

Press Release

## **International film community endorses Doha Film Institute's Qumra as a pioneering format for talent and industry development**

***Calibre of delegates, quality of projects, close-knit sessions, boutique approach and focus on meetings cited as high points of the Institute's new film industry gathering.***

***Event also highlights strong level of film appreciation in Qatar with sold-out Modern Masters screenings and enthusiastic Q&A sessions with the filmmakers.***

**Doha, Qatar – March 17:** The inaugural edition of Qumra, the new event by the Doha Film Institute, has been praised by international film professionals for bringing a new formula for the development of emerging talent in a 'one-of-a-kind' film event for the region.

Welcoming more than 100 high-calibre industry delegates including master filmmakers, film festival selectors, producers, sales and distribution experts, film funding agencies and script and development consultants, Qumra concluded last week in Doha following an intensive six-day industry programme of workshops, mentoring sessions, master classes, group tutorials, work-in-progress previews and feedback sessions, working breakfasts and screenings.

Twenty-nine Qumra projects at various stages of development had unprecedented access to industry professionals and Qumra masters in a tailored programme designed to propel their work to the next stage. The 29 projects included documentary and narrative short and feature films including: 10 projects from Qatar; 14 projects from the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region; and five from the rest of the world. Twenty of the 29 projects are backed by the Doha Film Institute's grants programme, highlighting an extension to the existing support provided by the Institute in nurturing a regional film industry.

The international delegates praised the event's boutique format for its ability to facilitate intimate meetings and optimal networking conditions "providing the right environment" for developing emerging talent in a meaningful way.

Writer/Director, Mahdi Fleifel, whose feature narrative project ***Men in the Sun*** participated in the development programme said: "Qumra was unlike anything I have ever attended. Everyone who is serious and passionate about cinema today was present and I felt humbled and inspired to be among them. Meeting the Masters and seeing what my peers are busy bringing to life, has set the bar high. It was a privilege to partake in the first edition of what will soon become a legacy."

Fatma Al Remailhi, CEO of the Doha Film Institute, said: "We listened carefully to the needs of emerging filmmakers and designed Qumra to make a difference to their careers by connecting them to the resources they need, both creatively and practically, to move ahead with their work."

She added: "We could not be happier with the feedback we have received from the project participants, the Masters and professionals from all sectors of the industry who contributed to the first edition of Qumra – their overwhelming positivity, support and endorsement confirms that we are on the right path."

### Masters' Voices

A highlight of Qumra was the public screenings and master classes by seasoned filmmakers Gael García Bernal, Cristian Mungiu, Abderrahmane Sissako and Danis Tanović – the Qumra Masters. They interacted with the talents behind the 29 Qumra Projects at bespoke 'Meet the Masters' sessions where each project had the opportunity to discuss their work in detail. The Doha Film Institute's Artistic Advisor, Elia Suleiman, also conducted a master class and individual mentoring sessions with filmmakers.

The Qumra Masters were unanimous in their support for the event. Abderrahmane Sissako, whose Academy Award-nominated *Timbuktu* received overwhelming response at the Modern Masters screening, observed: "The event was prepared in a considered and thoughtful way, and that was apparent from its concept, approach, and choice of participants. Everyone felt equal at Qumra, and the event provided the right environment to 'plant seeds' and examine the capacity of young filmmakers."

Gael García Bernal, the lead actor in *No*, Pablo Larraín's classic that was screened, said the size and dynamic of Qumra is perfect. "Qumra is a great opportunity for anyone who is passionate about film. It is an intimate setting where you really get the opportunity to meet people in a meaningful way. It is also important for a region that is developing a new narrative."

Describing Qumra as "truly pioneering," Academy Award winning *No Man's Land's* director Danis Tanović, whose film *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* was screened in the Qumra Modern Masters section, added: "Often we see only American or European perspectives on this region and very rarely do we see Arab storytellers crafting their stories. Qumra is a place where this can happen because we have brought together the crème de la crème of the industry – writers, distributors, sales agents, filmmakers – people who are passionate about cinema who can work with these new filmmakers. You have to plant seeds if you want something to grow so I am really happy the Doha Film Institute is doing this."

Palme d'Or winner Cristian Mungiu, whose *Tales from the Golden Age*, was screened at Qumra, highlighted the importance of Qumra in developing audiences: "Qumra has all the potential for its participants to have the framework in which they can express their ideas and find their means of making their stories. Educating a generation of filmmakers goes together with educating an audience to receive what they have to bring."

"From what has taken place at Qumra, I hope to see some of the projects in development become films that are interesting to their own local audiences so that in the future we can talk about a wave or a generation of filmmakers who found their own voice here in this region," he said.

### Industry endorsement

The industry delegates, who shared insights on filmmaking with the project participants in match-made sessions, group tutorials and one-on-one meetings complimented Qumra for creating a distinctive niche in the regional film landscape.

In particular, the work-in-progress sessions for projects in post-production and picture lock stages were praised for their effectiveness in showcasing these works to a targeted group of professionals, providing the filmmakers with direct access to leading sales agents, distributors and key selectors from Cannes, Busan, Venice, Toronto, Locarno, Sarajevo and Karlovy Vary film festivals.

Industry delegate Jason Kliot said: "The creators have been incredibly intelligent in keeping the event small and contained. The format of the works-in-progress screenings was extraordinarily impressive.

The ability to see a work in progress, have it introduced by the director and producer to give you context, and then have a discussion afterwards and then meet them, really gives you a picture of where they're going. The feedback sessions were closed and targeted which meant that we could speak our minds about the project and offer some helpful suggestions."

Nadia Dresti, Artistic Direction Delegate at the Locarno Film Festival, said Qumra offered a strong platform for two-way learning, by getting to understand the culture and the thought process of the region's filmmakers, while Karel Och of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, said Qumra has changed the perception of the Arab film industry by providing access to a range of new projects in development stages. "Earlier, we would screen Arab films that were fished from major international film festivals alone, and that is clearly not enough."

### Engaging the public

Qumra's unique format of showcasing films by contemporary Masters as well as emerging talent also earned the appreciation of the public. Films were screened in two segments – Modern Masters and New Voices – all of them accompanied by question-and-answer sessions with the filmmakers.

Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu* had a repeat screening following popular demand, while the short films, including some by Qatari talent, and New Voices screenings were also strongly attended by Doha's filmgoers. The question-and-answer sessions that followed were highly engaging, highlighting the critical appreciation of the films by the Qatari public and Qumra's aim to generate a new dialogue through cinema.

-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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### Press Enquiries:

Menna Gomaa

Communications Associate

+974/55073325

[mgomaa@dohafilminstitute.com](mailto:mgomaa@dohafilminstitute.com)



مؤسسة الدوحة للأفلام

DOHA FILM INSTITUTE

**MENA Press Enquiries:**

Kelly Home / Nivine William

ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller

+9714 4507 600

Kelly.home@bm.com / Nivine.william@bm.com

**International Press Enquiries:**

Cathy Dunkley

Freuds

+44 203 003 6355

cathy.dunkley@freuds.com