

Press Release

Qumra opened doors to new ideas and valuable connections say Qatari filmmakers

The Doha Film Institute's inaugural event concludes on high note of optimism for Qatari projects participating in Qumra

Doha, Qatar – 11 March 2015: “Put the best of all festivals and labs and roll them into one sweet baklava, that is Qumra for you,” Qatari filmmaker Hend Fakhroo summed up the new industry event by the Doha Film Institute that concluded on Wednesday following six-days of mentorship labs, master classes, Working breakfast sessions, tailored one-on-one meetings and group tutorials.

Qatari filmmakers who attended Qumra were optimistic about the event opening doors to new opportunities that are even more accessible to them now – be it co-production opportunities, story consultation, sales and distribution or securing a foot in international film festivals.

In all, 29 projects by Qatari, Arab and international filmmakers were selected for Qumra, offering filmmakers an unprecedented opportunity to network with more than 100 industry delegates representing all stakeholder groups in the industry and from around the world. For the public, Qumra also presented the opportunity to watch accomplished films by Qumra Masters representing some of the leading voices in world cinema today, who led a series of master-classes, alongside works by emerging talent under the New Voices in Cinema segment.

Throughout the week, filmmakers attached to the ten Qatari projects in development also participated in individual ‘Meet the Master’ mentoring sessions with Gael García Bernal, Cristian Mungiu, Abderrahmane Sissako, Elia Suleiman and Danis Tanović.

Creating a compact meeting place where meetings between filmmakers were the foremost priority, the inaugural edition of Qumra has set a new regional model for promoting the new generation of talent by offering “a genuine platform for networking,” said industry delegates.

The true impact of the event will unfold in the coming months as filmmakers return to their drawing boards to approach their projects with a fresh perspective from the knowledge they have gleaned from industry experts.

“One-hundred-fifty percent,” said Ms. Fakhroo, “I am going to put to use all the input I have gained from Qumra.” She says the fascinating aspect of Qumra was that she could meet with accomplished industry professionals, who are beyond reach and approach otherwise, “to ask anything about films. Where else can I get the opportunity to have an Oscar-winning veteran combing my script?”

She said, “Ten years ago, I could not have dreamt to be sitting with the masters here in Doha. And it helps that the management of the event understands what filmmakers really need.” Her project *Parijat*, about a Qatari woman rising up to the challenges of running a family perfume business, was one of the Qumra projects.

Nora Al Subai, whose adventure/fantasy project *Beyond*, was mentored at Qumra, said the event served as a “bridge between Qatari and international cinema.” Commending the event for offering opportunities to meet with filmmakers and industry experts, she said it “created a mark in promoting the growth of Arab movies.”

Khalifa Al-Muraikhi, currently in pre-production with *Sahaab* about a group of friends lost in the desert and struggling to retrieve their falcon, said Qumra offered a strong platform to learn more about all aspects of film but more importantly, it was “a give and take” where Qatari filmmakers and the visiting professionals learnt from each other. The very name Qumra explains it all, he said: “You look through Qumra (camera), look into [yourselves] with Qumra and they look [at us] with Qumra.”

Writer/Director Shaikha Al-Thani whose feature narrative project *Little River* is in development reflected on her experience at Qumra: “It's been incredible. I have learned so much from other writers and directors and also learned about the technical and business aspects from producers, sales agents and distributors on how the system works. I didn't expect to have so many chances for interaction and it's been a great privilege to meet such a wide range of experts and also interact with other filmmakers. One thing I learnt is that there are so many opportunities available if we just apply ourselves - and I'm proud to be part of Arab cinema moving forward.”

Soul-searching through films to discover one's roots, as was evident in the films of several Qumra Masters screened at Qumra, indeed, found resonance among Qatari filmmakers. “It is not as if I have been disconnected with my roots,” said Mohamed Al Mahmeed, whose project *Superpower* is a dysfunctional family trying to find happiness. “Qumra expanded the possibility of how I can take my world further beyond.” He said the event helped in from two perspectives: “The first is how to handle my script and two is to make connections with people whom I have never met in life.”

With his film *Old Airport Road* screening in the New Voices in Cinema section, and another, *Green Eyes* about the tireless struggle of a coma patient, selected as one of the Qumra Projects in development, Abdullah Al-Mulla said the most compelling part of Qumra was that it helped him to gain an understanding of the non-creative part of filmmaking – aspects that had tired him and even affected his health.

“As a filmmaker I want to focus on my art, the creative side. But then, filmmaking is also about the non-creative part. It is about understanding the industry aspects, which can be very stressful. For me, that was like a second job. At Qumra, I learnt a lot,” and he hopes it will make his life as a filmmaker easier.

On the creative side, he was advised to make his stories simple to make it acceptable for all, “as mine are more abstract.” But the final call will be his, based on the structure and style in

which he wants to narrate his story. That, he said is also the beauty of Qumra. “I can retain my individuality as a filmmaker while listening to differing and divergent views.”

Meriem Mesraoua, whose project ***Our Time is Running Out*** explores what happens to children and their simplicity when they grow up, said that Qumra offered her the platform to have “in-depth discussions with experts and gain their feedback. I met filmmakers, producers and script consultants who offered wonderful advice and helped me further understand the industry.”

Haifaa al-Mansour, the director of the ground-breaking film ***Wadjda***, the first feature shot entirely in Saudi Arabia, who mentored talents at Qumra said the event “represents the real effort to plant the seeds of good cinema. All the projects were carefully selected and there are many projects created by women that deal with our causes in a wonderful way. These stories are derived from the real life of our society.”

She added that “Qumra is a major hub for the cinema in the Gulf region to rise and accomplish progress. In the past the films here were not at a high level and that made the audience refrain from watching them, and now we hope this will change.”

The last word came from four Qatari female students, eager to make their mark as directors. Aisha Al Shammakh, Haya Alramel, Ohod BaniNassr and Shoug Shaheen, from Qatar University, attended the sessions, and are now inspired to continue working on their dream projects with new learnings.

The first, how to convert an idea into a credible story; the second, how to compose the perfect shot, and three, learning not just from directors but even from actors like Gael García Bernal, a Qumra Master, that creative brilliance in film is often the result of collaboration.

As for now, they hope to be at the next Ajyal Youth Film Festival, as filmmakers, taking cues on making great cinema from Qumra.

-ENDS-

About Qumra:

Qumra is an initiative that seeks to provide mentorship, nurturing and hands-on development for filmmakers from Qatar and around the world, alongside a series of screenings for Doha audiences featuring films by international masters and recipients of support from the Institute.

** The Arabic term ‘qumra’ is popularly said to be the origin of the word ‘camera’, and to have been used by the scientist, astronomer and mathematician Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham, 965-c.1040 CE), whose work in optics laid out the principles of the camera obscura.*

About Doha Film Institute:

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute’s platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture,



community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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