

First Qumra Talk sheds light on the importance of diversity in storytelling

- *The founder of The Black List believes that his company has helped to make Hollywood more meritocratic, allowing new and diverse voices into mainstream cinema*

Doha, Qatar: 16 March 2019: At the first Qumra Talk of the Doha Film Institute's six-day event designed to nurture the talent of emerging filmmakers, The Black List founder and CEO Franklin Leonard spoke to a packed audience about the importance of bringing new and diverse voices into Hollywood and the role that his company has played in this area so far.

An annual list of Hollywood's most liked unproduced screenplays, The Black List was founded by Leonard in 2005. It has grown into an industry-leading company celebrating and supporting great screenwriting and production. Since its launch, more than one third 1,200 Black List scripts have been produced, grossing over \$26 billion in box office worldwide and have won and have won an incredible 53 Academy Awards® from 262 nominations.

According to Leonard, the original aim of The Black List was simple – to find “extraordinary films”. What was at first a mailing list of Hollywood insiders' favorite unproduced screenplays has become an online platform that also allows writers outside the “Hollywood bubble” to get their work noticed. Because of this, Leonard believes that the growth of The Black List has contributed to entrance of new voices into mainstream cinema.

Leonard said: “In the first few years of producing The Black List, I realised that it had, for the first time, allowed the film industry in Hollywood to systematically tackle the question: what films are people actually going to love, rather than what films will just make money? After The Black List grew into an online platform, I saw that it had the potential to solve another industry problem: how to help unknown writers get their scripts noticed, especially for people who do not live in Hollywood.”

As well as act as a platform for new writers to share their screenplays, The Black List also runs several ‘screenwriters’ lab’ throughout the year, some of which are solely for women screenwriters to tackle the “frankly embarrassing” representation of films written and made by women in cinema today. Leonard proudly told the audience at his Qumra Talk that one former participant in a Black List lab was Minhal Baig, whose film **Hala** – an emotionally turbulent coming-of-age story about a Muslim Pakistani-American teenager – premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Apple has recently landed the film's worldwide rights, marking the company's first acquisition of the festival.

Leonard continued: “Hollywood is not traditionally set up to nurture the talents of people from diverse backgrounds, like Minhal. I am proud that The Black List has helped to launch the careers of those typically excluded from the mainstream film industry in LA. In the future, I am hoping to expand the reach of The Black List so that it can support the submission and review of foreign-language screenplays. After all, good stories don't have national boundaries.”

Leonard's Qumra Talk was introduced by Rana Kazkaz, Assistant Professor of Communication in Residence at Northwestern University in Qatar, which has partnered with the Doha Film Institute for several years running to deliver Qumra Talks.

The fifth edition of Qumra brings together more than 150 acclaimed filmmakers, industry professionals and experts to nurture 36 Qumra Projects – by first and second-time filmmakers that are in various stages of development. The six-day event takes place 15–20 March at Souq Waqif and the Museum of Islamic Art, and features Qumra Master Classes, Qumra Talks and screenings in the Qumra Masters and New Voices in Cinema series.

The third day of Qumra 2019 will see a Qumra Masters screening of Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida* – at 7 PM. The next Qumra Talk takes place on 18 March with Michel Reilhac, entitled 'Welcome to the New Reality: How VR is Changing our World', which complements the Qumra VR Lounge. Powered by Diversion Cinema, the lounge is available to the public for each day of Qumra 2019. It explores the world of virtual reality through two internationally acclaimed works – *Arden's Wake/ Tide's Fall* by Eugene Chung and *Spheres* by Darren Aronofsky.

Further details about ticket prices and sales for the screenings are now available on www.dohafilminstitute.com.

-ENDS-

Note to Editors

About Qumra

Directors and Producers attached to thirty-six projects in development and post-production are selected 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, which are also 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 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

Twitter: @DohaFilm; Instagram: @DohaFilm; Facebook: www.facebook.com/DohaFilmInstitute