied film in France. Back in Syria she began working in documentary cinema and filmed Diana El Jeiroudy's Woman from Damascus, Kamila Majeed's Black Lines and Nidal Al-Dabas' Black Rock. She then moved on to feature films, shooting short productions in collaboration with young filmmakers like Joud Said and Suwar Zirkly, followed by long films with Nidal Al-Dabas, Maher Kadu, Joud Said and most recently Abdullatif Abdulhamid. She has a name as one of Syria's most prominent directors of photography. Before Vanishing was Joude Gorani's graduation project.

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Bird of Stone, by Hazem Hamwi

2007, Syria, 35min

The Film

Hazem Hamwi approaches his city of Salmiyah, in the middle of Syria, through Abu-Hagar, the town idiot; Abu-Hagar believes that stones are better and more honest than men. With a calm and professional camera, Hazem searches for his own expression, his craziness and understanding of sanity and wisdom.



Farewell, by Joud Said

2008, Syria, 13min

The Film

Joud Said searches for a short story of cinema in Syria, for film festivals that have changed many lives, for a cinema that has lured a young generation to see its reflection in a pool of water, and that years later finds itself alone, in a theater.



The Filmmaker

Hazem Hamwi started out as a selftaught film director, creating short experimental documentaries. Later on he joined the Amman Arab Film Institute for professional training.

The Filmmaker

Joud Said studied film at Leon University in France. He has directed a documentary entitled Few of Last Days and two short films entitled Monologue and Farewell. His first feature film Once Again won the award for Best Arabic Film from the Damascus International Film Festival in 2009.

The Pot, by Diana El Jeiroudi

2005, Syria, 13min

The Film

Diana raises questions about women: the identity of the Syrian woman, and her connection with pregnancy. The idea starts from an empty pot, a worthless pot that only becomes significant when it carries something in it. The film has been screened at more than forty festivals worldwide including Yamagata Festival in Japan and the Lincoln Center in New York, among others.



The Filmmaker

Diana El Jeiroudi studied literature and worked in marketing before she turned to cinema. She co-founded the company Proaction film which specializes in producing documentaries and was one of the founders of the DOX BOX International Documentary Film Festival in Syria. Her first film was the fiction Good Morning. It was succeeded by the short documentary *The Pot* in 2005 and by a long documentary entitled Dolls - A Woman from Damascus in 2007-2008 which was shown at various festivals internationally, including the IDFA festival in Amsterdam, and the Neon Festival in Switzerland.



A Short Visit to Say Goodbye, by Rami Hanna 2007, Syria, 20min





IKBAL ZALILA: INDEPENDENT FILM IN TUNISIA



Born in 1967 in Tunis, Ikbal Zalila is associate professor in Film Studies at ISAMM (Institut Supérieur des Arts Multimédias de Manouba) where he teaches film aesthetics, film theory and film analysis. He is also president of the National Association of Film Critics and member of FIPRESCI (The International Federation of Film Critics). He was a member of the critics' jury at the Venice Film Festival, the Rotterdam International Film Festival and the Istanbul Film Festival. Zalila is a regular contributor to the Tunisian newspaper Le Temps. In 2008, he was a member of the organizing committee of the Carthage Film Festival.

CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

The independent film scene in Tunisia is generally presented as a homogeneous block formed in opposition to commercial cinema. In Tunisia, the particular historical developments in film making and the democratization of the means of shooting has today engendered various types of independent films characterized by variety and dynamism.

This program is composed of eight short films, which highlight the diversity of the independent scene in terms of production budgets, thematic approach, and aesthetic choices. Regarding the conditions of production, four films from the program - The Fall, Fundo, The Tank and Abdelkrim's Battleship - are considered "no budget films." They exist because young people came together motivated by a desire to make movies. Conversations and Madame Bahja are the outcome of a collaboration between two independent producers who in 2004 took the initiative to support ten young novice directors. Their project 'Ten Shorts, Ten Glances,' a rather rigid exercise (two days of shooting, two sets), was realized with a tight budget and allowed for the discovery of new talents. The Crossing and The Drowning Fish are short films subsidized by the Ministry of Culture. They benefited from substantial budgets compared with the previous six films and were produced by independent producers.

On the thematic level, death, war and the desire to escape elsewhere are the strong threads that run through the program. The fantasized "elsewhere" (through illegal immigration) is dealt with by *The Fall, Abdelkrim's Battleship* and Nadia Touijer's *The Crossing*, and "the elsewhere" as a no man's land is what the eccentric of *Fundo* is drifting towards. Meanwhile death is what *Madame Bahja* dreads, and what the mother and her daughter wish for the tyrannical father in *The Drowning Fish*. An off-camera war is at the origin of the wounded soldiers' friendship in Conversations, and a parody of war emerges with the story of scarce water resources in *The Tank*.

It seems premature to speak about a new wave cinema in Tunisia. This program of short films concentrates on the various alternatives which offer themselves to the Tunisian cinema of tomorrow.

The avantgarde - with its aesthetics of the break. its concern with formal questions and its sober and purified direction - is embodied by The Fall, Fundo. Abdelkrim's Battleship and to a lesser degree by The Tank, in spite of its didactic tone. The Crossing, with its documentary aesthetics and its inclination to de-dramatize, distances itself from the naturalism omnipresent in Tunisian cinema. Conversations. in its restraint and modesty, avoids the stumbling blocks of pathos and sentimentality. Madame Bahja probably stands as the birth certificate of a strong writer of dialog and a promising filmmaker. The academicism of its directorial vision is compensated for by its sense for a successful formula and an excellent control of the situation's comic potential. The Drowning Fish, a crazy and furious film, succeeds thanks to very precise work on rhythm and colors and to well-used slapstick potential.

Ikbal Zalila, 2009

IKBAL ZALILA: INDEPENDENT FILM IN TUNISIA

- 56 Abdelkrim's Battleship (La cuirasse Abdelkarim), by Walid Mattar, 2003, Tunisia, 8min
- 57 Conversations, by Mohamed Kaïs Ben Zaied, 2007, Tunisia, 11min
- 58 Fundo, by Abdelbar Mahmoud, 2008, Tunisia, 13min
- 59 Madame Bahja, by Walid Tayaa, 2006, Tunisia, 14min
- 60 The Crossing, by Nadia Touijer, 2008, Tunisia, 15min
- 61 The Drowning Fish, by Malik Amara, 2007, Tunisia, 19min
- 62 The Fall, by Ala Eddine Slim, 2007, Tunisia, 14min
- 63 The Tank, by Lassaad Weslati, 2007, Tunisia, 13min

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Abdelkrim's Battleship (La cuirasse Abdelkarim), by Walid Mattar

2003, Tunisia, 8min

The Film

Young people are waiting to obtain a visa to go to Europe. All their applications are refused. But there must be a solution! A revolution? – This blackand-white silent movie was shot in just a few hours. The Battleship Potemkin was the departure point of the revolution. Abdelkrim's Battleship is what remains for those who will never revolt. The citation of Eisenstein's movie is precise; the "décalé" mood prevents the movie from drifting into mannerism and the denouement matches the darkest side of reality.



The Filmmaker

Walid Mattar was born in Tunis in 1980. He has worked as a cameraman and filmmaker. *Abdelkrim's Battleship*, shot in 2003, won several awards from national and international film festivals. This debut work was followed by the short documentary film *Sons of the Turtle* (2005). In 2006, he co-directed *Good Morning* with Laila Bouzid. Other films are the documentary *Da Giorgio* (2007), and the fiction *Condemnations*.

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Conversations, by Mohamed Kaïs Ben Zaied 2007. Tunisia. 11min

The Film

The film charts the birth of a moving acquaintance of two injured soldiers in a hospital room. Producing this film was a challenge: The two protagonists are well-known theater and cinema stars. The task was to avoid pathos and sentimentalism and to achieve the right tonal pitch in a quiet and conventional mise-en-scène. And, in describing to his friend the images he believes to see, the soldier also mirrors the position of the filmmaker...



Fundo, by Abdelbar Mahmoud

2008, Tunisia, 13min

The Film

A man – maybe a tramp? – drifting on a wooden raft, a fish in a bowl floating alongside. A man drifting because of his fish? Who cares: it's the idea of cinema itself that prevails in this movie, a minimalist mise-en-scène and anodyne gestures...



The Filmmaker

Mohamed Kaïs Ben Zaied was born in 1984 in Tunis where he is still based. He studied at the School of Art and Design and also holds a diploma in sign language. His first short film *Conversations* has been screened in many festivals and won the Special Jury Award at Fespaco 2007. Other short movies are *Glass Age* (documentary directed during the summer workshop at La Fémis school in 2006), and *Oxymore* (for 'Dream City', a Contemporary Art Festival in Tunis).

The Filmmaker

Abdelbar Mahmoud was born in 1982 in Tunis. After graduating in 2005, he spent three years working as an assistant director in feature and documentary productions and also as a director of short movies. He has been working on a master's degree in media design in Tokyo. Fundo is his first professional work as a director.

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Madame Bahja, by Walid Tayaa

2006, Tunisia, 14min

The Film

A sharp, incisive glance on old age and solitude. There is a sense of repartee and a capacity to sink into the drama by humor. Madame Bahja is ugly, Madame Bahja is old, Madame Bahja is sick – and nevertheless she collides into the big despair of the nurse, frivolous and superficial, who has only a single concern: her phone conversation with a friend. Two antipodal characters; two images of Tunisia for a comedy that does not compromise. The genre is rare in Tunisian cinema. Through his first professional film, Walid Tayaa shows that it is possible to laugh intelligently.



The Filmmaker

Walid Tayaa took up Cinema after first studying sociology. His amateur short movies participated in international independent festivals. He has worked as an assistant director on several productions. In 2006, his first short professional movie Madame Bahja was selected in the category world cinema at the Cannes Film Festival. After taking part in various training programs and workshops in Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, the Czech Republic, Germany and France, he started studying at La Fémis school in 2007. Apart from Madame Bahja, his films are Moi, El Essawi, about the Sufi brotherhood of Issawiyya in Tunis, the short film Vivre and Prestige. Another, more recent project, is a full-length feature film.



The Crossing, by Nadia Touijer

2008, Tunisia, 15min

The Film

Eight-year-old Amin lives in a popular quarter in the heights of Tunis. He descends to the city to hand in his collection of stickers and hopes to be awarded a bicycle. Almost all alone he faces the metropolis. His journey proves to be more difficult than expected. There is something eminently modern in this initiation story: a subtle merging of documentary and fiction, a propensity to de-dramatize, an erasure of psychology, and a very irregular breath which matches with the rhythm of the little child's perambulation in the big city. Why does this boy, this foreigner to the big city, meet the glance of this particular tramp? The city is depicted without any disguise in its ugliness, and shot from the child's point of view.



Nadia Touijer was born in 1976. She has done several training courses in photography, editing, film analysis and film writing. After a degree in natural sciences, she studied film in Brussels and, in 2005, graduated in film editing. She edited several short and feature films, and since 1999 has also worked as a director (e.g. on the short films *La Descente* and *Utopie*).



The Drowning Fish, by Malik Amara

2007, Tunisia, 19min

The Film

Everybody, including his wife and his daughter, is relieved when the tyrannical fisherman dies. But this death is not as it seems. In this intense film with its furious rhythm and its great comedians, Malik Amara created a frivolous black comedy. Mastering the codes of the genre, the director introduces something new into Tunisian cinema: he undermines the sacred aura of death, turning funeral rites into mockery and depicting death's antechamber humorously. In dealing with death, *The Drowning Fish* celebrates life.



The Fall, by Ala Eddine Slim

2007, Tunisia, 14min

The Film

The plot revolves around a group of men who intend to make an illegal crossing to a European country. This short film forms a clever equilibrium between aesthetic concerns and political commitment: a real vision on a burning actuality. The symbolic image of the eradication of the tree's branch speaks of a way to keep a trace of what we have been, and shots that focus on torn Tunisian flags are just as loaded. The frames, the lines and the colors tell of the quest and its impossibility. Death is the destiny.



The Filmmaker

Born in Tunis in 1974, Malik Amara studied film at EDAC (l'École des Arts et du Cinéma) and the École Louis Lumière in France. He has worked as a director of photography, mainly in commercials. *The Drowning Fish* marks his debut as film director and has been shown at many international film festivals including Fespaco, Dubai, Stockholm and Nancy.

The Filmmaker

Born in 1982, Ala Eddine Slim graduated in 2003 with a short film entitled Night of Dreamers. Together with Ali Hassouna and Chawki Knis he co-founded Exit Productions in 2005. The Fall (2007) is his first professional short film, followed by the short documentary A Night Among Others (2008) that was produced during an internship at the Fémis school (France). More recent projects are a long documentary essay entitled Along with Hamlet and the short film The Stadium.



The Tank, by Lassaad Weslati

2007, Tunisia, 13min

The Film

Two men in the middle of nowhere fight for the last drop of water. What is left to do when the water is finished? The originality of this movie lies in its script and in the burlesque tone the filmmaker has chosen. Aesthetics prevent the "cistern" from turning into an imposition. The men's war for the last drop of water is pathetic, but cooperation is unavoidable.



The Filmmaker

Lassaad Weslati was born in Le Kef, Tunisia in 1979 and holds a degree in film directing. He has worked as assistant director on Tunisian and foreign films. After *The Tank* (2007), Lassaad directed *Mémoires d'Une Femme*, a documentary which won various prizes in film festivals internationally.

































SCREENINGS

At the Arab Shorts film screenings, curators and filmmakers introduced programs and films and got involved in discussions with the audience.







ARAB SHORTS 2010

ON ARAB SHORTS 2010

The future of short films is on the Internet. While short films have difficulty going through classic distribution channels – movie theaters and TV stations are not interested in short films for structural reasons, DVDs need the obligatory stars to sell – they are ideally suited to the Internet. They are easy on the precious resources of both bandwidth and viewers' attention spans, and since short films are not saleable to begin with, they fit well with the free-of-charge culture of virtual space.

Still, many open questions remain: Few artists are really comfortable in an environment composed of platforms offering countless videos and films such as YouTube etc., and while bizarre amateur videos of all-too-human embarrassing situations and mishaps reach more viewers than many a Hollywood movie, high-quality artistic works often receive little or no attention, with 100 or even fewer views being quite common. Therefore it was, and is, the main goal of "Arab Shorts" to offer an editorially suitable platform for independent, young Arab films.

Arab Shorts continues to be an experimental project also in its second year. When we began in 2009, there were many unknowns. Would the filmmakers want to put their films online? Would people come to the festival when they could view the films at home? Would there be any interest in the films afterwards, outside of the Internet?

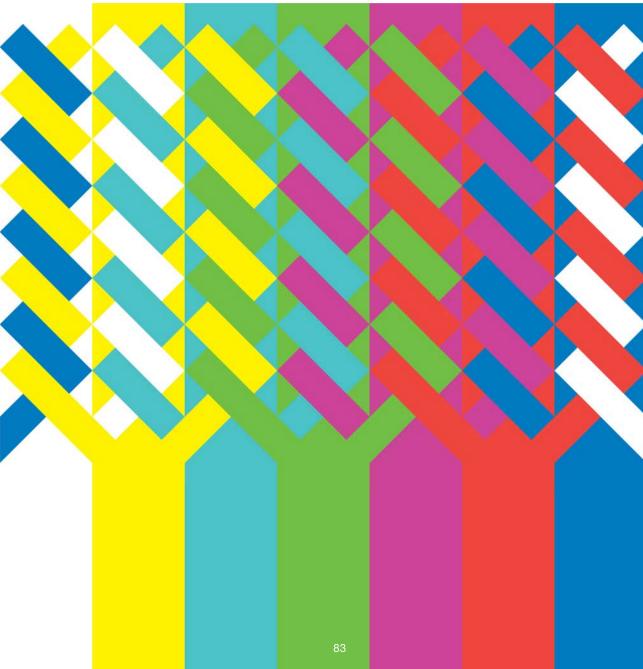
We are happy to report that we can answer all these questions in the affirmative. Generally, filmmakers have been pleased to present their films online, attendance at the festival in Cairo was excellent, and there was such a demand for the films also after the festival that we put together a touring program for screenings in movie theaters. We are also happy that the success of "Arab Shorts" in 2009 makes it possible to continue the project into 2011. Otherwise, many films in the "Arab Shorts" program that are now seen by thousands of people would not have reached an international audience.

We have set ourselves new tasks for the current program. We relaxed the strict categorization by national cinematographies, so every curator was free to put together either a country-focused or a cross-border program. In a globalized world and given artists' nomadic biographies, it is, after all, often difficult to determine a film's "nationality."

By inviting German festival experts, from big-scale events such as the Berlinale, the transmediale, and the DOK Leipzig but also from specialized start-ups such as ALFILM, and by setting up a panel discussion and a viewing lounge featuring current filmic works, we put more emphasis on the project's process and networking aspects. The idea is to build networks also, but not exclusively in the virtual space of the Internet.

I would like to thank all contributors, artists, curators, and cooperation partners for making this exciting project possible!

Marcel Schwierin



EMAD MABROUK: EGYPT – POST-REALIST REALITY



Emad Mabrouk was born in Alexandria and has worked as a filmmaker and cultural programmer since 2003. He has directed a number of films: The Dead Won't Mind (El-Maiyet Mesh ha Yiza'al), The Grocer's Daughter (Bent El Ba'al), The Color of Life (Loun El-Hayat), and other films. He won a scholarship to study creative documentary film at the Arab Film Institute in Jordan, followed by another scholarship to study direction for multiple cameras from the National School of Cinema, Denmark, in collaboration with Semat Production and Distribution. Cairo. As a member of the viewers' committee he has worked with the Cairo Independent Film Festival at the Goethe-Institut, and has coordinated and managed a number of film making programs in various places, among them the 'The Film making Workshop' at Jesuits Cultural Center in Alexandria.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Short films have been and continue to be the broadest and most accessible medium for free expression, whether in terms of tackling ideas, technology, or inventiveness in film. The brief running time of short films may constitute an obstacle in finding screening venues, but this brevity gives filmmakers a free rein to voice their opinions and positions, pushing each film towards innovative content on both commercial and cultural levels.

Last year I had the honor of being invited to select a number of Egyptian films for the Arab Shorts project, and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to choose new films for this year's program. The selection proved to be more difficult this time around since the films had to conform to a general theme. 'Post-Realist Reality' is the theme of this year – a theme that, as it happens, describes the state of short and independent cinema in Egypt today. The awards won by Egyptian films, the emergence of a large number of films and film festivals in 2009 and 2010, and the striking diversity of these films has placed Egyptian films in a position of distinction amidst Arab cinema.

I have chosen films that represent this development in terms of their visual qualities, content, idea, or approach to the medium of film. In addition to films by Egyptians, I have also deliberately included films that take Egypt as their topic or that have been shot in Egypt, with the goal of presenting different perspectives on how to make short films focused on this area of the world. I want to express my thanks to all the filmmakers who graciously allowed their films to be screened as part of this program and everyone who helped bring this task to completion.

Emad Mabrouk, 2010

THE FILM PROGRAM

EMAD MABROUK: EGYPT - POST-REALIST REALITY

- 64 Pale Red, by Mohamed Hammad, 2009, Egypt, 15min
- 65 Atef, by Emad Maher, 2009, Egypt, 6min
- 66 The Maid, by Heidi Samaan, 2008, Egypt/USA, 19min
- 67 Solo, by Laila Sami, 2009, Egypt, 6min
- 68 A Gown and Shoes, by Ahmed Nour, 2007, Egypt, 29min

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Pale Red, by Mohamed Hammad

2009, Egypt, 15min

The Film

Shaima is a teenager who lives with her grandmother. The two women have nothing in common. One day, Shaima faces an embarrassing situation that makes her become aware of her femininity...





Atef. by Emad Maher

2009, Egypt, 6min

The Film

Rain and confused names can sometimes be a catalyst for two strangers to engage in a conversation...



The Filmmaker

Mohamed Hammad was born in Cairo in 1981. He graduated with a degree in literature from Helwan University. He is an independent screenwriter and filmmaker. He authored the script for The Fifth Pound (El-Geneih el-Khames) (2005), directed by Ahmed Khaled, and Mersal al-Marasil (2005), directed by Hilmi Abdel-Magid. He also directed a short experimental film entitled Tawaf (2004) as well as several documentaries including Mulid al-Sayeda Nafisa (2004) and the fiction film Call Center (2006). He is currently working on his first full-length feature film.

The Filmmaker

Emad Maher obtained a degree in architecture from the University of Alexandria. He has worked as a graphic designer and studied cinema at the Jesuit Center workshops. Since then, he has worked as a screenwriter, director and cameraman. His first short film, *Lamba Neon*, won first prize in the 2009 Alsaqia Short Film Festival. *Atef* is his second short film.

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The Maid, by Heidi Samaan

2008, Egypt/USA, 19min

The Film

The Maid, a short fictional film, examines the moment when we are forced to understand that other people are real in the same way that we are. Rasha is an Egyptian housemaid who is struggling with her job. When her suspicions about her employer are confirmed, Rasha has to rethink her perceptions of trust, duty, and her place within the family household.



Solo, by Laila Sami

2009, Egypt, 6min

The Film

Egyptian filmmaker Laila Sami spends six minutes exploring the crushing pressures of agoraphobia that her protagonist must overcome to satisfy her desire for rich, dark, seductive chocolate. Not a single sliver of sweetness can be found in the entire house and yet she is afraid of going outside. It's a rueful affliction, but one that must be dealt with.



The Filmmaker

Heidi Samaan was born and raised in Anaheim, California, but is of Egyptian-Lebanese-Armenian descent. She attended the University of California, San Diego where she studied World Literature and Gender Studies. After graduation, Samaan was accepted to the Presidential Scholar Program at the American University in Cairo. There she worked in media relations as a writer, copy editor, and photographer. Additionally, she was a freelance journalist for the Cairo Times News Magazine, where her stories focused on gender-related issues in Egypt and the Middle East.

The Filmmaker

The Egyptian filmmaker Laila Sami, is a graduate of the Higher Institute of Cinema Cairo. As an actress she appeared in the acclaimed film Elevator, The Aquarium and the upcoming film In the Last Days of the City. She has directed a number of short and feature-length films.



A Gown and Shoes, by Ahmed Nour

2007, Egypt, 29min

The Film

Bakry divides his life between two opposite worlds: the village where he was born and raised and where his small family lives a traditional country life, and Cairo where he works in a well-known cultural center in Zamalek, an affluent upper middle class neighborhood. Following Bakry in these two environments reveals a lot of hypocrisy and ethical dilemmas. This applies to Bakry himself and to the people surrounding him, regardless of their social or educational background. However, he seems to be the only person brave enough to admit to this fact, or at least the only one who has escaped total confusion.



The Filmmaker

Born in Cairo in 1983, Ahmed Nour studied television directing at Ain Shams University, which was followed by several workshops and courses in film directing. He went on to study documentary film making at the Arab Institute of Film, while working as an assistant director on several full-length 35-mm films for Egyptian cinema. He has also worked as an assistant director in many music videos and television serials. More recently, his focus has been on documentary film making. In his practice, he is interested in humanitarian subjects, and is trying to develop an international language that takes into account the nuances of Egyptian society.



IKBAL ZALILA: FORMALISM BEYOND REALISM



Born in 1967 in Tunis, Ikbal Zalila is associate professor in Film Studies at ISAMM (Institut Supérieur des Arts Multimédias de Manouba) where he teaches film aesthetics, film theory and film analysis. He is also president of the National Association of Film Critics and member of FIPRESCI (The International Federation of Film Critics). He was a member of the critics' jury at the Venice Film Festival, the Rotterdam International Film Festival and the Istanbul Film Festival. Zalila is a regular contributor to the Tunisian newspaper Le Temps. In 2008, he was a member of the organizing committee of the Carthage Film Festival.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

The Tunisian program for Arab Shorts 2010 focuses on the current stylistic range found in the independent cinema scene in Tunisia. A stylistic gap between the work of established filmmakers and what can be described as 'the cinema of the margins" is growing due to a number of factors. One pertains to the rigidity and poverty of current cinematic positions that characterize mainstream Tunisian cinema, which had built its credibility in the mid-eighties on its capacity for transgressing social taboos. But despite this thematic shift, not much has changed in the last two decades on the formal level (more specifically through a scan of mise-en-scene). This cinematic conservatism can be explained by the inability of the scene to foster a productive environment for new filmmakers, which is mainly due to an unwritten rule according to which a director cannot benefit from state production grants until he/she is in his/her forties. And since it was impossible until ten years ago to make films without state subsidies. this explains the lack of diversity that characterized Tunisian cinema between the eighties and the beginning of this century. Paradoxically, naturalistic realism can be regarded both as the benchmark for cinematography as well as its main undermining factor.

The rise and democratization of digital technologies and the proliferation of film schools has led to the birth of a young Tunisian independent scene at the margins of mainstream cinema. From this 'marginal' perspective, there has been a decidedly violent reaction against the cinema of the older generation. Established filmmakers have been accused of benefiting from the state subsidy system at the expense of the entry of younger filmmakers. But perhaps more importantly, the naturalistic and academic legacy of the predecessors has been strongly contested for its inability to make an impact due to being locked in a state of 'false' realism.

Young Tunisian filmmakers have adopted a formdriven approach to cinema. This appropriation of formalism as an artistic quest to investigate reality has purged formalism of its negative connotation as a form without substance. Deconstruction as a way of questioning narrative, exploration of genre films (fantastic, burlesque, horror), new ways of editing where priority is given to 'plan sequence,' and a parsimonious use of dramatization effects (in lighting, sound and direction) are some of the main characteristics of this formal shift the young generation of Tunisian filmmakers is promoting.

From a film historical perspective, this new configuration can be read as a means to subscribe to modernity on the part of national cinema. Film is no longer a mere imitation of reality, but is first and foremost a formal proposition that seeks to communicate reality's richness and complexity. Seen in the Tunisian context, this shift is a healthy symptom of change giving evidence of the dynamism of the margins that the independent scene in Tunisia has witnessed in the last ten years or so.

Even if it is premature to talk of a new wave or of an organized aesthetic movement, this concern over cinematic form observed among some young Tunisian directors is a sign that naturalism is not a fait accompli, and that realism is not the only way to deal with reality. These tendencies obviously cannot be generalized to the entire independent cinema scene in Tunisia. The will of breaking with 'le cinema de papa' is not shared by all young filmmakers. So, when compiling a more representative film program, more classical ways of making movies should also be taken into account.

The Tunisian program has been put together with this approach in mind. It consists of four short films that represent the formal spectrum and means of productions observed in the Tunisian independent film scene. The films range from a conventional cinematic 'disposition' to more form-driven movies. focusing either on 'genre' or on deconstruction as a way to grasp a versatile and paradoxical reality. This selection also mirrors the different modes of production. The first film in the program is a statesubsidized fictional film entitled Le Rendez-vous by Sarra Laabidi. The second, Hikayetou Imraa (A Woman's Tale) by Karim Souaki, is a very lowbudget film by the Tunisian Federation of Amateur Filmmakers (FTCA), while the third is a totally independent one: Ayan Ken (Anyone) by Ridha Tlili is a fictional film by Exit Production produced with practically no budget. The last film in the program is entitled Eddoussi (The File) by Majdi Lakhdar and is a film school production.

Ikbal Zalila, 2010

THE FILM PROGRAM

IKBAL ZALILA: FORMALISM BEYOND REALISM

- 69 Le rendez-vous, by Sarra Laabidi, 2006, Tunisia, 16min
- 70 Hikayetou Imraa (A Woman's Tale), by Karim Souaki, 2005, Tunisia, 6min
- 71 Ayan Ken (Anyone), by Ridha Tlili, 2007, Tunisia, 20min
- 72 Eddoussi (The File), by Majdi Lakhdar, 2009, Tunisia, 16min

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Le rendez-vous, by Sarra Laabidi

2006, Tunisia, 16min

The Film

Ahlem dreams of Prince Charming. After a failed rendezvous, the police pick her up. This film marks the beginning of Sarra Laabidi as a professional filmmaker. In terms of aesthetics, *Le rendez-vous* is the closest film to the naturalistic realism typical of Tunisian mainstream cinema. Its strength lies in the genuineness of the filmmaker's gaze and her ability to avoid the traps of melodrama. It is a simple story, soberly directed, a female perspective on love, misfortune, and social and political male domination.



The Filmmaker

Sarra Laabidi was born in Gabés and started her career at the FTCA (Fédération Tunisienne des Cinéastes Amateurs). In 1997 she completed her BFA in graphic design and directed her first documentary Errances. In 2003, she began film studies at the INSAS in Brussels where she specialized in editing. After obtaining her diploma in 2006, she directed her first fictional film Le rendez-vous followed by The Last Wagon in 2010. More recently, Sarra Laabidi worked on a documentary (111 Rue de la poste) and on the script of her first full-length feature film.

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Hikayetou Imraa (A Woman's Tale), by Karim Souaki

2005. Tunisia. 6min

The Film

To earn her living, Rebeh, an old woman, drags her tired body around, carrying the burden of thousands of empty plastic bottles that she picks up from the streets. This films marks the first steps of a promising documentary director. In this very short documentary, Karim Souaki, a self-taught director, shows his intuitive ability to find the right distance to film the voice of a courageous woman struggling against poverty and marginalization. The images are rough but eloquent and the 'portrait' is convincing beyond its pathos.





Ayan Ken (Anyone), by Ridha Tlili

2007, Tunisia, 20min

The Film

A man discovers that his civil status papers pronounce him dead. He looks for a sign of life, or death. Aesthetically radical, politically engaged, Ayan Ken is a strong début for a filmmaker whose concern with cinematic form is obvious. Ayan Ken explores the deconstruction of narrative as a form but also as a metaphor for the path of its main character. A gloomy depressed gaze combines with a promising formal quest.



The Filmmaker

Born in 1977, Karim Souaki had his professional beginnings in the FTCA (Fédération Tunisienne des Cinéastes Amateurs). To date, he has directed three documentaries: Qui aime la vie aime le cinéma in 2004, Histoire d'une femme (A Woman's Tale) in 2005, and Silence in 2007. Silence was awarded prizes at several film festivals.

The Filmmaker

Born in 1977, Ridha Tlili studied film direction at the University of Manouba. Ayan Ken (2007) is his first professional short film and has been selected for several film festivals. In 2009, he directed two more short films: Bas-Bord and Teriague – a Poetic Travelogue.



Eddoussi (The File), by Majdi Lakhdar

2009, Tunisia, 16min

The Film

A man rushes through a Kafkaesque public administration in a hectic search for a document. Bureaucracy through the prism of genre film – this is the perspective of Majdi Lakhdhar's *The File*. The way the director has adapted the codes of burlesque to his own universe and the energy he has given to the montage make *The File* one of the most refreshing and innovative filmic propositions in the independent cinema scene of the last two years.



The Filmmaker

Majdi Lakhdar was born in Tunis in 1987. After obtaining his degree in script writing and film making from the Manouba Institute of Arts and Multimedia (ISAMM) in 2009, he directed two short films: *The File* and *Big Heart Little Heart*; both were awarded prizes at various festivals. Lakhdhar appears as an actor in several short films and has also worked as a film critic for a Tunisian daily. He is a member of the European Cinema Days 2010 steering committee and of 'L'Association du Court et du Documentaire Maghrébin.'



ALA YOUNIS: TO KNOW THE ARAB TERRAIN: MOVEMENTS TO, FROM, AND WITHIN



RATOR

Ala Younis is an independent artist and curator based in Amman. Through art, film, and publication projects, Younis investigates the position of individuals in a politically driven world, and the conditions in which historical and political failures of the collective become personal ones. In 2011, Younis curated 'Maps, Timelines, Radio Programs' for La Galerie, Contemporary Art Center in Noisy-le-Sec (Paris), 'Out of Place' with Kasia Redzisz for the Tate Modern (London) and Darat al Funun (Amman), and 'Momentarily Learning from Mega-Events' for Makan (Amman).

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CURATOR'S STATEMENT

In his book project, 'A Stone in a Pond', Moroccan artist Mohssin Harraki examines the educational and pedagogical publications that shaped the collective memory of Morocco as a product of post-colonialism. A closer look at the academic curricula in the Arab East in the mid twentieth century reveals that publications studied in Morocco were published by Dar al-Kashaf in Beirut, and were the same works distributed in Cairo. Until the late 1960s, the Jordanian curriculum was the same as the Syrian curriculum, but packaged in Jordanian book covers. Khalil al-Sakakini wrote books that were studied in schools in Baghdad and Amman. The Arab nation stretches from Mesopotamia to the western edge of North Africa, comprising peoples who are not Arabs and who are not using Arabic as their language of daily life.

This program is situated on the borders of Arabness and its categorization and relies on an examination of displacement and alienation. Arab nationalism began to gain currency as an elitist call for freedom from Ottoman rule and later colonialism. In the 1960s many states adopted the discourse of Arab unity and cooperation spearheaded by Abdel Nasser's Egypt. Politics exalted film production and the economy stimulated it, under these two factors, and with a prolific production, Egypt dominated the film production and pan-Arab distribution. Even to the present day Egyptian films remain the basic frame of reference for the Arab film industry and culture. Independent productions were not known, even in Egypt, beyond very narrow local bounds. Yet, the movement of Arab ideas across borders and local vernaculars stopped when it came to cinema in the Arab world.

The film program *A Lens on Syria* presented in Amman in collaboration with ArteEast in 2006 was eagerly attended by Jordanian audiences who had heard of Syrian films, but never seen any, despite the geographic proximity and the reception of Syrian television broadcast in Amman. These films had not and are not shown on satellite or terrestrial channels, nor in cinemas, and there are no copies of them available in the market. In many cases, they are banned, or have been in the past. It is also

difficult to obtain clear copies of Iraqi films produced from the 1950s to 1970s, except for those few copies saved on videotape by the actors.

In Ossama Mohammed's Step by Step (1979), a mass of people live between the field and the school, listening to the words of the father, a man with little education and deep loyalty to the party. The village children learn to obey authority and many join the army. The son may turn against his father: "If my father opposes my party, I'll be forced to shoot him." The film portrays how difficult conditions prompt young men to turn to the military, where roles and livelihoods are determined on the basis of rank. Mohammad contrasts captivating images of nature in Syria with the contexts shaped by politics, showing how peaceful communities adopt violence or at least accept its presence on a daily basis.

Jananne Al-Ani in Aesthetics of Disappearance (2010) soars over the south of Jordan. People become tiny grains of sand moved by the wind as the camera sweeps over archeological sites, the ruins of the Hijaz railroad, military training sites, dried-up water basins, cracked stones, sheep farms, and paved and dirt roads, bringing the modern history of Jordan into view from above. The treatment is similar to Google Earth, which lets you fly above lands you will never set a foot on. Parts of Lawrence of Arabia were shot in the southern Jordanian desert in the 1960s, and both works capture the south from various heights, although the southern landscape looks different in each. This is no doubt partially due to the passage of time, but even more significant is the role given to the terrain in each of these films. Jananne Al-Ani was born in Kirkuk and lived there until the early 1980s when she left for the UK. She has produced a set of video and photographic works based in the Jordanian desert, particularly the section that borders on Iraq. In many of these works, she gathers with her sisters to tell a story that usually revolves around their relationship with a figure that is not physically present in the work. The father, the homeland, Iraq. authority, separation, independence, longing, return - over the years of her work, we see how the relationship with these symbolic figures changes.

Wael Shawky brings to life scenes from Arab novels that blend history with fiction, like the works of Abdelrahman Munif or Amin Maalouf, or he re-casts real events like the assassination of Sadat. In his *Telematch Shelter* (2008), a Bedouin community dreams of settling down in farming. The artist uses

elements of typical images of the Arab world to make a commentary: children or non-professionals working as actors, desert locations, and camels and mules instead of cars. A group of children come out of a mud hut and later go back in and shut the door. We don't know where the children have spent their day or how all of them sleep in such a small space. This work is screened on a loop as part of a larger installation titled 'The Forty-day Road', a piece about the historic route plied by camel caravans that travel from Sudan to Egypt on a forty-day journey.

The vestiges of economics and politics dominate the forms and discourse of artistic production. In Mohssin Harraki's video, *Two Sides of One Piece* (2010), a dirham spins furiously on a white surface. The work is a commentary on the use of money in society and its effects on religion and politics. Coins strengthen the state's power on the one hand and declare the value of the coin's owner on the other.

In Ziad Antar's Tokyo Tonight (2003), we see shepherds and their flocks in a deserted piece of Lebanese countryside on a rainy day. We hear the musical score, and a shepherd faces the camera to confidently declare "Tokyo." The image returns to the empty roads, and the shepherds repeat the word "Tokyo" any time they choose. The shepherds don't seem to be truly obsessed with Tokyo: must all speech be linked to a specific context and time? The artist leaves it to the viewer to find a way to navigate between men tending their flocks in the silence of the mountains and a city on the other side of the earth.

Adel Abidin in *Vacuum* (2006) ventures out into the blanket of snow covering everything in Finland and begins sucking it up with a vacuum cleaner until he has totally erased it. In his *Cold Interrogation* (2002), a Finnish man asks questions of the viewer; "Do you ride a camel?" is one of the questions that constantly plague Abidin, an Iraqi Muslim who has relocated to Europe.

Moroccan Fadma Kaddouri's *Linge sur terrasse* (*Linen on Terrace*) (2007) is a poetic representation of the would-be migrants who come to al-Nador in the Rif in northern Moroccan with dreams of immigrating to Europe, yet they are stopped by the terrors of a sea under constant guard and surveillance. Kaddouri is of Amazigh origin and lives today in France, while her work can be considered an Arab work. Every time the artist visits the Rif with her family, she attempts to re-read not only the

history created by migration, but also the history of her father's land, his home, and everything she is supposed to connect with and learn. Her works also include a set of cassette tape 'letters', a form of correspondence that became popular in the 1980s. Over the course of the correspondence, new messages would be recorded on the same tape, thus erasing the history of the old messages.

We can also read personal and family films as a source to explore the representation of Arab reality. With the beginning of the oil revolution, scores of Arabs relocated to work in the Arab Gulf, many returned with video footage and photography stock. The program screens footage taken from a family archive filmed in Kuwait and Amman. To preserve the film stock, in the 1980s a VHS video recorder was used to film the footage from a Super 8 screening, and the videotape was then digitized a few years ago. Much visual information is lost in the process of such conversions, just as parts of any family archive are lost as members of the family move apart and relocate or just as the features of Arab-ness change in and outside of the homeland.

The program highlights the diversity of expression and cinematic production in the Arab world, examining the mobility and diversity of thought and history of the image-makers in it. Through the works of the artists, the program suggests a re-definition of the Arab and images of it and proposes a realignment of the elements of inherited history and its uses on the basis of existing cultural forms and artistic expression in the region. This program brings together independent Arab films that are presented at exhibitions and visual arts forums, contemplating the shape of the Arab terrain and attempting to reinterpret it more broadly and deeply, in keeping with the region's geography and demography.

Ala Younis, 2010

THE FILM PROGRAM

ALA YOUNIS: TO KNOW THE ARAB TERRAIN: MOVEMENTS TO, FROM, AND WITHIN

- 73 Aesthetics of Disappearance (Shadow Sites I), by Jananne Al-Ani, 2010, Iraq/Jordan/UK, 15min
- 74 Two Sides of One Piece, by Mohssin Harraki, 2010, Morocco/France, 2min
- 75 Telematch Shelter, by Wael Shawky, 2008, Egypt, 4min
- 76 Linge sur terrasse (Linen on Terrace), by Fadma Kaddouri, 2007, Morocco/France, 4min
- 77 Tokyo Tonight, by Ziad Antar, 2003, Lebanon, 3min
- 78 Step by Step, by Ossama Mohammed, 1979, Syria, 22min
- 79 Vacuum, by Adel Abidin, 2006, Iraq/Finland, 9min
- **80** No Title (excerpts from films from the family archive), by Mufid Younis, 1978-1980, Kuwait/Jordan, 2min (video)

Aesthetics of Disappearance (Shadow Sites I), by Jananne Al-Ani

2010, Iraq/Jordan/UK, 15min

The Film

Shot in the south of Jordan Aesthetics of Disappearance explores the disappearance of the body in the real and imagined landscapes of the region. Al-Ani has a long-standing interest in the power of testimony and the documentary tradition, as well as reversing the way in which the 19th century Orientalist stereotype of the Middle Eastern landscape endures. The notion of exotic and unoccupied space continues to inform Western media representations of the Arab world. The film survey of southern Jordan narrates the history of the area, while documenting the ancient remains, abandoned locations, formal and informal routes of the south, in addition to cattle farms and military locations all of which shape Jordan today.

The Filmmaker

Jananne Al-Ani (born 1966, lives and works in London) studied fine art at the Byam Shaw School of Art and graduated with an MA in photography from the Royal College of Art in 1997. Exhibiting widely, she has had solo shows at Tate Britain and the Imperial War Museum, London. Recent group exhibitions include 'Closer'. Beirut Art Center, and 'Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking', MoMA, New York. Al-Ani has co-curated exhibitions including 'Veil and Fair Play'. Her films include, among others, A Loving Man (1996-1999). Muse (2004), and Flock and the Guide (2008).



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Two Sides of One Piece, by Mohssin Harraki

2010, Morocco/France, 2min

The Film

The film questions the handling of money in society and the influences that money has on religion and politics. The video focuses on a spinning coin - its rapid movement transforms the coin into a foreign, aesthetically pleasing object. The sound of the coin's movement across the surface allows the viewer to enter a 'dry and fragile space'. It demonstrates how an object of opulent nature can become something appreciated simply for its aesthetic value.





Telematch Shelter, by Wael Shawky

2008, Egypt, 4min

The Film

The works of Wael Shawky reproduce realities of the Arab world, often recreated from fragments of the region or its history in videos that are charged with stereotypical connotations. Shawky employs clichéd elements such as vast, derelict desert landscapes where camels and donkeys replace vehicles, and where groups of children are directed to take part in reproduced narratives. Demonstrated through a looping video of a Bedouin-rural mobilization cycle, *Telematch Shelter* is about the aspiration of a Bedouin society to develop into a prosperous farming community.



The Filmmaker

Mohssin Harraki (born 1981, lives in Dijon and Tangier) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores cultural constructions, consequences of post colonialism and collective imagination. Graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Dijon, Harraki pays particular attention to foreign cultural landmarks and social practices, and produced his first video works in the form of interviews with artist colleagues debating political everyday issues that have no direct association to art practice. He showed his work in a solo exhibition at Lavomatic in Saint-Quen in Paris in 2009, in exhibitions in Paris. Marseilles and Amman. His films include Problème 5 (2010). Two Sides of One Piece (2010), and Voice Bread: Melody of National Anthem (2010).

The Filmmaker

Wael Shawky (born 1971, lives and works in Alexandria) completed his BFA at the University of Alexandria, followed by an MFA at the University of Pennsylvania in 2000. Solo Exhibitions include: Darat al Funun, Amman (2009); Project Gentili, Berlin (2009); Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2008); KVS, Brussels (2007), and Transitions-Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2001). He has received several awards for his work including the International Commissioning Grant, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York (2005); the International Award of The Islamic World Arts Initiative, Arts International, New York (2004); the Grand Nile Prize at the 6th International Cairo Biennial (1996). His filmic works include Al-Aqsa Park (2006), Telematch Sadat (2007), and Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File (2010).

Linge sur terrasse (Linen on Terrace), by Fadma Kaddouri

2007, Morocco/France, 4min

The Film

The idea for this video was conceived at the end of an afternoon in Nador (Morocco) at the house of the artist's parents where a very strong wind blew the linen on the washing line. It suddenly appeared to the artist as though a striking crowd was trying to go out of its way; a static article became alive, free. In the film we see the dance-like movement of the linen fight against the wind, this can be acknowledged as a metaphor of those who search to escape their condition that is determined by the state of their history. Nador is a city of transit, the border that separates Africa from Europe. therefore serving as a destination for a large number of sub-Saharan African immigrants who arrive with a dream of a new start. Most of them settle down in a city geographically separated from Europe by a thread of an indispensable border.



Tokyo Tonight, by Ziad Antar,

2003, Lebanon, 3min

The Film

Tokyo Tonight is one of the first videos made by Ziad Antar. Shot in Northern Lebanon, the film presents unexpected utters of the word "Tokyo". The rhythm of the video is defined by its alternating shots. Spoken outside all discussion, at a great distance from its reference, while intermitting a repetitious melody produced by a plucking sound, the utterances is neither an observation nor a call to action, however, it evokes a set of imaginary connotations.



The Filmmaker

Fadma Kaddouri (born in the Rif Mountains, lives and works in Grenoble) is a self-taught artist. Her photographs and videos often start as travel books. These works bear witness to the position of the artist and her vision of the interior and exterior and its movement between various segments of Moroccan society: family, community, and dual identity. Her productions result from a history that, whether lived or imagined, lies between reality and fiction. Despite its absence, the female body is represented in the spaces she explores, as well as the Rif, a region in the North of Morocco, which is also very present in her artistic and literary experiments. Kaddouri's videos include Rideaux (2006), Brussels Nador: Signs of the Hand (2007), and Cuisine (2009).

The Filmmaker

Ziad Antar (born 1978, lives and works between Saida and Paris) graduated from the American University of Beirut with a degree in Agricultural Engineering in 2001. Soon after, Antar started working with video and photography. He completed a one-year residency at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2003 and a one-year residency for the post-diploma of the École des Beaux-Art, Paris. Antar's videos testify to a world in conflict, using subtle playful short shots charged with subtexts. His films include WA (2004), La Marche Turque (2006) and Mdardara (2006).

78

Step by Step, by Ossama Mohammed

1979, Syria, 22min

The Film

Ossama Mohammed's short film follows the stages of submission one has to pass through in society, and the transformation of the individual mindset from unmediated co-existence with nature towards an acceptance of violence towards those dearest to oneself. By filming the daily efforts of village people and the very basic education system, the film portrays young villagers whose choice is either their parent's hard farming life or that of a migrant laborer in the city. Trapped between religious and political ideologies and completely fascinated by authority, these young peasants choose the army.



79

Vacuum, by Adel Abidin 2006, Iraq/Finland, 9min

The Film

"Someone has to do something about the winter in Finland." Having suffered enough of the interminably harsh winter in Finland, the artist finally decided to act. With a waterproof vacuum cleaner and a video camera, he went to the frozen sea and started to work.



80

No Title (excerpts from films from the family archive), by Mufid Younis

1978-1980, Jordan/Kuwait, 2min (video)

The Filmmaker

Ossama Mohammed (born 1954, lives in Rotterdam and Damascus) is a director and scriptwriter who studied film at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. His films are concerned with power structures and their effects on individual identity. As the smallest organizational structure of the state, the family group propagates social order and thereby maintains its traditions. His films include Today Everyday (Al Yawm Kol Yaom) (1980), Stars in Broad Daylight (Nujum al-Nahar) (1988), and Sacrifices (Sunduq ad-Dunya) (2002).

The Filmmaker

Adel Abidin (born 1973, lives and works in Helsinki) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad before moving to Helsinki, Finland in 2000. Having started his career as a painter, he began to work with video and consequently completed an MFA in New Media at Helsinki's Academy of Fine Arts in 2005. Adding sculpture and installation to his repertoire, Abidin uses humor and irony to investigate the theme of cultural identity, marginalization, nationalism, war, terror and heroism, surveying different experiences of living in a conflicting and precarious world. In 2007, Abidin represented Finland in the Nordic Pavilion of the 52nd Venice Biennial. His videos include Foam (2007), Bread of Life (2008), and Memorial (2009).





TONI SERRA (AKA ABU ALI): BROKEN FILMS



Toni Serra (aka Abu Ali) was born in Barcelona and divides his time between Barcelona, Spain and Duar Msuar, Morocco, He is a filmmaker and film curator. A member of OVNI Archives [www.desorg.org], Serra also works on the research projects TransArab and Babylon Archives. His videos explore the imagery that sits between prose and poetry, evoking trance and the realities of the dream world. His first works in New York and Tangier were about the beauty and mystery of the ephemeral and the marginal. In 1998 he finished the TV Codes series, a critical take on mass media's mechanisms of alienation and a deconstruction of its hypnotic creation of social and identity models. More recently, his videos delve into mass media's relationship with visionarism, and into the inner experience, the no man's land between real and unreal, dreams and wakefulness. poetry and prophecy as a way to foster a deeper critical engagement with reality.

RATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

This text is a reflection on three works: two by Waël Noureddine and one by Bouchra Khalili. There is an obvious relationship between the first two of these films, which form a somewhat disturbing diptych of Beirut. The much shorter third work is woven from oscillating images of a port city that the filmmaker chooses to present as anonymous, but which we as viewers venture to place at the other extreme of a Mediterranean torn apart by borders and pierced by resistances. An underground connection runs beneath these three works: the image as a diaphanous mirror reflecting a supposed reality irremediably broken, either in its construction or in its intention. Reality is no longer there to be represented, and so it must be imagined: it must first be seen in images, in order to later emanate from them. And then, as in an act of exorcism, something shatters and the visions offered in these works become an actual fragment of reality, rather than representing it. We are living at a time in which heterogeneous traditions and forms of experience radically question not only the concept of reality, but the very experience of the real. The result is not the evanescent reality of postmodernity-more solid in its relativism than objective reality-but an irruption from the unknown or what Bataille called a catastrophe for consciousness. (1)

And it is here that the game of representation becomes sinister: "(...) [R]epresentation, or more particularly the act of representing (and hence reducing) others, almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation, as well as a contrast between the violence of the act of representing something and the clam exterior of the representation itself, the image - verbal, visual or otherwise - of the subject. Whether you call it a spectacular, or an exotic image, or a scholarly representation, there is always this paradoxical contrast between the surface, which seems to be in control, and the process which produces it, which inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization, etc. The action or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind of estrangement or disorientation..." (2)

This latent tension is extreme in the case of Noureddine's video-films, given that their point of departure is a city wounded by war - not just by the armed conflict, but also by other parallel wars that perhaps precede it and will certainly outlast it. The films drift through the scars of the city - in its architecture, in the people who inhabit it - and also through the scars in the social body, in its memory or the wish to forget, in its broken imagination, in its dreams and its narcotic drive. One of the films, July Trip, begins with a quote from Rainer W. Fassbinder: "We cannot make films about war." In Noureddine's films, the tension with what should be represented certainly becomes impossible. The representation shatters, and the film itself breaks into pieces, becomes war: 16-mm film images collide with HD video, the screen constantly flips between different formats and textures, interrupted scenic shots, oscillations, repetitions, fragments of texts and poems, painful memories - "it was from this building (a skyscraper in ruins) that militants flung others into the void" - fantasies of real suicide, the compulsive search for "metallic" and armed medicine. The point at which the precise daily ritual of waking up, getting up... quickly flounders into the unpredictable "every day awakens, I shave my beard, don't brush my teeth, take some whisky, look through the windows. You only see victims."

Noureddine's video-films thus rebel against that calm surface of representation that Edward Said talked about. We could say that his camera does not capture reality, but rather blasts away at the spectacular master film of representation, that which aims to serve up a satellite, 'objective' vision, that which, day by day, constructs the dominant imaginary that we end up calling reality through a process of autosuggestion. It is then that "only the total refusal of reality reveals it to us in its reality, reveals it to us in its truth. Only the total refusal of the world speaks the truth of the world to us. But this radical gesture of refusal is no longer the modern gesture that would announce a new beginning after destruction and prepare the way for it. There is no absolute beginning because the tabula rasa offers us no absolute truth whatsoever. The total refusal of reality offers us only 'a single' truth about reality. This is our truth."(3)

In a strange and meaningful coincidence, Bouchra Khalili's *Vue aérienne* also contains a reference to Fassbinder. This time, a dialog from *Die Dritte Generation (The Third Generation)* provides a structural base for the video, guiding us through a

series of hypnotic images: the swaying of a cabin suspended over an occupied sea overpopulated by speculation, a giant screen that nobody will look at for more than a few seconds. Images of nothing for nobody, that invite us to look; a vortex of the void that remains in the wake of consumption. In the silence of this contemplation, in a slow twilight journey, we are plunged into sadness and tedium, into a state in which the bland and the spectacular drift into a single continuum. And at precisely that moment, we are offered the image as exorcism: "As long as films are sad, life isn't."

Representation thus takes on a very different nature, it cracks in its depths, not in its surface or construction, but in its purpose, its very nature: "Film is a lie 25 times a second, and because it's a lie, it's also a truth." There lies the importance of constructing our own imaginaries, given that reality itself is at stake.

- (1) Georges Bataille, L'Art, exercise de la cruauté (Art, an Exercise in Cruelty), 1949.
- (2) Edward Said, 'In the Shadow of the West. An Interview with Jonathan Crary and Phil Mariani...' in Power Politics and Culture, London: Bloomsbury, 2004.
- (3) Santiago López Petit, La movilización global. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2009.

Toni Serra (aka Abu Ali), 2010

THE FILM PROGRAM

TONI SERRA (AKA ABU ALI): BROKEN FILMS

- 81 Ca sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love), by Waël Noureddine, 2005, Lebanon/France, 29min
- **82** July Trip, by Waël Noureddine, 2006, France, 35min
- 83 Vue aerienne, by Bouchra Khalili, 2006, France/Spain, 9min

Ça sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love), by Waël Noureddine

2005, Lebanon/France, 29min

The Film

Ça sera beau (From Beyrouth with Love) is neither a fiction film nor a documentary. The best description would be a 'visual diary,' or 'notes on a town.' Don't expect to 'learn' anything about the Lebanese wars in this film; no talking head appears. You are supposed to feel that people have been pushed down this building you see in the sunset. And thanks to remarkable Super-16 photography, you just might. So, if you have half an hour to visit one of the most interesting cities on earth, just go for it: *From Beirut* is a beautiful love letter with a small dose of corny poetry at the end, like a postcard of a building in the sunset.



The Filmmaker

Born in Lebanon in 1978, Waël Noureddine is a writer, poet and filmmaker who began his professional career as a journalist. His films describe in literary and critical terms real-life situations. They try to capture the physical and mental scars of conflict, resisting subjugation and submission. In 2002 he directed and produced the documentary Chez nous à Bevrouth in Beirut, then emigrated to France. In 2005 he directed Ca sera beau (From Beirut with Love), an experimental documentary. In July 2006, at the outbreak of the war, he moved to Beirut to shoot July Trip, about his return from 'self-imposed exile' to Lebanon. He returned to the region - to Yemen - in 2007 for his fourth film, A Film Far Beyond God. In 2009 he started his own production company, Bird of Prey Productions, and went into production for his first feature film, The Underground Rivers Banditry. More recently, he participated in the Venice Biennale. produced several video installations and directed his fifth short film L'histoire de la drogue.

82

July Trip, by Waël Noureddine

2006, France, 35min

The Film

Beirut, July 2006. The Israeli bombings strike Lebanon. Waël Noureddine begins a journey across his native country. Although the film is not a documentary, its real-life images are gripping. Using 16-mm film and HDV, this film questions the underlying principles of the documentary genre. The cameras capture a country in a state of terror and record the immediate effects of the war on civilians. Waël Noureddine films what we are afraid to confront – a head-on encounter with death – which caused quite a sensation in the press. We vicariously experience Lebanese daily life. We feel the impact of the bombings, touch the victims, and hear the deafening silence after the blast.



<u>83</u>

Vue aérienne, by Bouchra Khalili

2006, France/Spain, 9min

The Film

An aerial journey over an unspecified major Western city. We see a large television screen that projects advertising images in public space, a heavily urbanized architecture, an occupied coast. At the same time, voices evoke meetings, failed or still to come, cinema as utopia and "the world as the will to represent."



The Filmmaker

Bouchra Khalili is a Moroccan artist, born in Casablanca. She is the program director and a board member of 'La Cinémathèque de Tanger', an artist-run organization established in 2006 the mission of which is to develop film culture in Morocco and to provide Tangier's public with quality programs that reflect the diversity of film production. As an artist, Bouchra Khalili's work has been shown extensively internationally, including shows at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Musée Nationale du Grand Palais (Paris), the Caixa Forum Foundation (Barcelona), the Studio Museum and Queens Museum of Art (New York), and the Reina Sofia National Museum (Madrid).



ABIR BOUKHARI: ONCE UPON A TIME IN ARAB COUNTRIES



Abir Boukhari is a curator of video art from Damascus, Syria. In 2005 she founded 'All Art Now', a private cultural, artistic, and social initiative supporting young Syrian contemporary artists has organized various local and international art events.

THE CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Tales often revolve around the real life in a certain period, with storytelling functioning as a form of disguised criticism of society or illustrating aspects of the storyteller's point of view. In this sense, tales always try to approach taboos and prohibitions. Their dense fabric often touches on aspects of our lives, both political and social, usually concealing in its folds some underlying criticism of everyday life.

I was always captivated by the heroic deeds within these stories and the hero's glorious victory. First consulting the book that never leaves his hand, the storyteller begins narrating the tale or story, which invariably involves heroism, bravery, honor, chivalry, and support for the downtrodden. Good, in the form of the hero, triumphs every time. In his role as a story-maker, the storyteller uses his words to weave diverse images and emotions and send them into our imagination, creating long-lasting ideas and images in our minds that are occasionally resurrected in the form of lived reactions. In this way, the listener becomes the storyteller and begins to compose a tale joined to his own life. Thus does the story branch out to permeate people's daily lives. The imagination becomes part of reality, woven by the fantasies of the storytellers and their listeners over the years.

Stories have long played an important role in the social and political history of the region, though they have taken different forms and roles in our own day with the adoption of new components and technical developments. Nevertheless, we still find a great interest in the basic elements of the story, even though the elements overlap, attach different aspects to the story, change and present it in various forms. And in spite of all these changes, there is still a great interest in telling stories, and it is visible in many art works. I have always been fascinated by this evolution: an oral story in which the words play the major role in stimulating the imagination becomes a work driven by the filmmaker or the artist in which the image plays the major role, transforming the audience from listeners into viewers. This transformation in the Arabic story is perhaps the thing that most fascinates me.

The story's major role in our history is well known, and it has now come to occupy broad spaces in the visual arts, to draw these images in our minds and give voice to our concerns. The observer of video art in the region may see a new form of the story. Narrative storytelling is not absent from video. Even when its elements are not entirely visible, we can discern them in the many works that goad the viewer to let his imagination loose to form images and a plot to go with the work, without neglecting a space for the viewer's own creativity.

What change has occurred in the shift from narrative storytelling to artistic narrative? How have tales and epics been transformed as they pass from the storyteller to the filmmaker and artist? And how have the elements of the story changed? Tales still circulate that relate the stories of Arab peoples and their hopes, dreams, pains, and convictions. Though the storyteller and setting have changed, the art of the story is never-ending, even when it comes in a new form.

Abir Boukhari, 2010

THE FILM PROGRAM

ABIR BOUKHARI: ONCE UPON A TIME IN ARAB COUNTRIES

- 84 Everywhere Was the Same, by Basma Al-Sharif, 2007, Palestine, 12min
- 85 Resonances, by Ismaïl Bahri, 2008, Tunisia, 7min
- 86 The Third Vision: Around 1:00 pm, by Khaled Hafez, 2008, Egypt, 7min
- 87 Wide Power, by Khaled Ramadan, 2007 (new edition 2009), Spain/Lebanon, 14min
- 88 Accident, by Nisrine Boukhari, 2009, Syria, 3min
- 89 Subtitles for Stolen Pictures, by Rheim Alkadhi, 2007, Iraq/USA, 8min
- 90 Arab Army, by Fawzy Emrany, 2007, Jordan, 6min
- 91 Habba, by Younès Rahmoun, 2008, Morocco, 7min

84

Everywhere Was the Same, by Basma Al-Sharif

2007, Palestine, 12min

The Film

A slideshow of abandoned spaces carries along the story of two girls who mysteriously turn up on the shores of a pre-apocalyptic paradise. Factual texts drawn from the Madrid Peace Accords to the CIA World Factbook are weaved into a fictional narrative that unfolds the story of a massacre.



The Filmmaker

Basma Al-Sharif works with photography, film, video, sound, text, and language to explore visual communication at an intuitive level. Using language as a response to images and images as a response to the aesthetics of text, Basma's work wavers between fiction and fantasy and experiment with non-linear narratives to explore subjective experiences in relation to political landscapes. Born in Kuwait of Palestinian origin, Basma Al-Sharif received her MFA from the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois at Chicago, with a concentration in photography, film and video. Her Works have been screened and exhibited internationally including Manifesta 8, TIFF, Palestine Film Festivals in UK. Boston, Chicago, and Michigan, and the Sharjah Biennial and she was a recipient of the Fundacion Marcelino Botin Visual Arts Grant 2009-10.

Resonances, by Ismaïl Bahri

2008, Tunisia, 7min

The Film

Resonances starts with the prospecting of the bathroom from my childhood. Black inked words written in Arabic on the bathtub surface scatter and propagate progressively. They resonate and echo night scene recollections. Transformed in a resonance chamber, the bathtub mixes the fluids of these evanescent thoughts. By reflecting its surroundings, the ink-blurred water surface, overturns and clouds the words. The backward surge of the night reveals the scars of a troubled universe, verging on obliteration.



The Third Vision: Around 1:00 pm, by Khaled Hafez

2008, Egypt, 7min

The Film

The Third Vision: Around 01:00 pm is a video and audio collage split for four-channel video projection. The work is a nostalgic narrative of visuals that the artist has kept in his memory and that to the present day have shaped his artistic practice. Khaled Hafez uses archival photographs from his family album, photographs he has collected along his way as a developing artist as well as film footage, some extracted from VHS-recorded TV material and/or

the Internet, isolated from its original context, and assembled in a new way to create a personal narrative. Modern social and military history of Egypt forms the principal structure of the work; in the second video, the artist uses historical footage of the assassination of Sadat which Khaled Hafez

The Filmmaker

Born in Tunis in 1978 of a Tunisian father and a Swiss mother, Ismaïl Bahri shares his life and his work between Paris and Tunis. After studying at the Tunis Institute of Fine Arts. he left Tunisia for France where he got a PhD in arts at the Sorbonne. Ismaïl Bahri's works take various forms, ranging from drawing to video, from photography to installations. Each of his works explores processes and materials of his own, but have in common their minimalism and strong graphic content. Ismaïl Bahri participated in exhibitions and international festivals such as the Bamako Encounters of Photography (Mali), Fotographia Europea (Italy), Videoformes, or Cinemed, His work has been exhibited in the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Filles du calvaire gallery, the Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa), the Cape Town National Gallery (South Africa), the Centrale électrique (Bruxells), the British Film Institute (London), and the Fondazione Mertz (Torino).

The Filmmaker

Khaled Hafez was born in Cairo in 1963 and lives and works in his birth city. From 1981 until 1990 Hafez followed the evening classes of the Cairo Fine Arts Academy while studying medicine. He attained a MFA in New Media from the Transart Institute / Danube University Krems, Austria in 2009. International group shows include: 12th Cairo Biennale, Cairo, Egypt, 2010, Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain, 2010; IN/FLUX: Awkward Conversations, The 17th New York African Film Festival. New Museum, New York, USA, 2010; 'The Present Out of the Past Millennia'. Kunstmuseum Bonn. Bonn, Germany, 2007 - and many more. His video works include Dwelling (the path of someone who dwelled in the past) (2010), The A77A Project (On Presidents & Superheroes) experienced when he was 18. The use of stock photographs, images and audio in this assemblage creates a hybrid story that actually took place in the artist's real personal life.



(2009), Visions of a Contaminated Memory (2007), Revolution (experimental, 2006), The Red Crown (documentary, 2005), Idlers' Logic (experimental feature, 2003).

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Wide Power, by Khaled Ramadan

2007 (new edition 2009), Spain/Lebanon, 14min

The Film

This video is a visual dialog about re-presentation, the self, the power of the lens, and remembrance. In a narrative manner, it addresses the notion of visual authority and the risk of diverting documentation into stylization towards orientalism. It is a narrative about Khaled D. Ramadan himself, who grew up in the Lebanese civil war's mayhem. It reflects how his life was structured and determined by the war. French and American Marines came to Lebanon, and Ramadan remembers French soldiers asking him and his friends to pose in front of their cameras. In his video, Ramadan investigates the fate of the images that were taken of him by the French soldiers. As a video maker and photographer Ramadan explores the parallels between the images of himself taken by others, and the images he takes of others.



The Filmmaker

Khaled Ramadan was born in Beirut and is currently dividing his time between the Middle East, Spain and the Nordic region. He is an artist, curator and theorist, and has worked as a special advisor at the Danish Art Council and co-curator for Manifesta 8. Spain 2010. He is a board member of the HIAP Finland and a member of the International Association of Curators (IKT). Ramadan has published several articles and books in international publications and was the winner of the prestigious Erik Hofmeyr Award, and the 'Achievement Award' at Cairo International Biennial 2009. Ramadan's work is greatly influenced by social history, scientific research and critical theory. In his artistic work he makes use of video, the Internet, archives, performance and photography to construct work that explores our perceptions of personal identity and community. In his theoretical writing, Ramadan explores contemporary art's role in modern society, and art, considering the implications of globalization, media and new internationalism for visual artists and society as a whole.

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Accident, by Nisrine Boukhary

2009, Syria, 3min

The Film

The written words in the video tell the story of a car accident. Cold and mysterious sound is combined with a stable image: Two people in a dark room, a man and a woman, almost disappearing in the darkness and sitting far apart from each other. This arrangement reflects the emotional relation between man and woman in a situation of shock, communicating, but empty and lifeless after the terrible experience.



Subtitles for Stolen Pictures, by Rheim Alkadhi

2007, Iraq/USA, 8min

The Film

Using appropriated news photos from the war in Iraq, this video is comprised of two elements: pictures and subtitles. Image fragments piece together a story of an anonymous civilian whose domestic activities are interrupted by her own death, yet her subtitles mysteriously persist.



The Filmmaker

Nisrine Boukhari is a mixed media and installation artist based in Damascus, Syria. In her work, she is much influenced by 'Situationism'; she uses concepts of psychogeography (the study of the laws and specifics effects of the geographical environment on the emotions and behavior of individuals) to explore our relationship towards inner and domestic spaces. With a characteristic economy of means she creates sensorial and participatory installations which engage the body as well as the mind. Nisrine Boukhari was born in 1980, and studied Sculpture at the University in Damascus. She was a resident artist invited by the Delfina Foundation, London, and through virtual residency worked in Almahatta Galler, Ramallah. She has exhibited her work locally (e.g. 'All Art Now' Festival for Contemporary Art: Traces, Magnetism, Here I Stand') as well as internationally. In 2008, she participated in the 'Shatana' workshop, Jordan (Triangle). In 2009 she took part in the Amsterdam Biennial.

The Filmmaker

Rheim Alkadhi is an artist working in various artistic areas. Born in 1973, she grew up as a bi-national citizen in Iraq and the United States. Her early years in Baghdad left her with the emotional, linguistic and aesthetic dispositions that inform her artistic practice until today. As a result, her work is a visual engagement with war from a psychological perspective, often leaning towards the absurd.



Arab Army, by Fawzy Emrany

2007, Jordan, 6min

The Film

In a workshop, tucked away in a small alleyway in the old city of Amman, the symbol of the so-called 'Arab Army' - the Jordanian Armed Forces - is sown onto uniforms by semi-mechanical machines. The place itself and the way of production evoke nostalgia for Pan-Arab ideas established during the movement for independence of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of last century. The great Arab revolution led by Sherif Hussein bin Ali ended with the British Mandate and Sike Spiko. Greater Syria was split into Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. Great Britain declared Mandate of Palestine, and under the patronage of the Balfour declaration allowed tens of thousands of Jews to migrate to Palestine, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Sadam Hussein and others invested in the idea of Palestine and inspired the Palestinians in one way or the other to continue to carry the flag of Pan Arabism. Today, not least because of economic instability and progressive Pan-Islamism, the idea of an Arab Nation is nothing more than a token used and employed according to agendas. The embroidered symbol of the Arab Army is carried away into dreamlike spheres, where heroic action stands for wishful attitude. (Text by Rayelle Niemann, 2008)



The Filmmaker

Fawzy Emrany was born in the city of Gaza, Palestine. He has contributed to various art exhibitions and projects in Palestine as well as in Europe and the United States. In 1993 he took a BA in fine art at the Alnajah Art Academy, in Nablus, West Bank. In 2000 he completed his MA in fine art at the academy of art and design Burg Giebichenstein in Halle/Saale, Germany. Fawzy Emrany has lived in Germany for 13 years and continues working as an artist.

Habba, by Younès Rahmoun

2008, Morocco, 7min

The Film

"Habba" is Arabic for "grain." This animation video tells the story of a grain that travels through space in search of the ideal place for germinating, growing and bearing fruit. The white circle that it moves in represents the human personal sphere that allows us to live in harmony with the world around us, even though our individual sphere may intervene with that of others. When the grain arrives in the center of the white circle, it stops and waits – and then wind and water make it grow and sprout very quickly. The green color here represents our spiritual life as in relation with the life around us. Younès Rahmoun's film was inspired by a phrase from the Quran (QS, 2:261), speaking of the eternal circle of life.



The Filmmaker

Younès Rahmoun was born in 1975 in Tetouan, in Morocco, where he currently lives and works. He studied at the National Fine Arts Institute of the city, and in 1998 set up his workshop in a small room of the family house which later inspired his series of installations Ghorfa. In an obvious simplicity of materials and forms and whatever the formats (video, installation, performance), Younès Rahmoun evokes a personal universe, intrinsically connected to Sufi thought and practice. Presented on the international scene through several major exhibitions and biennials, such as the Canaries, Pontevedra, Dakar or Singapore Biennials, his work spreads a universal message of intimate and interpersonal communion.











To Germany







2010/201





Within the project Arab Shorts 2010 and 2011 30 film-makers, curators, producers and screenwriters from Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine and visited major German film institutions and Festivals in Germany.

Destinations in 2010 were the DOK.Leipzig - International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film, the Werkleitz Festival in Halle and Berlin film and art institutions such as the 'Neue Berliner Kunstverein', the transmediale, the Arsenal – Institute for Film and Media Art and meetings with representatives from Berlinale, transmediale, among others.

In 2011, a different group visited the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen and the DOK.fest – International Documentary Festival Munich as well as institutions such as the KHM – Academy of Media Arts Cologne and the HFF – University of Television and Film Munich, the Videonale Bonn and the Film Museum Düsseldorf.

The study trips were organized by the Goethe-Institut Kairo in cooperation with the Visitors' Program of the German Foreign Office/Goethe-Institut Berlin.

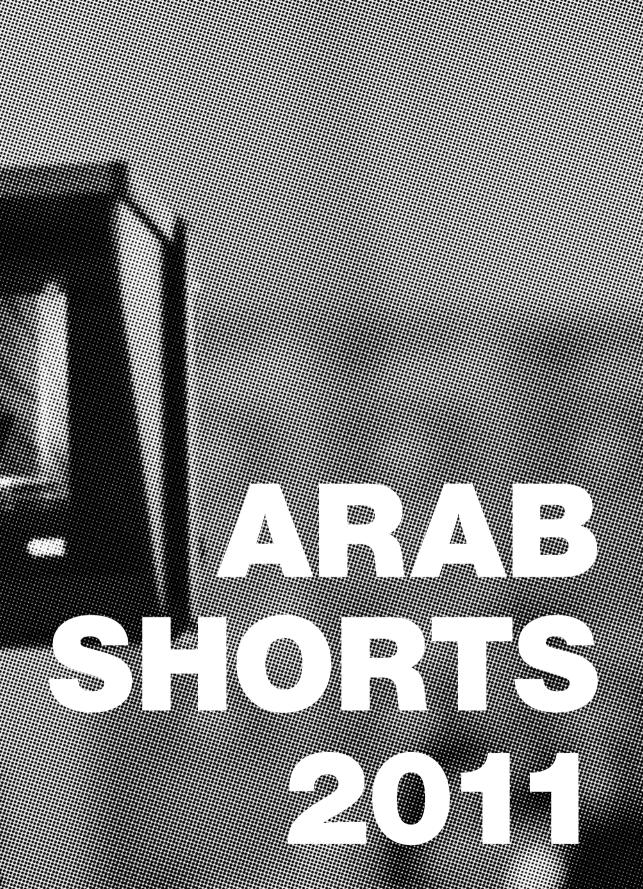












ON ARAB SHORTS 2011

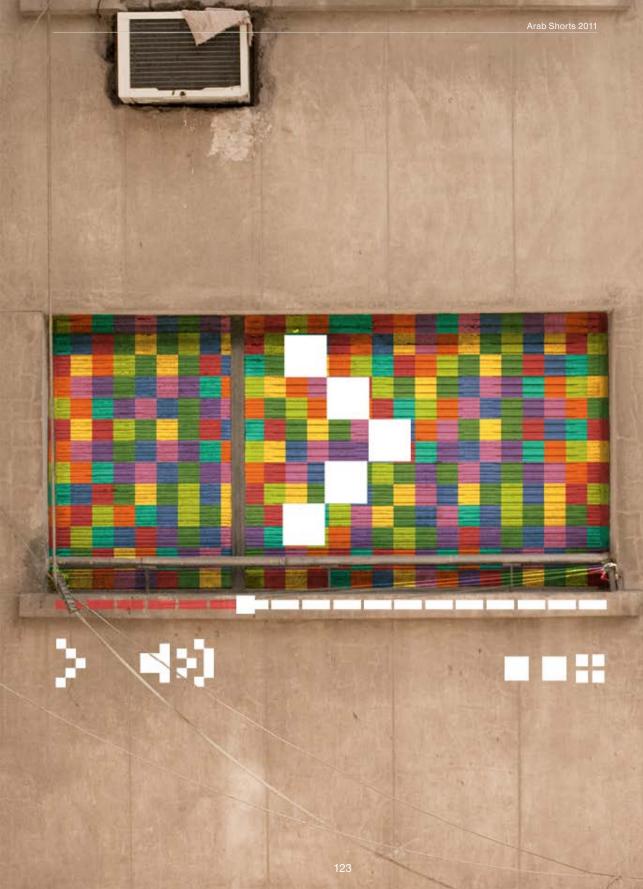
This is the third and final year of Arab Shorts. Initially, the project was planned for only one year, but the success of the first edition made two more possible. As in the two previous editions, we asked once again quite many - ten exactly - curators of the Arab world to put together a program of short films for Arab Shorts. For us, the cultural Arab context was crucial, not the country of production. There was intentionally no joint selection of films through a commission, rather each curator chose the short films of his program by himself. We wanted to avoid a homogenizing selection of a very diverse and disparate Arab short film scene. In addition, we understand the curators to be ambassadors as well as 'connectors' for Arab film and want to make them visible accordingly. They were completely free in the choice of cinematic genres and themes and as you can see next to feature films and documentaries. experimental and artistic videos, there is also an animation, traditionally an exception in Arab Shorts.

When we planned Arab Shorts 2009, we had one question in mind: is the Internet actually an effective means to make such a rich and diverse scene as that of Arab short films internationally known? In fact, Arab shorts already have proven to be an important research source for tens of thousands of anonymous users who visit the site and watch the movies. Some of them we know: curators, festival organizers, distributors and TV emission purchasers and they even use Arab Shorts when looking out for talents. The fear that the films could be 'burnt' by their online publication for other uses also proved to be unfounded. On the contrary, filmmakers received more invitations to festivals, presentations and purchasing as before. And of course they make themselves a name that will help them in future projects.

The importance not only of creating culture, but also of making it accessible, was evident at the beginning of the year, as with the 'Arab Spring' world interest in the Arab cultural production grew by leaps and bounds. And because all wanted to know right away whether the avant-garde, did not foresee the revolution, or at least saw it coming? With Walid Mattar we could at least refer to a Tunisian work, fulfilling even this very special wish.

The 2011 edition will receive just as many questions, on where the Arab revolution may be found in the short films. In fact, the curators have selected several films that refer to the 'Arab Spring', such as Karim by Omar El Shamy and Spices by Amer Alrawas, but it is mentioned almost casually, as if not so important. Looking at the films of Arab Shorts 2011, one sees exactly how deeply authoritarian power structures are anchored in the families of Arab societies, and one suspects that the tyrants' fall, which many in the West want to already regard as a successful revolution, is in fact only the beginning of a long and difficult transformation process. The 48 films from Arab Shorts 2011 give a fascinating insight into the Arab world that goes far beyond the usual stereotypes and images of the same old media world.

Marcel Schwierin



HALA GALAL AND AYMAN HUSSEIN: PERSONAL FREEDOM, FICTION WITHIN THE TRUTH





Hala Galal is a film director, script writer and producer, and founder and executive director of Semat - Production & Distribution. She has directed more than 18 films and produced more than 15. Her long documentary Women's Chit Chat won the Silver Prize at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2006. Galal has participated in several local and international film festivals in recent years, and has been a guest speaker and lecturer in many festivals, conferences and workshops. Moreover, she is a member of the Cinema Committee in the Egyptian National Higher Council of Culture in Egypt.

Ayman Hussein is an Egyptian Filmmaker who learned film making through strong passion and workshops. Since 2005 Ayman has worked for Semat - Production & Distribution as a director, producer, and editor of several films and has been in charge of different activities. He has directed seven shorts, four of which won eight awards at National and international film festivals, and wrote the scripts for all his films. He has also curated programs for film festivals and different events and has been working as a volunteer representing Semat, with over 70 NGO's and civil society organizations on the issue of street children in Egypt.

ATORS

CURATORS' STATEMENT

The difference between what is fiction and what is true cannot be measured, for: what exactly means "true"? A film, whether documentary or fiction, represents the truth in one way or another, but what happens in reality can be far beyond belief. Is a person free if he/she is not imprisoned? Are people free when they can decide on certain matters? Or are they free when they can do whatever they please? Personal freedom may be a real quest but in the end, is anyone really ever free? There is always truth in fiction and a lot of reality is too unacceptable to be conceived as true. This program represents reality, where what is real may seem unreal to many. We hope you touch reality in these films and that, for this one hour when watching them, you feel more free...

Hala Galal and Ayman Hussein, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

HALA GALAL AND AYMAN HUSSEIN: PERSONAL FREEDOM - FICTION WITHIN THE TRUTH

- 92 Under the Iron, by Agathe Dirani, 2011, Egypt, 6min
- 93 Karim, by Omar El Shamy, 2011, Egypt, 12min
- 94 Four Seasons, by Noha El Maadawy, 2011, Egypt, 9min
- **95** *04:02:2011*, by Mahmoud Faraq, 2011, Egypt, 6min
- 96 Suspended Freedom, by May El Hossamy, 2011, Egypt, 11min
- 97 Our Weapon, by Ziad Hassan, 2011, Egypt, 7min
- 98 Payback, by Omar Khaled, 2011, Egypt, 16min
- 99 I Am Asser, by Ramy Rizkallah, 2010, Egypt, 18min

92

Under the Iron, by Agathe Dirani

2011, Egypt, 6min

The Film

With the help of iron rods tied together, the 13-year-old boy Mina flies in his dreams, escaping reality in the vast city of Cairo, the city which he travels through daily on his way to work...



The Filmmaker

Agathe Dirani received her degree in international relations from the Institute of Political Studies in Bordeaux. Since starting her postgraduate studies, she has been strongly attracted to creating and implementing documentation. Documentation, which often is a source of valuable information for her research, also represents a creative space for her offering a privilege.

Karim, by Omar El Shamy

2011, Egypt, 12min

The Film

They eat, sing and supervise parked cars in Cairo: Nader's and Karim's everyday life.



The Filmmaker

21-year-old Omar El Shamy studies media. He produced his first film in Australia and directed a number of documentaries upon his return to Egypt.

Four Seasons, by Noha El Maadawy

2011, Egypt, 9min

The Film

A present which recalls the past, a family photo album which puts its owner into a situation where she is faced with fear.



The Filmmaker

A graduate of Cairo University, Noha El Maadawy received her bachelor's degree in film studies from the Faculty of Arts. She worked as a documentary director for Egyptian TV, and won an award for her first film, which she also produced.

04:02:2011, by Mahmoud Faraq

2011, Egypt, 6min

The Film

The knock at the door did not indicate what was behind it. ... I wished I were dead ... I wished to die there and then in their hands before I die of fear.



The Filmmaker

Mahmoud Farag is based in Alexandria. He graduated with a degree in Arabic language from the faculty of education at the Al-Azhar University and attended a script-writing workshop at the French Cultural Center in Alexandria. In 2005 he made his first digital video experiment. He works with visual arts, painting, old garments and discarded plastic pieces. In May 2010, he was awarded the Best Painting prize in the 'Funny Nature' artistic competition organized by the association L'Arbre des égrégores, Paris. France.



Suspended Freedom, by May El Hossamy

2011, Egypt, 11min

The Film

She works as a cleaning lady in Greater Cairo, struggling between moving in public and hard work.



The Filmmaker

May El Hossamy graduated from the faculty of fine arts at Helwan University Cairo and earned a PhD in the same field in France.

Our Weapon, by Ziad Hassan

2011, Egypt, 7min

The Film

Love of art and fear of the police give a thrill to the graffiti artists who were highly motivated by the 25 January Revolution to express their opinions through their art.



The Filmmaker

Ziad Hassan is a student in the Faculty of Media at the Modern Science & Arts University. He has also worked as a director of photography on several documentaries and narratives.

Payback, by Omar Khaled

2011, Egypt, 16min

The Film

Most of the events of the film take place on the same day. We meet different characters and watch them facing worlds of oppression, violence and social injustice.



The Filmmaker

Omar Khaled graduated from the High Institute for Cinema Cairo, participated in several workshops, directed 12 short films, and wrote and edited many others. His films have won awards at several film festivals.



I Am Asser, by Ramy Rizkallah

2010, Egypt, 18min

The Film

The child Asser is constantly monitored by his mother, but he challenges his mother's law, claiming his right to privacy.



The Filmmaker

After receiving his bachelor's degree in business administration, Ramy Rizkallah pursued his artistic inclinations by getting a degree in music followed by a course in script writing and film directing. As a scriptwriter/ musician, he wrote three seasons of the award-winning 3D animation series 'Wuzz Wuzz' that was aired all over the Middle East. Soon he started to produce the show and at the same time was working as a documentary filmmaker for clients such as UNHCR, UNDP, Save the Children, MADEV, and Book of Hope. In 2005 he wrote and directed a 28-episode documentary-drama titled Love Life on people living with HIV/AIDS in the Middle East, a comprehensive project that took almost two years to complete. At the same time, he directed his first 35mm short film Life Giver for the Book of Hope International.



NADIRA ARDJOUN: CHILDHOOD: INNOCENCE

Nadira Ardjoun has been the co-organizer of the International Short Film Festival in Clermont-Ferrand, France, since 1985.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

I chose this topic on childhood because it is universal. Everywhere in the world, children are born equal with the same innocence but from their first cry of life, all will not have the same opportunities to flourish. This innocence is very quickly altered by the social and/or political context. A child has no choice; it must, all by itself, grasp reality as it is and often without explanations from adults: more remains unsaid than answers their questions. No words to channel the suffering that is originally not theirs. Nevertheless, children always find guiding, despite everything, to create a place for themselves in the universe where they grow up. Certainly, more and more, children's rights are being recognized, integrated into legislations, but it is also and above all a matter of education. Laws can help but they do not change attitudes. Five shorts showing children's carefreeness in a world that does not belong to them but that they have to live in and face up to daily much too early. There is the young Palestinian who does not understand his father's pain but absolutely wants to help him; there is Amal, the little Moroccan girl that sees her dreams crushed; the Lebanese children caught up in the war; the little girl that wonders about the absence of her father; and finally the young Palestinian who plays with his gazelle and forgets about reality, his father saying nothing but giving him a lesson for life. A tribute to children because I think that much too often we forget to involve them in cultural events, a tribute to children because they are our future.



Nadira Ardjoun, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

NADIRA ARDJOUN: CHILDHOOD: INNOCENCE

- 100 Checkpoint, by Ruben Amar, 2010, France, 19min
- 101 Amal, by Ali Benkirane, 2004, France/Morocco, 15min
- 102 Short Memory, by Marwan Khneisser, 2010, Lebanon, 9min
- 103 Album, by Shiraz Fradi, 2010, Tunisia, 16min
- 104 Roos Djaj, by Bassam Ali Jarbawi, 2009, Palestine/USA, 15min

Checkpoint, by Ruben Amar

2010, France, 19min

The Film

A young Palestinian boy living in the Gaza Strip accompanies his father on monthly visits to the ruins of a destroyed village. Though he doesn't understand his father's ritual, he feels he has a duty to help him.



The Filmmaker

Born 1974 in Montpellier, Ruben Amar is an awarded director and screenwriter of six short films shot in London, New York, Paris and Tel Aviv. His movies have been screened in more than 50 international film festivals like Clermont-Ferrand, Raindance, Palm Springs, Slamdance, Crossroads, Glasgow, Istanbul.

100

Amal, by Ali Benkirane

2004, France/Morocco, 15min

The Film

Amal is a 12-year-old girl who lives in the Moroccan countryside. A serious and passionate pupil, she dreams of becoming a doctor. Until the day when her parents decide she will not be returning to school anymore...



The Filmmaker

Born in 1975, Ali Benkirane graduated from ESRA (Paris Film School). He lives in Casablanca, Morocco, where he is now dedicated to making films.

102 Short Memory, by Marwan Khneisser

2010, Lebanon, 9min

The Film

Beirut, 7th August 2006. Children are playing inside a building in the neighborhood of Chiyah without worrying about the war that surrounds them.



The Filmmaker

Marwan Khneisser was born in 1981 in Lebanon. After graduating in economics and working for three years in the telecommunications sector, he decided to commit himself to film making, an ambition he had developed since his teens. He has directed two short films: Short Memory (2010), an award-winning fiction, which was selected in numerous film festivals and broadcast on three international TV channels, and The Disarray of Our Youth (2011), a competition winner at the 60th Melbourne International Film Festival. Most recently, he has worked on his first feature-length screenplay that he intends to direct in 2013.

Album, by Shiraz Fradi

2010. Tunisia. 16min

The Film

Nada, seven years old, lives with her brother Hatem and her mother. She wonders about sexuality and how children are made. Why isn't she, nor her brother, on the wedding pictures of her parents? Will her depressed mother be exhausted by her daily chores...?



Roos Djaj, by Bassam Ali Jarbawi

2009, Palestine/USA, 15min

The Film

When Mish-Mish, his pet gazelle, accidentally kills the family's prized sheep, Yousef eliminates the evidence and implicates his brother's dog, Max. Yousef's father decides to kill Max...



The Filmmaker

Shiraz Fradi was born in Tunisia and graduated from the Higher Institute of Multimedia Arts in Mannouba. Her short film *Nightmare* (2007) won the first prize in a Red Cross contest for 'Films about War' made by young received a special jury mention in the student film competition at the International Amateur Film Festival in Kelibia. *Album* (2010) received 'The Black Pearl Award for the Best Narrative Short' in the international competition at the Abu Dhabi International Film Festival.

The Filmmaker

Born and raised in Palestine, Bassam Jarbawi began working as a photographer during the second Intifada. His photographs produced several exhibits and the still documentary Frequency (2004). Bassam completed his BA in communication and political science at Macalester College, and earned his MFA in screen writing and directing at Columbia University. During his studies at Columbia, he produced and directed short films and music videos in Palestine. the United States and Jamaica. His short film Roos Djaj (Chicken Heads) won the prize for Best Film at the Columbia University Film Festival, premiered at the New York Film Festival, and was awarded First Prize at Dubai's International Film Festival.

HABIBA DJAHNINE: TRANSCEND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF FEAR



Habiba Djahnine is a film director born in 1968 in Algeria. She is the initiator and the one in charge of the workshop 'Bejaia Doc' specialized in documentary creation. This workshop is organized by two associations: Cinéma et Mémoire (Bejaia) and Kaina Cinéma (Paris) in Beiaia, Algeria, Diahnine is the author of several short stories and humorous texts published in journals in France and in Algeria. In 2003 she published a poetry collection entitled 'Outre-Mort' (Beyond Death) with El Ghazali. A poem from this collection was also published in an anthology entitled 'Je est un autre' (I is someone else), published by Seghers. Since 2003, she has collaborated in various festivals and cinematographic events as a curator. She is the co-author of 'Associations algériennes, parcours et expériences' (Algerian Associations: paths and experiences) published by PCPA in 2008. In 2006 she directed a documentary film entitled Lettre à ma sœur (Letter to My Sister) and in 2008 Autrement citoyens (Otherwise Citizens), a movie about associations in motion in the Algerian civil society. In 2010 she directed Retour à la montagne (Back to the Mountains) and in 2011 Avant de franchir la ligne d'horizon (Before Crossing the Horizon).

RATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

In my proposition, I drew on all genres of cinema art (creative documentaries, fiction, experimental film, and animation). In this selection, I was tempted to ask the question of what penetrates the society in which I live, in this case Algerian society. The filmed images help shed light on the imagination that stirs a society. The particularity of these selected films is the liberty of creation, the independence of the cinematographic gesture.

For over fifteen years, all types of artistic creativity in Algeria have been marked by themes related to the violence that the society experienced. Like a setting, this horrible war with many faces that led to the confrontation of the Islamist extremists on the one hand and the Algerian army on the other, continues to take on new forms, to the extent of reaching all segments of society, sparing no one. The words defining these multitudes of bloody conflicts are numerous - civil war, war against civilians, antiterrorist - words are very important, but I will not dwell on them; the images show us the field and beyond, the road and its consequences. Besides, nothing is without consequences! One of the consequences of 'war' is death, exile, disappearance, oppression, confinement. It may be important to remember that this war with the many designations that hit Algeria came after October 1988, a date which marks the first major widespread rioting in the country. The repression that followed made the political forces that were in hiding react. From 1988 to 1992, Algerian society experienced a fine profusion. The birth of a multiparty system and freedom of association has allowed hundreds of structures to emerge. This meant that Algerians had a strong need to express themselves.

And where is art in all this? The youth really believed in change, the streets and public spaces have become areas of the individual's transformation and emergence. But those who decide ... had other plans. Society has found itself even more muzzled. The attacks re-placed the protests, and processions to the cemeteries took the place of freedom marches. Despite all this, despite the fear, some filmmakers have continued to work, to build new platforms for expression, including the issue of

language, of living space, of confinement, of transhumance in their work that paints as varied a picture of Algerian cinema as we would like it to be.

Aboubakar Hamza is a young director. In *El Berrani*, his first film, he presents himself as a stranger in his own country, this desire of young people today in Algeria to leave for an uncertain elsewhere. Everyone knows the phenomenon of 'boat people', 'Harragas', which has witnessed a phenomenal evolution in Algeria. But ... leave to go where? Stay to do what? Such are the questions buzzing in the heads of the characters of Aboubakar, or Bouba, who lives in Oran, a city in western Algeria.

Djamil Beloucif divides his time between Algiers and Geneva; he is one of the young Algerian directors educated abroad. In his film he suggests the arrival of clandestine travelers to an unknown land. He reinvents the language of the landless, while at the same time creating a dialog and solidarity across borders.

As does Ammar Bouras, an artist graduated from the School of Fine Arts of Algiers, who lives and works in Algiers. His work *A One-way Ticket (Un aller simple)* reveals the wandering and the fear of men and women threatened with death by Islamists in the 90s in Algeria. It offers a geography of fear ... with the only port of attachment being the voice recorder that records the voice of his loved ones.

Amina Djahnine who now lives in Switzerland after having spent her youth in Algeria, watches the street from a balcony. The street that held so many dangers, with the memory of bodies lying on the ground, carrying the memory of the trauma ... Why? She herself has experienced this violence and tries to express how the first space that is affected is the street and therefore the presence or non-presence of bodies in the street. She shows the contrast of a quiet street that can turn horrific at any time.

Finally, there is the singular, unclassifiable work of Tahar Kessi, a fiction that distances itself from the usual forms of narration. Neither linearity nor a story in search of coherence can be found. The film reflects on the world and cinema, a back and forth between what is seen and what is believed to be seen, what is heard and what is believed to be heard. Images fading into total darkness or into a place of blinding light.

Habiba Djahnine, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

HABIBA DJAHNINE: TRANSCEND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF FEAR

- **105** *Djoûû*, by Djamil Beloucif, 2010, Switzerland/Algeria, 25min
- 106 El Berrani, by Aboubakar Hamzi, 2010, Algeria, 35min
- 107 Un aller simple (A One-way Ticket), by Ammar Bouras, 2007, Algeria, 5min
- 108 Instants/Alger (Instants/Algiers), by Amina Djahnine, 2008, Algeria, 1min
- 109 Hysteresis, by Tahar Kessi, 2010, Algeria, 16min

Dioûû, by Diamil Beloucif

2010, Switzerland/Algeria, 25min

The Film

The film tells the story of two illegal immigrants 'eager' for freedom. 'Djoûû' means 'hunger' in Arabic. The film is a metaphor of the 'Tower of Babel' myth and represents those who are 'damned', being carried away by their dreams and ending up with clashing words instead of intertwining ones.



The Filmmaker

After studying medicine in Algiers, Djamil Beloucif moved to Paris in 1999 to pursue his cinema studies at the University of Paris 8. There he met Serkan Turhan and Ali Umut Ergin and, together with them, created the ADA Films collective. Since 2003 he has lived in Geneva, where he works as a university researcher. In 2009 he established ADA Films Production.

106 El Berrani, by Aboubakar Hamzi

2010, Algeria, 35min

The Film

The film is set in Oran in western Algeria. Candidates for 'Harga' (which means illegal crossing by ship) are numerous: rappers and artists who express their confusion and their will to leave their country, but where to?



The Filmmaker

Aboubakar Hamzi is a young cinema autodidact. He is also an actor and has directed El Berrani as part of Bejaia DOC (workshop of documentary creation at Bejaia, Algeria). He is a true lover of images – which explains his eagerness to pursue his self-education to earn a place in this field.

Un aller simple (A One-way Ticket), by Ammar Bouras

2007, Algeria, 5min

The Film

Un aller simple (A One-way Ticket) evokes the idea of movement, while pointing out the impossibility of living in a space without violence. Images are shot from the artist's car during an endless drive in the capital as well as other regions in the country. The only social link is the phone messages sound in the background. Keeping the link, the attitude and the reflex of a normal life are synonyms of persistence.



Instants/Alger (Instants/Algiers), by Amina Djahnine

2008, Algeria, 1min

The Film

Insidious fear and mistrust rule the street. They make people in the street gather unwittingly in an unconscious and silent communication. "I stand on a balcony with a camera in my hand. The street seems to become a test or danger." Each noise recalls the bombs, the bodies and the violence in the 'black decade' – downtown of Algiers 2008.



The Filmmaker

Ammar Bouras is a photographer, video maker, experimental filmmaker and plastic artist. His video art is made of live events and archives that weave the postcolonial political and social memory into an acoustic poetic mix. This is also the case in Serment (Oath) and Un aller simple, which are kind of journeys into the memory of a wounded Algeria. This journey brings us to the uncertainty of the present in which everyday life is witness to terror and problems that confront the whole postcolonial population.

The Filmmaker

Amina Djahnine is a film director, editor and trainer who graduated from the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Geneva, where she studied scenario, directing and editing in the cinema department. She worked as an editor for TSR (Télévision Suisse Romande), before becoming a free-lancer in 2007. In addition to being a film director and editor, she is working as a writing, directing and editing trainer in workshops in Switzerland and Algeria.

108

109 Hysteresis, by Tahar Kessi

2010, Algeria, 16min

The Film

Two places, two worlds, two people. A story. A beginning, a link. Hope... A turtle, time... a fly paper. Contempt, a tear, flies. One possibility: a meeting, a tumble ... a new beginning.



The Filmmaker

Tahar Kessi lives in a mountain village in Kabylia, Algeria, and is passionate about film and literature. On his blog he writes movie reviews, humorous texts and rants.



WALID TAYAA: METAPHOR AND RESISTANCE IN TUNISIAN SHORT FILMS



Walid Tayaa was born in Tunisia in 1976. After studying sociology, he turned to cinema. He directed short films as part of the amateur cinema movement and participated in independent international festivals. He also worked as first assistant director in many productions. In 2006 his first short film Madame Bahja was shown at the Cannes Festival. He participated in numerous training workshops and seminars in Tunisia, Morocco, Togo, Syria, the Czech Republic, Germany and finally France. Here he pursued continued education at La Fémis in 2007. In 2008 he directed the short film Haylaman. which was shown at the Berlin Film Festival in 2010. In the same year he directed the film Life that won the main prize at the Tetouan International Mediterranean Film Festival in Morocco, the Andalusian Television Award at the African Film Festival in Tarifa, Spain, and the Golden Tanit at the national competition during the Carthage Cinema Days. He also directed a documentary on Issawiya Sufism in Tunisia. Recently, he has been working on two new short films, The Age of Marriage and Wrinkles, as well as preparing his first long feature film.

RATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Before the 14th of January revolution and for many years, the political regime in Tunisia fostered a poor concept of culture and art, based on consuming bad art, generally understood as promotion festivals, variety television and restaurant artists. It was a regime that knew nothing of art and intellect, so the taste of the public had fallen to catastrophically low levels. It was a political concept of culture, reduced to entertainment and superficiality, for which hordes of associations and mercenaries received support, interest and media coverage. Free critical creative art was shattered and loyalty to the regime was imposed as a measure for creativity capacity. Despite this screaming ignorance and stifling siege, many artists remained steadfast, yearning for free expression and more refined public taste.

The era of the previous regime was marked by narrow-mindedness and a discontent with daily life under a 'schizophrenic' regime that marketed the myth of the 'ever-happy country' and 'oasis of security and peace.' Public taste was overruled by mediocrity, and there was no horizon for the young who found themselves caught in an endless cycle of monotony and boredom. Free expression, critical creativity and alternative art were not possible and associative, cultural and civil work, independent of the ruling party and the regime, was a form of resistance that the regime tried to suppress. Yet this oppression made some youths insist even more to express themselves, and many cultural movements like cine clubs and amateur filmmakers were resolute, standing strong, like fortified citadels, in the face of dictatorship.

Tunisian short films were not isolated from this suffocating political atmosphere and boring environment. Many young directors tried to express this situation in short movies and they were successful, partly due to new technical possibilities, but mainly carried by the new liberated creative thirst. The digital revolution freed youth from having to wait for decisions from support committees. Through independent and marginal production patterns that depended on austerity and on professional solidarity, they managed to create new directing

stakes in expressing their individual artistic and cinematic concerns and views.

It is worth noting that the amateur filmmakers' movement was at the forefront of austere production, creating very important films. Launched from a cultural climate that was determined by public issues these films suffered from severe restrictions in broadcasting and distributing and from massive harassment by the authorities. On the professional level, 'Ten Shorts, Ten Visions' is an experiment initiated by two independent Tunisian producers in 2006. It is an important and decisive beginning in adopting a new production pattern, represented in a strict way of working: two days of shooting, a small team, a modest budget. Since this experiment an active and enormous movement of short production has erupted on the Tunisian cinematic scene with the same austere concept. From no more than 5 films annually, the number of shorts increased to 80 films in 2010.

The desire of many young directors was also to overcome the inaction, stagnation and lack of diversity that characterized for a long time the conventionally directed films of the middle and old generations of directors. Marred by poor vision and presentation, their colorless films drowned in narcissism and were unable to express the current aesthetics. The audience was frustrated and accused Tunisian cinema to be too complicated, elitist and not up to the expectations of the people. What can be noticed in this production leap was the topic of isolation and suffocation that appears almost in all short films, and the focus on the big questions faced by people: failure, death, defeat or escape. Against this background, many directors worked on the idea of frustration as a violent and inevitable result of an oppressive regime.

The topic of isolation was also echoed in the metaphoric scripts of the shorts. Metaphoric writing marked many of the films. Their directors used different creative techniques and tools in order to affirm the meaning of living that persists even in a society stifled by a despotic regime. The four Tunisian films chosen for Arab Shorts in 2011 belong into this context. Four shorts, which reflect par excellence the isolation topic and political metaphor. Two of them were supported by the Ministry of Culture. The other two come from austere cinema and were produced on very low budgets.

Walid Tayaa, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

WALID TAYAA: METAPHOR AND RESISTANCE IN TUNISIAN SHORT FILMS

- 110 Tandid Condemnations, by Walid Mattar, 2010, Tunisia, 15min
- 111 The Stadium, by Ala Eddine Slim, 2010, Tunisia, 24min
- 112 Fouska, by Sami El Hadi, 2008, Tunisia, 26min
- 113 Coma, by Aladin Aboutaleb, 2010, Tunisia, 8min

110

Tandid - Condemnations, by Walid Mattar

2010, Tunisia, 15min

The Film

A group of unemployed friends spend their time in a coffee shop in a popular neighborhood of the Tunisian capital. The coffee shop patrons are following a soccer match, commenting and analyzing, when suddenly the Israeli war against Gaza erupts and the comments turn to the event. In a cinematic portrait, the film illustrates what it means to be living as a young man under a despotic regime. Through a cinematic language that is both simple and intricate, it brings out the feeling of restlessness and the absence of the concept of the human citizen, the creative being.



The Filmmaker

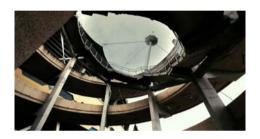
Walid Mattar was born in 1980 in Tunisia. He earned a master's degree in communications and management at a Parisian university. At the age of 13 he joined the Tunisian Faculty of Amateur Cinematographers. He participated in many films as cameraman or photography director: In 2003 he directed the short La cuirasse Abdelkarim that was very successful with the public and the critics and garnered prizes in Tunisia and abroad. In 2006, it was followed by Good Morning together with Leila Abouzeid, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in the World Cinema section. He also directed a documentary, Fekrouna's Children, and has lately worked on Nahdi Alales, Father Nawal and on his first long feature. Tandid - Condemnations received the Public's Prize at the Montpelier Festival and the award for best screenplay at the Tangier Mediterranean Short Film Festival.

The Stadium, by Ala Eddine Slim

2010. Tunisia. 24min

The Film

Delving into the idea of frustration up to the point of suffocation, the short depicts a person in a cold night in the center of the Tunisian capital. Ala Eddine Slim depicts the city as a big prison, were creatures live dehumanized and stripped of citizenship. The aesthetics of isolation and monotony is created through employing a slow moving narrative and a directing style that much depends on the dexterous use of light.



Fouska, by Sami El Hadj

2008, Tunisia, 26min

The Film

Sami El Hadj in this film created a piece of rare metaphoric political writing: He presents a full and expressive scene on the state of the country through the story of high school pupils who are taking an Islamic religion test in which a cheating attempt occurs. Events get tangled up and escalate into struggles between the pupils, teachers and guardians, while the principle, the director - representing the top of the pyramid - is never seen. The concept of authority is exposed as a common practice determining and destructing the relationships among the members of the system.



The Filmmaker

Ala Eddine Slim was born in Tunisia in 1982 and graduated from the Higher Institute of Multimedia Arts. He directed Dreamers' Night in 2004, which was his graduation project. In 2005 he established with Ali Hassouna and Shawki Kheneis the Iquisite Company that tries to present different creative cinematic visions. In 2007 he directed Autumn which participated in the Clermont Ferrand competition in 2008. In the same year he did a summer college course at La Fémis in Paris where he directed One of Those Nights. In 2009 he started a long documentary entitled With Hamlet and in 2010 directed The Stadium. Lately, he edited the long documentary Babylon, which he directed along with Youcef El Chabi and Ismail.

The Filmmaker

Born in October 1971, Sami El Hadl studied economics and fine arts. first in Tunisia and then in La Fémis in Paris. He earned his master's in theatrical studies and visual arts from the Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts. He has been a director and producer since 1993. Currently he is working on two long features, Azrael and Territorium Nostrom. His film Fouska has earned the prize for best short film at the 18th African, Asian and Latin American Film Festival in Milan, Italy.

Coma, by Aladin Aboutaleb

2010, Tunisia, 8min

The Film

A radical film in its writing, directing and vision, *Coma* also represents a rare genre in Tunisian and Arab cinema. The film directly confronts us with the ghosts sitting on our chests. The story starts with death, with failure and asks the question: what is after oppression? It starts from the end, without giving reasons or introductions for what is happening, with an approach that is bold and uncompromising.



The Filmmaker

Born in Cairo in May 1987, Aladin Aboutaleb received a degree from the High School of Sciences and Technological Design in Tunisia. Since 2003 he has worked in animation and participated in a number of flashes and films. In 2010 he finished and directed the short *Coma*, which participated in a number of international festivals. He is one of Tunisia's promising young talents in animation movies and graphic design.



ALA YOUNIS: EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT, OFFICER



Ala Younis is an independent artist and curator based in Amman. Through art, film, and publication projects, Younis investigates the position of individuals in a politically driven world, and the conditions in which historical and political failures of the collective become personal ones. In 2011, Younis curated 'Maps, Timelines, Radio Programs' for La Galerie, Contemporary Art Center in Noisy-le-Sec (Paris), 'Out of Place' with Kasia Redzisz for the Tate Modern (London) and Darat al Funun (Amman), and 'Momentarily Learning from Mega-Events' for Makan (Amman).

CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Neil Beloufa is lead to a former hideout for terrorists in Algeria, where an era of terrorism is only documented through the verbal stories told by the people. The hideout is a deserted villa with glass facades that do not only show its inner space but also its residents, their life styles and their coming and going, in contradiction to the secrecy terrorists are obliged to surround their lives with. Beloufa goes to the villa and documents with photographic images the details of the inner space. He also records audio testimonies of descriptions of the villa's former residents, told by their neighbors, servants and others. In a studio in Paris, Beloufa rebuilds the villa utilizing the pictures he has taken, and voice over of the recorded interviews over bodies of actors simulating the interviewed characters. We won't see the actors' faces as they walk in the constructed villa and point to the details of the terrorists' lives. We will learn that the terrorists had always shaved their hair, worn ordinary clothes, and acted refined in appearance and conduct. At any case, we will never know how accurate these stories were. We, as well as Beloufa, have not seen the men whose descriptions we hear, but we get to imagine their character through their hideout. In Sans titre (Untitled) (2010) Beloufa mixes reality with fiction, while documenting an important period in Algerian history, not only the time of terrorism but also post-terrorism and people's perception of it.

This program examines the acquisition of news gained by means of constructed space: Events and people appearing in the news are assimilated from bits and pieces of descriptions given by others. The Arab revolutions that broke out at the onset of 2011 have affirmed that the media pick and choose only what matches their policies for broadcasting. But with social media sites, "official" mass media no longer holds a monopoly over the news industry. Other interpretations of the events are now available. More importantly, we get our news today from texts and pictures posted by our friends on Facebook and Twitter. These virtual spaces, with their endless series of pictures and comments posted by friends, and friends of friends, may support or refute the "official" news transmitted on news channels, which go through several editing, commenting and presenting processes. So it remains to be the case that our knowledge of truth relies on a narrator's story, just as we imagine stories of pure fiction.

In 2026 (2010) Maha Maamoun presents a future image of the pyramid plateau, as imagined by Mahmoud Othman, author of 'Revolution 2053'. We do not know where the narrator is located as he overlooks this scene, but it appears that he can hover over the pyramids to see details of the ground, the horizon and the Egyptian Museum, as well as describe the details of food, technologies and visitors at restaurants and night clubs, in glass domes erected around the plateau. In the background, a giant screen displaying selective images hides the dirt behind it as well as the numerous surveillance cameras and the poor children fighting over food. Visitors arrive to the plateau emerging from black vehicles after passing through a gate upon which stunning images of nature are projected; and they enter their glass rooms. The writer imagines the future of the pyramid plateau to be luxurious rooms isolated from the [miserable] world. The rooms are connected through corridors and protected roads and its residents move through the corridors in black vehicles. The setup attempts to prevent the two contradicting, yet equally real, worlds from intersecting. We will imagine these images ourselves, as the work only presents fixed images of a blindfolded man sitting alone in a room, hurting, as he describes his perception of the future.

Travel through time, or traveling with time, are mixed in The Valley (2011), which is a work-in-progress by director Firas Taybeh. The Valley is what is left of a land where there used to be a river that dried out long before this story. Split characters are trapped in the valley and they try to make a living in this deserted, bewitched spot. In the middle of the valley five donkeys of a man become four and a lost soldier, trying to reach the battle on the other bank of the dried river, gets stuck. There are actors' clothes and things from all eras, mainly 'Chinese.' The director plays with time and character roles to link to his own environment where he was raised. There are ambiguous relations with enemies, for whom hostilities change with time and politics. There is a mixed society from varied roots and an anticipated battle that never comes. There is a drought and piles of stuff, mostly useless Chinese products. Who makes the valley and which power occupies its spheres, leading to the loss of the man's donkey followed by the men of the valley? Between realism and science fiction, even though

the tools are simple, the work uses symbolism to allow for many levels of interpretation. The film is thus liberated from its maker's intention to embrace its viewer's interpretation.

In his work Le monde sous la table (2010), Mohssin Harraki uses a magnet to make a hidden hand draw an uneven map of the world that does not quite resemble the world. Who is it that shapes the world and re-shapes it today? This program must be clear now in the questions it poses. It is a reflection of the state of perplexity resulting from the circumstances we are living today. News makers are numerous; and picture broadcasters are even more in number. By broadcasting images, they too become involved in the news making. We may come to understand only to discover that we did not see the whole truth, or that we did not understand. We share the incidents to discover that we played a role that was not assigned to us, or that we did not know we are playing. And we'll wonder if we were there at all.

Rabih Mroué is searching in With Soul, With Blood (2006) for himself in a picture of angry crowds that demonstrated in 2005 demanding the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Mroué is trying to determine his place in a photograph of a millionman march. He cannot decide which of these heads is his own, because they all look alike, but he is able to tell which crowd members do not resemble him. His head must be there somewhere. He seems to be exploring questions of participation, roles, images, and the direct relationship between effects and their causes.

In Children of Fire (2009), Mohammed Al Hawajri documents another representation of life in Gaza, the isolated city. In Al Bereej camp, children choose to play fire games that produce light in Gaza's dark nights. The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip have to put up with a number of limitations: a limited power supply, the availability of only basic commodities, and highly restricted mobility. The residents, just like the children, politicians, and artists, look for ways to undo the effect of the siege, even if just for moments. Al Hawajri is a visual artist and all his work is based on elements and stories from the Bereej camp where he lives. Here is a reality that grants life to another reality that has to re-formulate itself, visually or through temporary moments, to conform to assumed forms of urban life.

In Paper Dress (2009) Kasem Kharsa produces a live world of puppets that he moves in rooms made

of pictures while a Persian girl simultaneously tells the story of how her little sister recovered from a serious disease. The work's poeticism lies in Kharsa's masterful employment of translation. The two-dimensional pictures palpitate once with anticipation and once with pain, while the puppets' colors change according to treatments that they undergo.

In Maher Abi Samra's *Merely a Smell* (2007), the details of dead corpses being uncovered after the Israeli bombing of Lebanon in 2006 are blocked from the viewer's vision by the bodies of rescue workers. Abstract sounds are heard from the scene as well as some light that penetrates through to indicate what is happening behind those men. We are allowed to see bits of the scene, while we build the story from images and interpretations – stored by the audiovisual library of our minds whether consciously or not – and from the news that reach us.

The production circumstances of the chosen films and the narrative resulting from the way they are presented are similar to our relation with stories. Live testimonies, real pictures, artificial space, and imagined images of narrators. How can one talk of something that does not exist, is not clear, or needs to be asserted, or changes, every instant... or surprises with new, or old being revealed, or tries to imagine the future, exactly as it imagines the pre-sent... and the past! We collect the pieces of the story from the unrelated times and places, until we see another picture. I take the title of this text from the graduation film of the Syrian director Mohamed Malas from the Cinema Academy in Moscow, which he made with the Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim. The film is about a group of communist prisoners during the 1967 war. Ibrahim plays the role of the newspaper reader, who reads newspapers smuggled into the prison. By the "time when the news of victory in the June war reached the prisoners through smuggled newspapers, that arrive late, the war was over, having ended in defeat. While the prisoners still rejoice at the victory, the country, for which they went to prison, lives through the defeat." The state of the prisoners is very much like that of many who were imprisoned outside the revolution or lived its times at the margin of its news, or who knew about it in artificial spheres, or knew themselves through it. Then they came to know, or were made to know that everything was not alright for the officer at all.

Ala Younis, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

ALA YOUNIS: EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT, OFFICER

- **114** Le Monde Sous la Table (The World Under the Table), by Mohssin Harraki, 2010, Morocco/France, 8min
- **115** *2026*, by Maha Maamoun, 2010, Egypt, 10min
- 116 Children of Fire, by Mohammed Al Hawajiri, 2009, Palestine, 3min
- 117 Merely a Smell, by Maher Abi Samra, 2007, Lebanon, 10min
- 118 Paper Dress, by Kasem Kharsa, 2009, Jordan/Egypt, 7min
- 119 Sans titre (Untitled), by Neil Beloufa, 2010, Algeria/France, 15min
- 120 Al Wadi (The Valley), by Firas Taybeh, 2011, Jordan, 13min
- 121 With Soul, With Blood, by Rabih Mroué, 2006, Lebanon, 4min

Le monde sous la table (The World Under the Table), by Mohssin Harraki

2010, Morocco/France, 8min

The Film

In Le monde sous la table (The World under the Table) an invisible hand draws a map of the world on a white surface. Under the table, a magnet traces the contours of the map, while causing the movement of another magnet, fixed to the pen on top of the table. The magnet on the table follows the same route as that at the bottom, yet gives a new proposal of the world map on top of the table.



The Filmmaker

Mohssin Harraki was born in 1981 and lives in Dijon and Tangier. He is a multidiscipli-nary artist whose work explores cultural constructions, consequences of post colonialism and collective imaginations. Graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Dijon, Harraki pays particular attention to foreign cultural landmarks and social practices, and produced his first video works in the form of interviews with artist colleagues debating political everyday issues that have no direct association to art practice. He showed his work in a solo exhibition at Lavomatic in Saint-Ouen in Paris in 2009, in exhibitions in Paris. Marseilles and Amman. His films include Problème 5 (2010), Two Sides of One Piece (2010), and Voice Bread: Melody of National Anthem (2010).

2026, by Maha Maamoun

2010, Egypt, 10min

The Film

Based on a text from a recent Egyptian novel entitled 'The Revolution of 2053', by Mahmoud Uthman, and referencing a scene from Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), a time-traveler recounts his vision of the future of the Pyramids area, and by extension Egypt, in the year 2026 – a vision that strains to reach beyond, yet remains severely confined by the present's imaginative constraints.



The Filmmaker

Maha Maamoun was born in 1972 and lives in Cairo. She works mainly through the media of photography and video, often starting from generic visual representations of Cairo to explore how these intersect with and are negotiated by personal experiences. Maamoun's work has been shown in biennials and exhibitions including 'Mapping Subjectivity: Experimentation in Arab Cinema from the 1960s to Now' (MoMA. 2010), 'Live Cinema/In the Round: Contemporary Art from the East Mediterranean' (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2010), 'Ground Floor America' (Den Frie Center of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, 2010), 'Home Works 5' (Beirut, 2010), 'Past of the Coming Days' (9th Sharjah Biennial, 2009), 'PhotoCairo 4' (Cairo Image Collective -CiC, 2008), 'Global Cities' -(Tate Modern, 2007), and others. Her videos include Domestic Tourism II (2009), and Most Fabulous Place (2008).

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Children of Fire, by Mohammed Al Hawajiri,

2009, Palestine, 3min

The Film

Since childhood, night has been associated with sleep and the time when life is asleep. The darkness reminds us of myths and mysterious stories that frighten young people. But in Gaza's dark night, the children go out to burn the fear. They have fun with their own primitive games to overcome the difficulties of their lives, they are the children of fire who overcome the darkness.



The Filmmaker

Mohammed Hawajri was born in 1975 and lives in Gaza where he studied drawing and painting at the YMCA. In addition to local personal exhibits, Hawajri has shown his work internationally, and is one of the founders of the fine art program in the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in the Gaza strip as well as the Eltiga Group for Contemporary Art. Hawajri works in a wide and fluctuating range of media - painting, sculpture, photography and video art (e.g. Molokhia, 2008) - his choice frequently determined by such everyday matters as which materials happen to be available at a given time in the restrictive conditions in which Gazans live.

Merely a Smell, by Maher Abi Samra

2007, Lebanon, 10min

The Film

Summer 2006, Israeli war on Lebanon. A boat docks in a besieged Beirut to evacuate foreign nationals. From under the rubble of destroyed buildings, relief workers pull the bodies of the dead. Moving between light and darkness, life and its extinction, bodies redraw the boundaries of other bodies, the smell of death cloaking all. *Merely a Smell* received several awards including the Golden Dove (International Competition Documentary Film) of the International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film - DOK Leipzig, 2007.



Paper Dress, by Kasem Kharsa

2009, Jordan/Egypt, 7min

The Film

Surrounded by darkness, a young Iranian woman recounts a painful moment in her life. Her child-hood memories prompt the use of Persian miniature cut-outs, images reminiscent of a fairy tale or a children's book, to tell this story. The juxtaposition of the imaginary and the real gives life to the paper world and characters, generating a complex web of nostalgia, tragedy and hope.



The Filmmaker

Maher Abi Samra was born in 1965 and lives in Beirut. He studied drama arts at the Lebanese University in Beirut and audio-visual studies at the Institut National de l'Image et du Son in Paris, and has worked as a photo-journalist for Lebanese dailies and international agencies. His feature-length documentary Shatila Roundabout (2004) won the Prix Ulysse du Documentaire at the Festival Cinéma Méditerranéen Montpellier, 2006. Merely a Smell (2007) was awarded prizes for best short at DOK Leipzig 2007 and at Brazil's 'It's All True' International Documentary Film Festival in 2008. His films include Mariam (2006), Women of Hezbollah (2000), and Chronicles of Return (1995).

The Filmmaker

Kasem Kharsa, born in 1977 and living in Beirut, is an Egyptian-American design engineer, filmmaker, writer, and visual artist. Kharsa spent his childhood in the United States and the Middle East, and is an alumnus of the Rawi Screenwriters Lab, Sundance Directors/Writers Labs and Binger Filmlabs. More recently, he prepared his feature debut *Shelter*.

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119 Sans titre (Untitled), by Neil Beloufa

2010, Algeria/France, 15min

The Film

A cardboard decor and photographs reconstitute a luxury Californian-type villa in Algeria. Its inhabitants, neighbors and other protagonists imagine themselves there to explain why and how the latter was occupied by terrorists in order to hide although it is, paradoxically, made entirely of glass. They even polished it clean so as to leave no traces. This improbable and irresolvable anecdote encourages the characters to invent images of an event given by media coverage without the images nor the story and thus missing the main point. Sans titre was awarded the Grand Prize of the City of Oberhausen at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 2011.



120 Al Wadi (The Valley), by Firas Taybeh 2011. Jordan. 13min

The Film

The Valley is a comedy that takes place in the future where things go back to a primitive set in a desert where there has been a river that has gone dry. Two characters inhabit the valley: a digger and a valley crosser whose work is to make people pass to the other side of the valley. A conspiracy creates a conflict between the two men and they leave the valley. Inspired by folk stories from the Middle East, this experimental work in progress is a study for a feature-length version.



The Filmmaker

Neil Beloufa was born in 1985 and studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ENSAD) in Paris. He was a member of the 2010 promotion of Le Fresnoy - National Studio for Contemporary Arts and received several awards, notably the Prix Videoforme of Clermont Ferrand 2009, the Grand Prix IndieLisboa 2009 and the ARTE prize for a European Short Film at the 54th Oberhausen Film Festival. His work was shown in four solo exhibitions in Frankfurt. Los Angeles, Paris and New York, and selected for several group exhibitions and projects since 2007 (12th Biennial of Moving Images in Geneva, Prague International Triennial, Momenta Art Brooklyn, the Netherlands Media Art Institute in Amsterdam, Espace Croisé in Roubaix. Beaux Arts of Marseille). His films (e.g. Kempinski, 2007) were screened in international festivals for video and documentary.

The Filmmaker

Firas Taybeh lives in Amman, but was born in Libya in 1983. He studied directing and cinematography at The Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts in Aqaba, and started his artistic career studying sculpting before turning to film making in 2007. Taybeh has worked as an independent producer, director of photography, actor and art director in many Jordanian productions, and he is one of the creators of Aramram, Jordan's first web TV. His films include *Pigeon Boy* (2010), *Shawahed* (2009), and *Invisible Face* (2007).

With Soul, With Blood, by Rabih Mroué

2006, Lebanon, 4min

The Film

In With Soul, With Blood, Rabih Mroué scans a grainy newspaper photograph of a massive crowd at a political protest in a futile effort to find any trace of his own presence at the event.



The Filmmaker

Rabih Mroué, born in 1967 and living in Beirut, is an actor, director, playwright, visual artist, and a contributing editor for The Drama Review (TDR). His complex and diverse practice, spanning different disciplines and formats in between theater, performance, and visual arts, has established Mroué as a kev figure in a new generation of artistic voices in Lebanon. Employing both fiction and in-depth analysis as tools for engaging with his immediate reality, Mroué explores the responsibilities of the artist in communicating with an audience in given political and cultural contexts. His works deal with issues that have been swept under the rug in the current political climate of Lebanon, connected to the enduring marks left by the Lebanese Civil War as well as more recent political events. His filmic works include Foam (2007), Bread of Life (2008), and Memorial (2009).

MASOUD AMRALLA: PATHS TO SOLITUDE



Masoud Amralla Al Ali was born in Sharjah, UAE, in 1967. He is the curator & director of the Emirates Film Competition (2002-2007), artistic director of the Dubai International Film Festival, and director of the Gulf Film Festival, and served as a jury member in several Arabic and international film festivals. His writings comprise poetry, including a collection of poetry entitled 'Hymns of a Seagull', and cinematic critiques and have been published in Arab magazines and newspapers. He also directed several shorts and documentaries including Al-Rumram (1994), The Rainbow Room – 100 Years of Cinema (1996), Horizontals and Ornament in the Baroque Age (1999), and The Mountain Keepers (2005).

CURATOR

CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Only ten years ago, the whole Gulf region lived in a total cinematic drought. This was an impossible situation at a time when the world was celebrating over 100 years of cinema. Actually what was missing was an attractive, calm, understanding and patient environment, and more importantly, one that believes in culture, in the language of pictures, that has a passion for cinema ... a lot of it. As soon as this environment materialized in 2002 with the Emirates Film Competition in Abu Dhabi, the cadre started shylv. hobbling, in an absurd flow, individually, and enthusiastically. The joy was overwhelming. What would our image look like on screen? How strange to sit in a cinema, seeing ourselves projected onto the screen with a new image we were not used to. An image that was very much like us. The cinematic image that others had of us was always either of stupid Bedouins or rich people swimming in barrels of oil or, both a fresh and rather old-fashioned image, terrorists.

That day I wrote: 'this experiment... does not impose actual postulates of cinema presence in the Emirates. It is only an attempt to break through the block of dullness and rigidity that surrounds an important cultural project that has been - and still is - neglected, on purpose or not. The experiments of professionals, amateurs, and students come together to have an impact, not to be presented to a few and that's it. They are being projected to alarm, to draw attention, not to become commercial material or a product. They are projected to say in plain frankness: we didn't die. If some of these experiments are confused or technically poor, visually or in terms of sound, they came by themselves to say it openly: yes, it is like this, poor and desperate.' This misery that not many understand has also been a new source for a series of fallacies about our image: Why are film festivals being held in countries that do not produce films? Or why encourage amateurs and video films and gather under a fictive setting called 'festival'?

Personally I was not very concerned with names, designations or the setting at the time. What interested me, was the involvement, the attraction and the polarization, to keep the flame burning so that

the smoke won't kill us when it is put out. Despite the sharp criticism, I knew deep inside that the sorting phase was to come later and that we have to change that negative image in the mirror of the other. The bet was not on movie production; it was very simple: on individual artists, on a purer image of us, and on a group in which all speak their mother tongue: cinema, and on cool breezes to comfort our dry lungs – and correspondingly watching the image of the other, his understanding of renewing our impression of him, to remove false impressions if existent. Very briefly and simply: environment.

The program presented here is a simple selection from the Gulf and what I know for sure today is that the last ten years had a lot of cinema about them.

Masoud Amralla, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

MASOUD AMRALLA: PATHS TO SOLITUDE

- 122 Land of the Heroes, by Sahim Omar Kalifa, 2011, Belgium/Irag, 19min
- 123 Heaven's Water, by Abdullah Boushahri, 2010, Kuwait, 23min
- 124 The Power of Generations, by Mohammed Jassim, 2011, Bahrain, 2min
- 125 Sabeel, by Khalid Al-Mahmood, 2010, UAE, 20min
- 126 Spices, by Amer Alrawas, 2011, Oman, 11min

122 Land of the Heroes, by Sahim Omar Kalifa

Belgium/Iraq, 2011, 19min

The Film

1988. The conflict between Iraq and Iran is reaching its final stage. The 10-year-old Dileer and his sister Zienee want to watch cartoons on television, but that is easier said than done when Malo, the bully, comes along...



The Filmmaker

Sahim Omar Kalifa, born in Kurdish Iraq in 1980, studied audiovisual arts at the University of Art and Design Sint-Lukas in Brussels. Land of the Heroes is his first professional short film, following the success of his graduation film Nan.

Heaven's Water, by Abdullah Boushahri

2010, Kuwait, 23min

The Film

A peddler visits a yellow fish at a pet shop every day. One day, he meets a young pregnant woman, and a friendship slowly develops. As she faces an important decision over the future of her unborn child, the peddler decides to help her.



The Power of Generations, by Mohammed Jassim

2011, Bahrain, 2min

The Film

A man on a bench in the middle of the desert watches the world around him develop. Deserts turn to pastures and then modern buildings. The man watches until global wars break out. Eventually, all developments vanish and the desert returns.



The Filmmaker

Abdullah Boushahri is a Kuwaiti director and producer. His debut short was *Kuwaiti Champion* (2003) and he also directed *Losing Ahmad* (2006). He recently founded Synq Studios in Miami, Florida.

The Filmmaker

Mohammed Jassim is a film editor and 3D graphic artist. In 2011 he produced his first film *The Power of Generations*, which he also scripted and directed.

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Sabeel, by Khalid Al-Mahmood

2010, UAE, 20min

The Film

Two small boys live with their sick grandmother in the mountains of the UAE. Tending their vegetables and then selling produce on the road, they need to earn enough money to buy medicine for her. This poignant film depicts their lives and the world in which they live. *Sabeel* won the Second Prize in the Muhr Emirati Awards at the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) 2010.



The Filmmaker

Khalid Al-Mahmood was born in Abu Dhabi in 1976. He graduated from the University of Denver in mass communications. He has worked on several short films, and lately freelanced in video and film production.

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Spices, by Amer Alrawas

2011, Oman, 11min

The Film

Four stories of four people: an infertile woman seeking a cure, a 90-year-old man waiting, a child preparing for change, and a blogger.



The Filmmaker

Amer Alrawas was born in Oman in 1980. He graduated from UAE University. He worked on several short films, among them *Belooh* in 2008 and *Between Lines & Mirrors* in 2005.



MAHA MAAMOUN AND SARAH RIFKY: A STATE OF FLUIDITY





Maha Maamoun lives and works in Cairo, Egypt. As an artist she primarily works with photography and video. Most recently she co-edited, with Haytham el-Wardany, a book titled 'The Middle Ear', for Sharjah Biennial 10. Her recent exhibitions include: 'Second World', Steirischer Herbst (2011), Outres Mesures, La Galerie – Contemporary Art Center in Noisy-le-Sec (2011), 'The End of Money', Witte de With – Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (2011), 'Mapping Subjectivity', MoMA, New York (2010), and 'Live Cinema', Philadelphia Museum of Art (2010). She was co-curator of 'PhotoCairo3' (2005) and assistant curator for 'Meeting Points 5' (2007). Maamoun is a founding board member of the Contemporary Image Collective (CiC).

Sarah Rifky lives and works in Cairo and elsewhere. She has been curator of the Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art since 2009 and has taught at the American University in Cairo and MASS Alexandria in 2010. She studied visual art and mass communication at the American University in Cairo and received her MFA in Critical Studies from the Malmö Art Academy, Lund University in Sweden. She co-edited the artist book 'Damascus: Tourists. Artists Secret Agents'. Her projects include 'Invisible Publics' (Cairo, 2010), 'The Popular Show' (Cairo, 2011), 'an accord is first and foremost a proposition' (New York, 2011) and 'The Bergen Accords' (Bergen, 2011). She is a curatorial agent for dOCUMENTA (13) and founding director of CIRCA, the Cairo International Resource Center for Art.

ATORS

CURATORS' STATEMENT

Sometimes I imagine us together, I think of 'us' as a situation; but this – this is a fluid state, it is a condition, which we are all a part of. Half the time we imagine situations and create them, constructing them, in our minds, then we step back and observe in wonderment this fluid state that is all embracing, and impossible to exit or escape. We follow inspiration towards intimacy, the comfort of lingering in a space of one's own thought, fleeting, or a rumination, that stays.

I sit on the edge of a cliff and look down. The cliff, a limit to my own humanity, my own intelligence. I look down, and the view opens up beneath us, an open sea, a horizon. Jumping seems like a bad idea, but it's nice to take in the view that cannot be contained within the mind except from that vantage point perhaps. Perhaps, you can close your eyes, and imagine it differently. You may be asleep, but your mind is still lucid like it never has been before. You wake up to the underworld of your thoughts, an after-hours club, a Russian billiard parlor overflowing with men in the heart of Damascus. You walk in and it opens up in stretches of red sand, laden with iron, it is red. You walk and shallow waters reflect pink flamingos, all balancing with ease on one leg. There are two boat wrecks. The sand is like clay, but it is iron, it sticks to your feet, weighing you down, grounding, it slows down your steps. The sky opens up low and wide. The trees, in the distance, are low too. Everything appears to be horizontal. A race of situations keeps taking you back to the top of the cliff, where you see yourself looking down, at yourself, leaving a trail of footprints in red clay sands, next to nothing.

You stand there, with me, words appear like birds, and ideas are all cut out from books, other works, pieces of fabric, flags, pairs of scissors, typewriters, discarded computers, drawing boards, and tables upside down, stacks of newspapers, and books banned once upon a time, an old crochet tunic, an unlikely pile of things in red, black, white and green, strings of pearls, yourself in a mirror, and glasses, for shortsightedness, are lined up ahead of you on the utmost edge of the cliff. The glasses look and you look after them. You look out, the horizon is a limit of a view.

There is fire on a mountain behind you, and you wonder how calmness is possible when the world is up in arms. We are implied around each other, you are an accompanying thought, that makes me smile, and makes me touch my hair differently, you move something in me. I slow down around myself, I glance around, and put things in order, I think about the order of the world. In sequences, we replay our experiences, for you, for each other, and we imitate and repeat ourselves, in sentiments. The most intimate thoughts, are piercing non-verbal disclosures, mere insinuations, that run like fault-lines along the shell of the earth.

We live in cities along these natural fissures, concealing faults, and lines. The lips of cities are inflamed and the skin of the world is highly irritable. We swallow, with difficulty, at times in darkness, taking in sequences of narratives. We succumb to our selves, the limits of our body, and where it meets our mind, we become overtaken with the turmoil of a swiftly rising state of fluidity. Malleable, weak, vulnerable and shapeless, we take the form of anxiety in apprehension, our thoughts are shaped by the real, the uncanny, history and its cities, love and its reproduction, and finally each other. In constant reverberation, we are suspended, breathless, in trance, drifting, and are suddenly summoned back to a present tense. Stories, yield us towards the state of things, as they are, an unrelenting fluid state.

Maha Maamoun and Sarah Rifky, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

MAHA MAAMOUND AND SARAH RIFKY: A STATE OF FLUIDITY

- 127 Rice City, by Sherif El Azma, 2010, Egypt, 19min
- 128 Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright, by Akram Zaatari, 2010, Lebanon, 12min
- 129 Tarahi II, by Haris Epaminonda, 2006, Cyprus, 4min
- 130 Giza Zoo, by Solmaz Shahbazi, 2010, Germany, 6min
- 131 Short Wave/Long Wave, by Vartan Avakian, 2009, Lebanon, 7min
- **132** 80 Million, by Eslam Zeen El Abedeen/Mohamed Zayan, 2009, Egypt, 4min
- 133 My Father Looks for an Honest City, by Basim Magdy, 2010, Egypt, 5min
- 134 Images of a Center, by Iman Issa, 2005, Egypt, 5min

<u> 127</u>

Rice City, by Sherif El Azma

2010, Egypt, 19min

The Film

In an old-fashioned apartment, in an atmosphere of tension and unease, located somewhere between the real, the uncanny, and a state of dream-like delirium, suggestive symbolism and insinuations fester in dark corners of rooms where *Rice City* unfolds. A self-conscious young woman, anxious, haunts the corridors; we encroach on a young black man lounging in his bed, building a city from blocks; an older man played by Count Federico de Wardal, recounts a story of selling rice to his friend, who appears as a ghost. A tight-lipped scene around a dinner table, with its ripples of tension spilling beyond the bounds of this exquisitely shot film noir featuring an equally beautiful soundtrack, transfixing, full of suspense.



The Filmmaker

Sherif El Azma lives and works in Cairo. He studied at the Surrey Institute in London and teaches experimental film at the American University in Cairo. In addition to more than ten single-channel videos, Azma has authored performance lectures, sound installations and live visuals for the '100Live' electronic music festival in Cairo. His films have been screened at numerous international venues, and featured in Manifesta, Home Works Forum, the Sharjah and Venice Biennales. In 2001, he was awarded a Best Work prize for his 'Interview With a Housewife' at the Al-Nitag Festival. His works range from the highly experimental to documentary to riffs on the cinematic, often exploring trajectories of psycho-geography, relations and sexuality in relation to the city.

Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright, by Akram Zaatari

2010. Lebanon, 12min

The Film

On text, love, recording and writing, *Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright* features an exchange between two lovers over the course of an evening. A story of longing unfolds between two people, on the last sunset of the millennium, encapsulating the intensity of a private conversation, the unsettling nature of communicating, approaching understanding, and what is implied within a script.



Tarahi II, by Haris Epaminonda

2006, Cyprus, 4min

The Film

A clip of footage of a hotel-room TV, during the artist's visit to Egypt, a famous Egyptian actress is re-captured, re-edited, in a sequence of close-ups, placed in cuts and repetition, in a contemplative conversation with herself. Accompanied by a piano soundtrack, the displaced emotional pathos extracted from this meditative scene is interrupted by the appearance of identical twins, who look at each other concealing an ominous expression.



The Filmmaker

Akram Zaatari lives and works in Beirut. He received a BA in Architecture from the American University of Beirut and an MA in Media Studies from the New School for Social Research in New York. He worked at Future Television in Beirut between 1995-1997 where he produced most of his early videos. Zaatari is cofounder of the Arab Image Foundation through which he developed his work on photography and collecting as an art practice. Zaatari's work shows particular attention to the idea of desire, the human body, and sexual practices among men.

The Filmmaker

Haris Epaminonda works and lives in Berlin. She co-represented Cyprus at the 52nd Venice Biennale and participated in the 5th Berlin Biennale and 9th Sharjah Biennale. Most recently her works have been included in exhibitions at the MoMA in New York, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main, the Museo di Palazzo Poggi & Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna, and the Tate Modern in London. Since 2007, Epaminonda has been developing, together with Daniel Gustav Cramer, an ongoing book project called 'The Infinite Library'.

129

130 Giza Zoo, by Solmaz Shahbazi

2010, Germany, 6min

The Film

A near-documentary take of the Giza Zoo, opened to the public in 1891. An early jewel of modernization in Egypt's capital, the zoo marks a nostalgic last vestige of the agricultural hinterlands that once surrounded Cairo. The transformation of public space, the politics that willed the rise, fall and formation of new social classes, encapsulated by this particular site, are presented in carefully selected sequences and a soundtrack emulating the image, completing the viewer's fictitious - or rather imaginary - of the Giza Zoo.



The Filmmaker

Solmaz Shahbazi lives and works in Berlin. She studied architecture and design at the Stuttgart Academy of Art and Design. Before venturing into photography and film, Shahbazi worked as an architect. Her works have been shown a the 7th Shariah Biennial, the 9th International Istanbul Biennial and the 1st Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art, Since 2001, Shahbazi's works have been exhibited widely in Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Shahbazi uses the documentary format in both her videos and her photography as a tool to analyse different modes of imagery, expectations of the unknown and possible effects on perception.

Short Wave / Long Wave, by Vartan Avakian

2009, Lebanon, 7min

The Film

'Some cities have no voice.' - Vartan Avakian



The Filmmaker

Vartan Avakian is a Beirut-based visual artist. In his inter-disciplinary work, he employs video, installation, photography and other media. He studied communication arts at Lebanese American University and architecture and urban culture at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), and at the Center de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona. Avakian is a founding member of the art collective Atfal Ahdath.

80 Million, by Eslam Zeen El Abedeen/ Mohamed Zayan

2009, Egypt, 4min

The Film

Something is about to explode: Zayan and Abedeen break out in a rhapsodic percussive dialog, seizing the power of a popular life on the brink of implosion. Charged and charging, the deliberate performance in the absence of their instruments transposes pathos and agency. The video has best been described as 'part-tribute, part-elegy' to Egypt's population of eighty million people.



My Father Looks for an Honest City, by Basim Magdy

2010, Egypt, 5min

The Film

The artist films his father while re-enacting Diogenes the Cynic's philosophical stunt, in which he wanders around an arid landscape with a lit lamp in daytime, claiming to look for an honest man. The film is shot on an open site with unfinished glass buildings, insignia of the new architectural prototypes of the New Cairo, a rising city on the outskirts, complete with archaeological finds, stray dogs and fake palm trees. The re-enactment is set to the sound of a raging thunderstorm.



The Filmmaker

Mohamed Zayan and Eslam Zein El Abedeen live and work in Cairo. Zavan studied at the Cairo Higher Institute of Applied Arts, and has participated in a number of group shows, including IMAFY in 2008, and the 20th Youth Salon in 2009. His work has also been shown at the Darat al Funun in Amman and was included in the survey exhibition 'Why Not?' at the Palace of the Arts in Cairo. Zein El Abedeen has participated in various workshops, including the 20th Youth Salon in Cairo. Together, the artists were jointly awarded the Golden Prize for their work 80 Million, which premiered at the 20th Youth Salon in 2009.

The Filmmaker

Basim Magdy lives and works in Basel and Cairo. Magdy uses different media including drawing, painting, animation, installation, sculpture, film, video, sound and printed matter. Most recently his work has been shown, among other venues, at the Kunsthalle Vienna, the Institut Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, the 1st D-O ARK Underground Biennial in Konjic/Sarajevo and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCa). In his work, he explores the space between fiction and reality in the representation of power in the media and global culture.

133

Images of a Center, by Iman Issa

2005, Egypt, 5min

The Film

Issa invents a character that describes a city, which is never named. The video, composed of the narrator's text and public domain landscape images, emerges from the artist's attempt to describe a personal relationship and a set of observations of a familiar location, searching for an appropriate language – both textual and visual – to accomplish this task. The utopian narrative and almost indistinguishable images gain resonance and specificity through the artist's articulation of these elements in her work.



The Filmmaker

Iman Issa is an artist living and working in Cairo and New York. Her most recent solo exhibition, 'Material', took place at the Rodeo Gallery in Istanbul, in addition to selected shows including at the KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin, the Sculpture Center in New York, the Contemporary Image Collective in Cairo and the Art Dubai Special Projects. Her videos have been screened at the Tate Modern, London, Spacex, Exeter, Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, and at the Bidoun Artists Cinema, Dubai. In her practice Issa deals with questions of language, place, methodically exploring the relationship between history, the city, personal cognition and experience. Lyrical and encrypted, her works pose systematic questions, a little off-center, insinuating narrative and always resisting placement or definition.

LARA KHALDI AND YAZAN KHALILI: IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER





Lara Khaldi was born in Jerusalem sometime in the eighties, and received her BA in archaeology and art history with a minor in English literature in 2005. She recently resigned in protest as assistant director for programs at the Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE, and decided to work alone elsewhere. She worked as assistant curator for the Sharjah Biennial 8 (2007), as co-editor for the Sharjah Biennial 9 publications, and has also worked on the Sharjah Biennial 10. In 2007, she was assistant director at Al Riwag Art Gallery in Bahrain for the exhibition 'Disorientation II' at Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, in November 2009, and for the exhibition 'Never Part', Bozar, Brussels, 2007. In addition, she co-curated the exhibition PALESTINA: Tierra, Exilio, Creacion: Reconsidering Palestinian Art, Fundacion Antonio Perez, Cuenca, Spain 2006.

Yazan Khalili was born in 1981, and lives and works in and out of Palestine. Yazan Khalili received a degree in architecture from Birzeit University in 2003 and in 2010 graduated with a master's degree from the Center for Research Architecture at Goldsmith's College, University of London. He was one of the founding members of Zan Design Studio (2005) and a finalist in the A. M. Qattan Foundation's Young Artists Award (2006), as well as an artist-in-residence at The Delfina Foundation in London (2008) and production coordinator for Sharjah Biennials 9 & 10. Yazan Khalili's photography explores the relationship between the social and spatial elements of the built environment and the contextual landscape alongside which they are perceived. Solo shows include 'Landscape of Darkness' at Transit Gallery, Belgium (2010), 'Urban Impression' at French Cultural Centers in Palestine (2007/08), and 'Margins' at The Delfina Foundation, London (2008). Selected group shows include 'Invisible', Ramallah, Amman and Rome (2006/07); 'No Man's Land' at Video Art, Granada (2008); 'Mapping' at Art Dubai, UAE (2009). The Jerusalem Show (2010) and 'External: New Art from Further East' at Newertown I Art, London (2010). Additionally, Khalili was one of the participants in Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti's project 'Ramallah Syndrome' at the Palestine c/o Venice Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009) and, with the Belgian group tg STAN, in the performance show 'The Tangible'. In 2008 and 2009. he was nominated for the KLM Paul Huf Award. He is one of the artists showing at the Future of a Promise Pavilion in Venice in 2011. His writings and photographs have been featured in several publications, including Frieze Magazine and Race & Class. In 2009, Khalili co-curated, with Lara Khaldi, 'We Are Never Heroes' as part of the Jerusalem Show. Some of his works have been acquired by the British Museum.

CURATORS' STATEMENT

The following exchange of emails took place between Lara Khaldi and Yazan Khalili over the course of three weeks in September while trying to write their curatorial statement. At the end, they decided to present it in this raw format as it allowed a more open discussion and exchange.

Dear Yazan,

It is strange how we keep building those video programs on intuition, and I keep thinking that we were so set on showing My Father is Still a Communist and building the program around it, because we have such affinity with this film. This relationship with the missing father, as we've both in a way had this experience of a missing father, for different reasons, but all intermingled, war, politics, to run from a higher father... And there's also Hicham's film As They Say, produced at the same time... Do you think the revolutions had something to do with suddenly remembering fathers, and our relationships with them? Perhaps all of this is a coincidence... Perhaps the whole curatorial process is a coincidence, but one makes a narrative out of it, and it suddenly becomes intentional?

Hey Lara...

Your last questions are tricky, because, in a way, they attempt to make us naked... expose us to the reader and viewer... You actually surprised me by asking these questions again, as I remember we had this discussion when we chose the films for the first program we participated in, we didn't reach a conclusion, but then it was easier, we only had to choose independent Palestinian films, this time we need to have a curatorial intention, and yes we built it around My Father is Still a Communist, or at least this film pulled the trigger for the selection process... But the narrative comes as we are looking and choosing the films, as we are combing the program, making the order, and having this discussion... It is not a coincidence as much as a discovery process, with lots of luck involved...

So, fathers, we are always in conflict with their disappearance and their existence, I guess we are always in conflict with them, and now with the new revolutions this conflict will expand, now we have our revolution that can stand against theirs in the 60s and 70s, now we will not tell them 'we wish we lived your time', now it is our revolution against theirs... or narrative against theirs... am I too enthusiastic here? Are we breaking away from them? Are we looking to become them? Revolutionaries... do we want to become fathers?

Yazan,

I am writing to you on the bus on my way from Jerusalem to Ramallah, and next to me are two young men staring, one is actually now standing and trying to brush against my arm, and it makes me think of what Freud said in 'Totem and Taboo' about sons conspiring to kill their fathers, and the birth of laws pertaining to desire. He argues that it is when the higher figure of the omnipresent father is defied by his sons, or the younger males in the clan, there is loss of control, havoc, and sexual freedom, but also the beginning of taboos and repression...

You ask a very important question, I think, are we imitating or are we breaking from a legacy? A friend of mine used to tell me that the older we get the more we resemble our parents, and it bothered me, as most of us see our parents as failures, especially our generation, and here I don't mean failures in a negative sense but they had a project that failed, and that resulted in a bitterness that we see...its visible. I don't know if Ehab has this experience, and I'm perhaps projecting here, but in his video, this portrait of his parents, silent, bleak, almost cold, although they are a family, all seems as if there's an attempt to show them in a light contrary to the image of a family house buzzing with life. I wonder if every son or daughter in different ways see their parents' lives partly as an incomplete project, a part failure - but to get back to repetition, maybe the only way in a sense to carry on is to actually keep repeating into eternity...

Неу,

I hope the two guys didn't harass you a lot, ah, it is annoying, being harassed makes one feel strange, different, another, one suddenly gets confronted with oneself... It is funny, I always get harassed for my pony tail, and in the film *Moustache* the character gets harassed for not having yet grown a moustache, one becomes obsessed with the way he/she talks, walks, looks.. etc.. a slight difference makes one in confrontation with society... the minute we decide not to become our parents we are accused of being revolutionaries. This is fine if this was intentional, but it makes one crazy being forced to be one...

My main issue with my father is that he doesn't recognize my criticism for their revolution as a continuation of it, he sees this as anti-revolution... I now accuse him of being conservative, he accuses me of being an 'aimless young man', I loved Hisham's film for its rawness, the raw and direct way he shows this conflict in, in this animalistic way... Sameh's film Be Quiet as well, even though it further complicates things because there's another authoritative figure that the son has to yet defy... It all makes me wonder sometimes if revolution is an instinct!!

Lara Khaldi and Yazan Khalili, 2011

THE FILM PROGRAM

LARA KHALDI AND YAZAN KHALILI: IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

- **135** My Father is Still a Communist: Intimate Secrets to be Published, by Ahmad Ghossein, 2011, Lebanon, 33min
- 136 As They Say (Kif Ma Yi Qulu), by Hicham Ayouch, 2011, Morocco/UAE, 13min
- 137 Be Quiet, by Sameh Zoabi, 2006, Palestine, 19min
- 138 Moustache, by Megdad Al-Kout, 2010, Kuwait, 15min
- 139 The Forty Second Winter, by Ehab Tarabieh, 2009, Syria, 17min

My Father is Still a Communist: Intimate Secrets to be Published, by Ahmad Ghossein

2011. Lebanon. 33min

The Film

All what is left from the relationship between Rachid and Maream is a large number of radio cassettes sent as love letters during the time of civil war in Lebanon. "When I was a child, I invented stories about a father who was a war hero fighting with the Communist Party."



The Filmmaker

Ahmad Ghossein won the Best Director Prize at the Beirut International Film Festival (2004) for his short film Operation N after having graduated with a degree in theater arts from Lebanese University. He has since directed several documentaries and video works including 210m (2007), produced by Ashkal Alwan, Faces Applauding Alone (2008), What Does Not Resemble Me Looks Exactly Like Me with Ghassan Salhab and Mohamad Soueid (2009), and An Arab Comes to Town (2008), a documentary filmed in Denmark produced by DR2. Lately, he has been working on his first feature film.

As They Say (Kif Ma Yi Qulu), by Hicham Ayouch

2011, Morocco/UAE, 13min

The Film

Set in the lush Rif mountains of northern Morocco, As They Say spans the length of a weekend camping trip where a father and his son hike in a forest to go fishing in a beautiful lake. The son is a hip twenty-five year-old who wants to use the intimate meditative get-away with his father to reveal his secret. The father, a former soldier, is a conservative sixty-year-old who does not suspect his son's secret. The revelation will shatter their relationship...



37 Be Quiet, by Sameh Zoabi

2006, Palestine, 19min

The Film

Be Quiet follows the story of a young boy and his father on their journey home to the city of Nazareth. What should be a simple car trip is beset by politically charged tension and a militarised reality - each of which serves as a foil to enhance the struggle of a complacent father raising a strong willed son. The film has won more than 20 awards and recognitions including Third Prize in the Cinéfondation Selection at the Cannes Film Festival (2005), Best Narrative Short Film at the IFP Market in New York City, Best Student Short at the Aspen Short Festival, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Grand Prix at the Brest European Short Festival, Best Arab Short Film at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, Golden Prix at the Carthage Film Festival, Bronze Muhr Award at the Dubai Film Festival, and others.



The Filmmaker

A former journalist, Hicham Ayouch worked for a few years in French television before taking to writing and film directing. His first film, *The King's Queens* (2005) explored the status of women in Morocco and *Angel's Dust* (2006) was about autistic teenagers. He has since directed two feature-length fiction films, *Edges of the Heart* (2006) and *Cracks* (*Fissures*, 2008).

The Filmmaker

Sameh Zoabi was born and raised in Iksal, a Palestinian village near the city of Nazareth, in 1975. In 1998, Zoabi graduated from Tel Aviv University with a dual degree in film studies and English literature. The following year, Zoabi was awarded a merit scholarship to pursue a master's degree. In February 2005, he completed his MFA in film direction at Columbia's School of the Arts. Filmmaker Magazine named Zoabi as one of the Top 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema. Zoabi recently completed his first feature debut Man Without a Cell Phone.

Moustache, by Megdad Al-Kout

2010. Kuwait. 15min

The Film

The film is set in old Kuwait and depicts the life of a man who is unable to grow a moustache.



The Filmmaker

Megdad Al-Kout was born in 1983. He graduated from Kuwait University with a BA in English literature, and then worked as a production assistant and assistant director for many TV commercials, for Al-Watan newspaper and TV channel. Al-Kout wrote and directed a number of short films that were screened at many festivals. including the short film Shanab (Moustache) which was selected for numerous film festivals including the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival 2010 in Brazil. His third film Banana won the Special Jury Prize at the Gulf Film Festival 09, it was also selected for the Dubai International Film Festival 2009.

The Forty Second Winter, by Ehab Tarabieh

2009, Syria, 17min

The Film

A series of winter frames of an Arab Syrian village near Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights. The filmmaker takes a close look at 'the dance of life' led by his aging parents, 42 winters after the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.



The Filmmaker

Born in Majdal Shams, in the occupied Golan Heights in 1982. Ehab Tarabieh is a filmmaker and a human rights activist. He lives in Jerusalem and works as camera project coordinator for B'Tselem. the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Ehab's films were screened in many local and international film festivals. His short documentary The Forty Second Winter won a special mention of the jury at the Jerusalem Film Festival in 2009, and his short drama Chance won first prize for directing at the Haifa International Film Festival in 2010. In 2011 Ehab co-produced and directed the project 'Living in East Jerusalem', a collaboration between B'Tselem and The Guardian.











2010/2011



Viewing Lounge

At the festival events 2010 and 2011, film professionals and journalists could access a digital film library based on formats used for international film markets. 200 short films and video works had been collected from various Arab countries.





REALITY RECAPTURED: A NEW CULTURE OF DISCOURSE

A VISIT TO THE ARAB SHORTS FILM FESTIVAL 2011 AT THE GOETHE-INSTITUT IN CAIRO

By Amira El Ahl

PAYBACK

It could have been a good day. "I felt your love" the Egyptian singer was crooning on the radio, "my hope is for you to be happy", transporting the taxi driver to a better place other than his low-class neighborhood somewhere in Cairo. And the young boy, who was queuing for some beans in the morning at the 'fool' stand had succeeded in squeezing in front of all the big men and ran down the street beaming with success. It could have been a good day.

But then it all turned sour.

The boy got a slapping from his father for bringing too small a portion back home. The taxi driver had an accident and the culprit got away with it, thanks to his wasta – his privileged contacts. The taxi driver was left with no papers and no compensation.

Where to go with all this anger and frustration from this injustice?

The taxi driver, a teacher during the day, has a favourite tool: a wooden stick that he keeps in the trunk together with his schoolbooks. Once he enters the schoolroom, the victim from the street turns into the perpetrator who abuses his position for power and submission. Dark eyes and grim faced, he walks through the small classroom; scared eyes looking up at him. Who will be his victim today? The boy, whose day had started so

promising at the 'fool' stand, knows that it is his turn when the teacher points at him. He does not know the answer to the teacher's questions who is waiting in anticipation for the whipping. Wailing, struggling and fighting with his schoolmates who are asked to bring him to the front of the room, the boy knows that there is no escape. Although his feet show marks of previous beatings, the teacher knows no mercy. He beats the boy over and over again on the soles of his feet, taking out his anger, avenging all injustice he had suffered from earlier.

Violence, social injustice, corruption – issues deeply rooted in Egyptian society.

The boy gets a beating because the taxi driver had a bad day. The taxi driver gets punished for an accident that someone else had committed. The officer who acquits the culprit, forces the young woman who was sitting in the back seat of the cab to give him a blow job - otherwise she will end up in a prison cell. The young woman has to prostitute herself to make a living for herself and her mother. She gets molested even at home, where the father of the little boy rents out a room to her and her mother. "I am here to collect the rent," the father says and forces himself on her. Her disgust at herself and the life she has to lead shows when the young woman sees her reflection in the mirror over the sink. She cannot look at herself without throwing up her feelings of utter disgust.

The lives of the characters in Omar Khaled's short narrative *Payback* are intertwined, and we

watch them facing a world of oppression, violence and social injustice. Screened at the Arab Shorts 2011 of the Goethe-Institut in Cairo, this short film was shown as part of a program titled 'Personal Freedom: Fiction Within The Truth.' Curated by Hala Galal and Ayman Hussein, the program explores questions of fiction and truth and how the difference between both can be gauged. "There is always truth in fiction, and much of reality is too unacceptable to be conceived as true," they write in their curatorial statement. "This program represents reality, where what is real may seem unreal to many." More than any other program in this year's festival, their selection of short films deals exclusively with currents events.

In *Our Weapon*, Ziad Hassan tells the story of a group of friends who use graffiti to express their opinions after the 25 January Revolution.

Suspended Freedom by May El-Hossamy follows a housekeeper around Cairo, who travels half the city every day to work in different houses, scraping a living for herself and her children. We see her cleaning houses, cooking and struggling through Cairo's traffic while talking about her personal life. Her husband, imprisoned for seven years, had escaped during the 25 January Revolution - a fact that does not seem to make her life any easier. For the two Egyptian curators it was a conscious decision to show films only from their home country. "Based on what was happening here and all the new work we had been exposed to, we wanted to focus on films from Egypt," says Ayman Hussein. All but one film were made in 2011, focusing on the day-today life in Egypt after 25 January or the conditions that led to the revolution, as portrayed so harshly in Omar Khaled's fiction Payback.

Fictitious or realistic/fiction or reality? This was one of the main points discussed by the audience and filmmakers after the screening of Payback. "I was very impressed by this movie, however, it really is a harsh portrayal of a society," says Marcel Schwierin, artistic director of Arab Shorts. Were plot and characters exaggerated for dramatic purposes? Can this be a realistic reflection of reality? "From my point of view, this film expresses what is happening as part of Egyptian daily life," says Ayman Hussein, although the film was made in 2010, a year before the political upheaval that ousted former president Hosni Mubarak. "Egypt still suffers from a vicious circle of violence, especially among the economically weaker classes. And this violence continues," Ayman Hussein says.

This is highlighted by the sad fact that the film's screening coincided with news of the death of

23-year old Egyptian Essam Atta after being tortured by police in prison. The political upheaval in the Arab world has deeply affected every strata of society. It was not only visible in the highly political programs of this year's festival, but also felt reality throughout the five-day festival.

On Friday, the day after the opening, many filmmakers and curators chose to join the protests in Tahrir Square, just a few meters away from the Goethe-Institut, to show their solidarity with the pro-democracy movement. Essam Atta's body was brought to the square and the filmmakers from all around the Arab world were deeply moved by this experience.

"I got carried away by what I saw there," says Ali Benkirane from Morocco, who joined the screening of his film *Amal* late, because he had joined the protests in Tahrir.

In the afternoon of that day, the curators of the Arab Shorts 2011 meet at the "White Box" in the gardens of the Institute, in order to discuss organizational issues. But many who sit around the table seem absent-minded. The noise from the square, rallying cries echoing through megaphones from Tahrir-Square, make it difficult to concentrate. Yazan Khalili, curator from Palestine, joins the meeting late. He has come directly from the square, on the back of his hand glow the Egyptian colors - black, red and white. "I did not want to, but before I knew it I had a flag painted on my hand," he says while looking down at his hand. Others don't make it at all to the meeting, because they are protesting in front of the prison where Essam Atta was tortured to death.

The Arab world has seen dramatic changes in the past year and the Arab Shorts Festival thus faced a new challenge in its third year in existence. With its largest program so far, the Arab Shorts presented eight programs, curated by eleven curators from Egypt, Algeria, France, Tunisia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Palestine. All in all, forty eight films from twelve Arab countries were screened. "There is a huge variety of short films in the Arab world and we wanted to reflect this variety by choosing eleven curators." Marcel Schwierin explains the idea behind the format of the Arab Shorts 2011: In the past, curators received specific instructions on how to choose their films; in 2009, curators represented their home country, in 2010 they were asked to work with a particular theme. This time around curators were completely free to make their own choices. The only criteria they had to adhere to were that first, films had to have an Arab component, second, the whole program is not to exceed

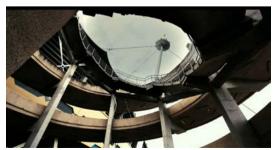
a maximum of 70 minutes overall with each film no longer than 30 minutes, and third and finally, at least one of the films per program should have been produced within the last three years. The core question of what constitutes an "Arab" film remained open for interpretation.

"To put a program together is maybe as intimate as making a film," says Marcel Schwierin. It was important for him that curators from the Arab world would choose the films for the different programs. "To curate myself would have had implied something post-colonial for me." A trained photographer and filmmaker, Marcel Schwierin has worked exclusively as a feelance film curator since 2004 - "a job description that I basically created in 2004," he says. Ever since, he has co-founded the Werkleitz Biennial in Halle (Saale) and the Internet database cinovid. He is also curator for the transmediale Berlin and curated regularly for the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. He is the brain behind the Arab Shorts, launched the festival in 2009, and has been its artistic director ever since. What makes Arab Shorts special for him is its strong socio-political orientation. "You get a very rich view on the Arab world and its societies." Through the media one is always confronted with the same images, the same old clichés: angry young men, Orientalism and Internet savvy men and Arabs who are seen as revolutionaries, explains Marcel Schwierin. In contrast, many films at the Arab Shorts present the political side within very private settings, and show, for example, how the dynamics of family networks work and how this in turn affects society and politics.

THE STADIUM

It is a cold night. He has his coat collar pulled up, the smoke from his cigarette is visible against the dark street lights. The cigarette. He has one constantly between his lips, sucking on it as if it were to keep him warm, as if it is the only thing left for him to hold on to. A cigarette. He is walking through the dark city, his feet slurping on the floor, his back hunched as if he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. He looks as if he is being pushed to the ground by an invisible force. His face is that of a man who has no expectations anymore; sad, hopeless, exhausted. Deep lines are cut into his face, a face that has seen a lot and does not want to see anymore. He walks with his cigarette in his mouth, followed by a dog, through the deserted city. He walks into a bar, where he downs some drinks. Nobody speaks a word but the radio presenter who is talking about a football match. There are some other clients, but everybody seems to be on their own sad and lonely planet; nobody speaks to each other. Only the youth on the street talk, about football and the match, just like the presenter on the radio. The man continues his walk, passing a construction site and empty streets until he buys a sandwich, which he devours. He is exhausted. He looks up, takes out a cigarette and looks through his black-rimmed glasses at a group of youngsters standing at a distance. He puffs heavier and heavier at the cigarette, as if he was pumping himself up with courage. Then he stands up, slurps over to the young men, as fast as his hunched body allows him, looks provokingly into the round and receives what he silently has been asking and hoping for: a straight hit in the face.

The Stadium by Ala Eddine Slim, Tunisia, is an oppressive drama that creates a sensation of suffocation through its slow moving narrative and the dexterous use of light. Over the course of 24 minutes the viewer moves with the old man through a dark city, where the hero vanishes from view most of the time. The director depicts the city as a big prison were citizens live dehumanized, with



The Stadium



Payback

no soul, without hope. The film traces a gloomy picture of the psychological state of Tunisia and its citizens before the January 2011 events. "Free expression, critical creativity and alternative art were not possible and associative, cultural and civil work, independent of the ruling party and the regime was a form of resistance that the regime tried to suppress," writes Walid Tayaa, curator of the program 'Metaphor and Resistance in Tunisian Short Films' in his introduction to the films. With its underlying message it is surprising that *The Stadium* was produced in 2010 under the auspices of the Tunisian Ministry of Culture.

A reason might be the basic nature of short films. "Short films are often produced below the radar of censorship," explains Marcel Schwierin. Because they are short and unlikely to be screened in front of a big audience, the censors do not take much notice of short films, an advantage which provides them with more freedom of expression and criticism. Nevertheless, they do get a social relevance once a critical mass is formed. An example is the Arab Shorts that drew in crowds of people to the Goethe-Institut in Cairo. Films such as *The Stadium* and *Payback* are a mirror for the audience, reflecting the appalling realities of their societies.

AMAL

But is their hope? Amal - which means "hope" in Arabic - certainly believes so. The twelve-year-old is a paragon of energy, happiness and lust for life. She aspires to becoming a doctor, a wish so strong making it her only priority. She owns a little treasure tin box that contains a stethoscope, with which she listens to her heartbeat with indulgence. Every beat a promise for life, a different life than the one Amal leads with her mother, father, brother and elder sister in the Moroccan countryside. "I have one single wish - to become a doctor and take care of all the ones I love," she says in a whispering, excited tone. Every morning she wakes up with a smile on her lips and her first direction is towards her box. She takes out the stethoscope, walks over to her sleeping brother and presses it against his chest. At school, a long walk through the countryside away, she listens to her girlfriend's heartbeats during the break and after school her teacher gives her a book about the human heart. "If you want to really thank me come back through this door in 15 years with your diploma in your hand," the old man says. But he also knows that it is a long road for her, especially as a girl. Neither the teacher nor Amal know yet that

it will be her last day at school. At night her mother tells Amal that from the next day on she will have to stay at home. Her sister will move to the city and her mother needs help in the house. A world falls apart for Amal, whose eyes fill with tears, but no word of resistance leaves her mouth. She knows that she has to obey. Her brother pleads for her with his father but to no avail. "Amal is grown up now and the road is too dangerous for her." But he also thinks that there is no reason for her to continue her education, as there will be no work waiting for her once she graduates. Why spend all this money?

At night Amal lies on her mattress, a candle flickering in front of her eyes. She gets up and puts the stethoscope next to her brother's pillow. They don't speak a word until Amal blows out the candle and says into the dark: "Good night." Her dream has just died.

"Amal means hope and her parents are killing the hope inside of Amal. I wanted to show that she will wake up as a different person," says Ali Benkirane. The director produced this fiction film in 2004 in Morocco, It was his first film, "This really is a movie that tackles the whole MENA region," Ali Benkirane says. "It is about human potential and what we do with it, since it is the wealth of every society." Besides Amal, Nadira Ardjoun, curator of the program titled 'Childhood:Innocence' showed four further films about the lives of children in the Middle East. How does the life of a child in Palestine. Morocco, Lebanon or Tunisia look like? What are the children's everyday realities? How are they affected by the decisions of adults through political manoeuvres and social traditions? "Children bear the consequences of others," says Nadira Ardjoun. "For me it was important to let you know what children are suffering from, because far too often we forget that children are suffering too, that they bear the consequences of decisions taken by adults." In the introduction to her program she writes: "A child has no choice; it must, all by itself, grasp reality as it is and often without explanation from adults: more remains unsaid than answers their questions. No words to channel the suffering that is originally not theirs."

Nadira Ardjoun, who has been the co-organizer of the International Short Film Festival in Clermont-Ferrand, France, since 1985, chose the topic of childhood because it is universal. But there is a decisive difference between Europe and the Arab world, that Marcel Schwierin points out in the discussion following the program: "I was surprised by the obedience of these children. In Europe there would be much more conflict. Here it seems that the





Children of Fire



My father is still a communist: Intimate Secrets to be published

kids – in all films – accept their fate without any rebellion." Maybe because rebellion, which requires an opinion or a position was nothing that was ever encouraged by elders, be it fathers, teachers or rulers. Obedience is a deeply rooted concept in all Arab societies. It was also a tool to keep the masses silent and to direct them as needed by rulers.

Without intention by the curators the topic of childhood became a strong theme throughout the Arab Shorts 2011. "I was really surprised by that," says artistic director Marcel Schwierin, "since the curators were totally free to choose their topics and films." Nearly all programs featured films that evolved around children and their relationships with their parents and how political and social circumstances affect their lives.

Children play the lead in *Children of Fire* by Mohammed Al Hawajri, a colorful and powerful documentary about children in Gaza who burn their fears and paint the dark with fire at night. In *Paper Dress* by Kasem Kharsa, a young Iranian woman recounts childhood memories of her sister's illness that are illustrated with Persian miniature cut-outs reminiscent of a fairy tale or a children's book. Both documentaries are part of Ala Younis' program 'Everything is Alright, Officer.'

Additionaly, Land of the Heroes by Sahim Omar Kalifa, was shown in the program 'Path To Solitude' curated by Masoud Amralla. It is the story of ten-year-old Dileer and his sister Zienee who live in the border region between Iraq and Iran. It is 1988, the conflict between the two countries is reaching its final stage. Dileer and his sister want to watch cartoons, but there are two obstacles to that modest wish: the national broadcaster, that cancels the cartoons in order to show images of the last victory on the battlefield, as well as cousin Malo, a bully that tantalises Dileer especially, who wants to be a superhero.

In this fiction something else strikes the viewer: the absence of the father. Where he is - fighting

against the Iranians or possibly deceased – is never explained. Many films at the Arab Shorts 2011 evolved around the topic of the absent father. "Maybe Arab societies want to get rid of their father figures," Marcel Schwierin suggests as an explanation for this unexpected phenomenon.

MY FATHER IS STILL A COMMUNIST: INTIMATE SECRETS TO BE PUBLISHED

"My life will be reduced to dust, as the saying goes, while you remain young and healthy, just like your father. And then you will go and marry another woman." It is 1978 and the female voice on the tape sounds sad, longing and playful at the same time. She is talking to her husband Rachid, "my love, my soul, you are the pulp of my heart," the one that has left her behind in the mountains of south Lebanon to find his luck and work abroad. Their only tool of communication, the only way to hear the voice of the beloved, to talk about longing, love and everyday life, is by sending tapes. "Everything fades away, everything disappears in the end, so let it go," she urges her husband. It is 1982, and he is still far away from his homeland and family. Her urges for his return home and her playful yet serious threats to destroy his passport next time he comes home, so he would stay with her and keep her warm at night have been in vain. Her voice sounds tired, somewhat disillusioned, facing life and the responsibilities of child rearing on her own. "There is only little space left on the tape, let me find you a song on the radio," she says and then the soft, warm, yet always longing and sad voice of the Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez fills the air.

It is sound, voice and words that are the storytellers of Ahmad Ghossein's fiction film *My Father* is Still a Communist, which was shown in the program 'In the Name of the Father', curated by Lara Khaldi and Yazan Khalili. The images of the film seem to function only as a backdrop while the story unfolds through the voice of Maream on the radio cassettes sent as love letters to Rachid during the time of the civil war in Lebanon. It seems throughout the film that these tapes are the only thing that is left from their relationship. We see images of a wedding, when both were young, smiling, holding hands and dancing together with family and friends in addition to all these pictures from the family album. Maream in her wedding dress, Maream holding a baby in her arms, Maream jumping into a pool and Maream with the kids in a park. It is always the father that is missing, who is now walking through the images as if to make up for lost times. Old and out of place, he tries to get into the family picture, putting his arm around Maream. But it is too late, only an illusion, times are lost forever. Never throughout the 32 minutes of the film do we see Maream and Rachid together, even now in old age they seem to be separated. She in the house they built for the family, him going through old family pictures. They do not find each other anymore. She looks sad, exhausted and disillusioned while we watch her going about the chores of her days. Alone, without her kids not her husband.

My Father is Still a Communist was the starting point for the curatorial team of 'In the Name of the Father.' They built their program around this film, because the issue of the father was something Lara Khaldi and Yazan Khalili had been talking about for a while, the latter explains. "We did not try to connect this program to the revolutions, but we tried to connect it to the role of the patriarchy," says Yazan Kkalili. They were driven by their own relationships with their fathers, both politically involved in different Palestinian organisations. "Somehow we always wished we could have lived their lives. The 'Arab Spring' really changed this." The conflict of the disappearance and the existence of the fathers, that seemed to play a vital role in many films at the Arab Shorts 2011, was possibly such a dominant feature because the revolutions also questioned the role of father figures in the Arab world in general. In this respect, without showing the raw documentary images of the currently fresh revolutions, the festival was highly topical and initiated debates concerning current political and social issues.

In 2009, Arab Shorts started as a project in support of independent Arab filmmakers. Apart from the festival, that was intended to be a one-time show but was so successful that it was continued for three years, the Goethe-Institut has organized film-screenings, presentations and discussions as well as visits of Arab film experts to German film festivals and institutions. The Arab Shorts project

also includes an online platform that features about 100 films shown at the Arab Shorts in the past years. This web resource was meant to work as a means of making the rich and diverse scene of Arab short films internationally known. Until now Arab Shorts already has proven to be an important research source for tens of thousands of anonymous users who visit the site and watch the movies. "Some of them we know: curators, festival organizers, distributors and TV emission purchasers and they even use Arab Shorts when looking out for talents," explains Marcel Schwierin.

Over the past three years the festival has developed and changed. "In 2009 it was quite an experiment," Marcel Schwierin says. "And I say experiment because we only had nine months to organize the event." Usually such an event takes more than a year in preparation time. Marcel Schwierin came to Cairo for three month to launch the Arab Shorts. There was yet no 'Viewing Lounge', as in 2010 and 2011 and Marcel Schwierin ended up as a projectionist, because there was nobody else who could do the job. "It was crazy and chaotic but also amazing and very creative," he says of this first Arab Shorts festival. In 2010 the festival turned out much smaller. Marcel Schwierin and the Goethe-Institut had not intended for the festival to continue, but due to its big success it was decided later in the year to make it a three-year project. This time around the curators from the Arab world did not have to represent their home country as in the Arab Shorts 2009 but were alternately given a theme to work with. In 2011 all these guidelines were dropped and the curators were free to choose the theme and any films that had an Arab component. With eleven curators and eight programs it turned out to be the biggest Arab Shorts festival, and also the most successful. For five consecutive days the projection room at the Goethe-Institut was packed with people. "It means, that the people really appreciate this festival," says Ala Younis. "It is a small victory for securing these alternative places to host cultural events." For Marcel Schwierin, it was the best Arab Shorts, "also because the discussions after the screenings with the audience were so refreshing." He realized a change in the way people commented and reflected on the films compared with the last two years. "There seems to be a new culture of discourse." The debates were open, friendly and minted with the wish to understand and learn. "You can feel that the audience and the filmmakers really want to benefit from this festival; they are eager to exchange and learn from one another," Marcel Schwierin recaps his impressions.

AL WADI

The valley must be cursed, there is no other explanation. The valley crosser is at a loss, "I have five donkeys, but whenever I walk them to the middle of the valley they become four. When I come back to my starting point, they become five again." Nobody seems to be able to give him a satisfying answer to this mystery. Neither the digger, who is hunting for treasures in the sandy ground of this dry and deserted valley, nor the soldier who wants to pass the valley or the Sheikh who has come to bury a person. But many things seem to be curious in the valley. Why does the Sheikh resemble the image we traditionally have of Jesus, with long hair, a beard and a shawl over his head? Why is the soldier unaware that the river, that once upon a time ran through this valley, has dried out? And why is the digger collecting broken plastic plates that he finds on the ground? "It is plastic, it must be from the plastic age," says the valley crosser after some serious contemplation. Made in China. "Ah, it seems that the Chinese enslaved the English people in an attempt to find Noah's ark in this area," the digger concludes. "There is a theory, I will write a book."

Al Wadi, part of Ala Younis' program 'Everything is Alright, Officer,' is a comedy set in the future but playing heavily on traditional symbols. "Normally when we see films on the future we are confronted with a lot of technology," says the director Firas Taybeh. "I wanted to work differently. After many wars, in the future we could go back to an old age - maybe even a golden age." His fiction film was inspired by folk stories from the Middle East. Every child in the Arab world knows about Goha and his strange adventures. Hundreds of stories exist of Goha, and his donkey is an integral part of every one of them. Goha embodies the Arabic humor like no other figure, but very often the listener will gag on his own laughter since his stories live not only from its humor but also from its shrewdness and its often deserved malicious joy. "We all look for the truth, and usually it is very close to us, closer than you think, Firas Taybeh explains his decision to use a story from Goha in his film.

Ala Younis writes in her introduction that her program "examines the acquisition of news gained by means of constructed space: Events and people appearing in the news are assimilated from bits and pieces of description given by others. The Arab revolutions that broke out at the onset of 2011 have affirmed that the media pick and choose only what matches their policies for broadcasting. (...) It remains to be the case that our knowledge of truth relies on a narrator's story, just as we imagine stories of pure fiction." Her title 'Everything is Alright, Officer' is a quotation from a film by Syrian director Mohamed Malas, which he made with the Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim. The film is about a group of prisoners who read old newspapers smuggled into prison. But the news is always belated news. "Living this effect of belated news linked the film to the program," explains Ala Younis, who is the only curator who took part in all three Arab Shorts festivals. It is the theme on the state of destruction and instability that guided her through the process of choosing her films for the program. "And as a matter of fact, NOT everything is alright at all this year," says Ala Younis. The state of revolution and the uncertainty of what will happen were the themes that she was looking for in her selection. "It has been a challenge to find films that present this vagueness."

The heavy use of symbols in AI Wadi became a topic of discussion after the screening. Why were the donkeys disappearing, why did the Sheikh look like Jesus and which problems did the director encounter during his shoot? These were only a few questions tackled during the debate. "Well, my biggest fight was with the donkeys," Firas Taybeh says and laughs.

The debate was one example of many of how engaged the public was at the screenings and how



Al Wadi/The Valley



Al Wadi/The Valley

interested to exchange with the filmmakers and curators. "You can feel that there is a lot of meaning in the discussions here, a kind of urgency that you don't find anymore in the West." says Marcel Schwierin. Also compared with the two previous years the discourse gained in strength. "Since the revolution there seems to be a whole new culture of debate," Marcel Schwierin notes, an observation that was affirmed by many participants. "The kind of debate I encountered here I have not experienced in a long time," says Stefanie Schulte Strathaus from Arsenal - Institute for Film and Media Art, Berlin, who presented a guest program from Berlinale Forum at the Arab Shorts. "It is extremely refreshing and amazing to witness how eager for knowledge and exchange people here are." A reason for this difference might be the fundamental issues that are at stake in the Arab world, the profound changes that are affecting the political, social and economic spheres. "It is definitely true that the artists in the Arab world work more intensively, with more passion and much with regard to content," describes Marcel Schwierin the differences in artistic relevance between Germany and the Arab world as he sees it.

INTO THIN AIR

The images that are running over the screen are blurry and it is difficult to make out the faces. No matter how often they are rewound, one cannot see any faces. But they are not needed to feel the fear that must be written in all of them. The fear, the panic in their eyes is tangible in every second. Hundreds of people are running down a street in fear of their lives. Some fall to the ground, put their hands to the ground, get up and continue. Others run, turn around with their hands over their heads and start screaming something that cannot be heard, into the direction from which the people are running. There, in the distance, stands the army and shoots at peaceful protesters. "Some of the people in the footage returned home. Some didn't," says a voice from the off.

The audience watches spellbound, no sound can be heard in the room. It feels as if everybody here must know these images, either lived through them or saw them on TV. The only difference is, that these images are not images from Tahrir-Square in January 2011. Mohammadreza Farzad's documentary *Into Thin Air* is a film about the "Bloody Friday" massacre, which took place on September 8, 1979. The footage documents the shooting of innocent

people by soldiers in Jaleh Square in Tehran.

Into Thin Air was shown as part of the guest program presented by Stefanie Schulte Strathaus from Arsenal, 'Re-Moving Images,' "a short film program about political changes as they are seen in (and empowered by) the world of images, and about the productive process of decay," as Schulte Strathaus writes in her introduction.

Tahrir Square in Cairo 2011 or Jaleh Square in Tehran 1979 - the images resemble one another so much, that it takes one's breath. And then suddenly, while the film is still running, loud screams from a fight break into the silence of the screening. Many heads in the audience turn nervously. It is an unreal moment, where through the images on the screen and the sudden noises from the street outside, the people are transported back to the days in late January, when just around the corner from the Goethe-Institut the Egyptian police was attacking peaceful protesters and hundreds died. Egypt is still in a state of alert and everybody here knows it. The images on the screen, the massacre in Jaleh Square, serves as a reminder that history always repeats itself.

"For me the amazing thing about Arab Shorts is that it shows reality in many different facets," says Marcel Schwierin. From fiction to documentary to video art to animation – the artists and filmmakers don't deal with merely academic, but existential questions. "What impressed me the most in the past three years is, that art is done with so much earnestness in this part of the world," says Marcel Schwierin.

And the current political upheavals will only add to the creative output in the Arab world. Therefore, even though Arab Shorts was meant to be a three-year-project, all people involved are sure that in one way or the other Arab Shorts will carry on.

Amira Sayed El Ahl is a German-Egyptian journalist and foreign correspondent Near and Middle East based in Cairo.











PRESENTATIONS

At Arab Shorts Festival Events in Cairo, film experts from Germany and the Arab World gave presentations about their festivals, institutions and projects.

- 1 Azza Chaabouni Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, Tunis
- 2 Stefanie Schulte Strathaus Arsenal, Institut für Film und Videokunst (Institute for Film and Media Art)/Berlinale Forum, Berlin
- **3** Annegret Richter DOK Leipzig, International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film
- **4** Alain Bieber arte CREATIVE the new network for contemporary culture, Strasbourg
- 5 Irit Neithardt mec.film, Berlin





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