

Industry experts reveal insights to securing funding for film projects during Doha Film Institute's Qumra event

Doha, Qatar; March 8, 2016: Having a grand ambition and vision for cinema is one thing; securing the funds and production support, however, serves a stumbling block for many.

With the Doha Film Institute having already set a definitive template in extending support to Arab filmmakers, in addition to a dedicated fund for Qatari directors, a discussion by industry experts on securing funding for independent cinema in the Arab world offered several insights for emerging filmmakers in a working breakfast roundtable session during the second edition of Qumra in Doha this week.

Khalil Benkirane, Head of Grants at the Doha Film Institute, presented a detailed overview of the Institute's Grants programme adding that its objective is to identify new talent by championing projects that focus on expanding authentic story-telling.

To date, Doha Film Institute has supported more than 250 films, effectively positioning it as supporter of quality film projects from around the world, he said. Since 2010, the Made in Qatar section of the Institute's film festivals has supported 65 films, of which 40 have been by Qatari filmmakers. The Qatari Film Fund, further lending momentum to the Qatar film industry, supports nine short films and four Qatari feature films in development across two funding rounds each year.

Intishal Al Timimi, Head of SANAD; Jane Williams, Director of Dubai Film Connection; and Rima El Mismar, Deputy Director and Film Programmes Manager at Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, shared insights on the funding provided by the respective entities during the roundtable session attended by delegates attending Qumra – the producers and directors attached to 33 projects at varying stages of development.

All the experts highlighted the importance that their organisations place on promoting regional films covering shorts, documentaries and feature narratives with dedicated funding mechanisms for production and post-production.

Underlining the competitive nature, especially with the number of film projects submitted for consideration increasing every year, the experts provided valuable tips to ensure that the submissions receive the attention they deserve.

"The number of good projects that come in for funding consideration is increasing every year," said Al Timimi. "It is important that your project must be in very good shape to be accepted over the others. But not receiving the funding does not mean your project is not bad; it is just that there are several exceptional works that are also being considered for support."

Benkirane said it is key to ensure that the submissions are visually attractive. "Visual packaging of the submission does not guarantee funding but the look and feel can be a good indicator of the preparation that has gone into a project. No good project will be denied the opportunity on the aesthetics of its submission but it is good to be professional."

Williams highlighted value of simplicity in submitting proposals. "Make sure you get a good translator for the script. Provide show-reels that demonstrate your experience in your segment and explain the treatment that you plan. Also ensure that your stories are complete; many tend not to give away the climax hoping that it will raise the curiosity of the funding committee. It is a

misconception; the committee needs to know the whole story. Supplementary documents such as the director's statement and tone also add to the chances."

Rima El Mismar also underlined the need to provide a strong script and the visual treatment approach, which are important considerations in selecting films for funding and support. Being as concise as possible and providing visual elements help the funding agencies in deciding the merit of the project.

Qumra has selected 23 feature-length and 10 short film projects in various stages of production for mentoring. The chosen project teams have the opportunity to benefit from the experience of five Qumra Masters as well as bespoke mentorship and business meetings with international experts during the six day event.

Qatari filmmaker Jassim Al Rumaihi, whose film *The Palm Tree* (Qatar, No Dialogue, 2015) screened in the New Voices in Cinema segment of Qumra, has his second project, *Amer: The Arabian Legend*, being mentored at the industry event. "I am eager to know the response of the experts, as I already have the rough cut ready; I know there are mistakes in it – some of them are deliberate – so that it will help me to enter into productive discussion that will help my project further."

Hafiz Ali Ali, a Qatari filmmaker whose feature narrative, *The Search for the Star Pearl* is a Qumra project, said the event helps him in benefiting from the experts. "They read the script and review it, and when you discuss your ideas with the producers and writers, you gain insights that help to make your work even more successful."

Qatari filmmaker Abdullah Al Mulla's short narrative *I Want to Feel What I Feel When I am Asleep* is a Qumra Project. He said that the meetings at Qumra were fruitful. "This is a benefit you cannot have at film festivals but only at such networking sessions where experts share their knowledge that will help us to take our projects to the next level."

Taking part in Qumra for the second year, Clare Dobbin, Script Consultant from Australia, said the most exciting part of the event is that "Qumra has stories to tell that are found nowhere else. People around the world are hungry for what they don't know and Qumra has these stories. Further, it also presents delegates a view of how the entire industry works. It would have been very different if the script consultations were done outside Qumra because here the delegates learn many things at once. It is an amazing opportunity for filmmakers."

Carlo Chatrian, Artistic Director, Festival del Film Locarno, said he was pleasantly surprised by the organisation of the event. "It is a very interesting mix – to create a community that enriches the delegates. The diversity I see here is what I look for in cinema; further, it also lends a human experience – of interacting with filmmakers for a longer period of time to understand them and their movies."

Matthieu Darras, Artistic Director, Torino Film Lab, observed that the festival being cosy and small provides a perfect platform to have an overview of almost everything about the industry. "This is a welcome difference in comparison to film festivals that are big."

Violeta Bava, Programmer, Buenos Aires International Film Festival, said Qumra is very unique in that it is a place that really discusses cinema. "There are no films or competitions that you may miss. You just meet people, who are all on the same page; it is really unique to have that."

Notes to Editors

About Qumra

Directors and Producers attached to up to twenty-five projects in development or post-production will be invited to participate in the event. They will include a number of emerging filmmakers from Qatar, as well as recipients of funding from the Institute's Grants Programme. The robust programme will feature industry meetings designed to assist with propelling projects to their next stages of development, including master classes, work-in-progress screenings, bespoke matchmaking sessions and tailored workshops with industry experts. This creative exchange will take place alongside a programme of public screenings curated with input from the Qumra Masters.

The event is organised in three main sections: The Qumra Master Classes are daily sessions; each led by one of the Masters. The participating filmmakers have full access to these sessions, and will also be open to accredited industry guests to attend in an observational capacity.

The Qumra Meetings are a series of one-on-one meetings, workshops and tailored mentoring sessions between representatives from the 25 selected projects and seasoned industry experts.

The Qumra Screenings are open to the public and feature projects funded by the Institute through its grants and co-financing initiatives, as well as a series of films chosen by the Qumra Masters accompanied by Q&A sessions.

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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