

37 Diverse Projects by Arab and International Talents Chosen for Doha Film Institute's 2019 Spring Grants

- 28 countries represented with 31 projects from the Arab world
- 18 projects helmed by women filmmakers
- Yemeni project supported for the first time alongside three projects from Qatar
- Two projects by established MENA directors and eight by previous Grants recipients

Doha, Qatar; 19 May 2019: An impressive range of 37 projects by first-and-second-time filmmakers from around the world and established names from the Arab world, have been selected by the Doha Film Institute for its Spring 2019 Grants cycle, which aims to nurture a new generation of creative talents and support the development of original and compelling content. Underlining the important role of Arab women in filmmaking, 18 of the chosen projects are by talented female directors from the region including a Qatari national.

The announcement of the recipients of the 2019 Spring Grants cycle, which covers feature, documentary, short film, and TV and web series projects, was made on the sidelines of the 2019 Cannes Film Festival by Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Chief Executive Officer.

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi said: "Our Grants Programme is a unique resource for the next generation of filmmakers from the Arab world and beyond and forms an important part of how we deliver on our mission to support emerging filmmakers and shine a light on new voices in world cinema. The diversity of this cycle's projects combined is incredible and each project tells an important story that is specific to its local context but also universal and presents new perspectives on humanity.

"This is especially true of the selected Arab projects that represent some powerful new and established voices, who bring our hopes, dreams and values to life. We hope their stories will further understanding of the Arab world and contribute to a global culture of storytelling. It gives me great pride to see women filmmakers from across the region emerge as creative leaders of the new wave of filmmaking and crafting compelling stories with global resonance."

2019 Spring Grantees:

Among the 37 projects selected for the 2019 Spring Grants cycle are the next recipients of the TV and web series grants introduced last year. Highlighting its role as a champion of Arab cinema, 31 projects are by Arab directors from the MENA region, including three by Qatari talents, and a project from Yemen featured for the first time. Six projects are chosen from outside the MENA region including China, Afghanistan, Italy, Canada, Serbia and the Philippines.

Awarded films **“The Orphanage”** (Afghanistan, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Qatar) by Shahrbanoo Sadat and **“To Live, To Sing”** (China, France, Qatar) by Johnny Ma will make their global debut at Directors’ Fortnight (Quinzaine des Realisateurs) at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. They are both recipients of this year’s post-production grants.

2019 Spring Grants Recipients:

Feature Narrative – Development:

- **“A Road to Damascus”** (Lebanon, France, Qatar) by Meedo Taha is about a reclusive professor of botany who takes the law into his own hands when he witnesses a politically-driven murder on the road between Beirut and Damascus.
- **“Plum Season”** (Morocco, Qatar) by Rim Mejdi follows 16-year-old Nouha as she flees her broken home for the mountains – an experience that triggers an irreversible transformation.

Feature Documentary – Development:

- **“Do You Love Me”** (Lebanon, Germany, Qatar) by Lana Daher is an archive-based documentary that features personal accounts of the generations that grew up during and after the Lebanese Civil War, interwoven with the rise and fall of the musical band Bendaly Family.
- **“Machtat”** (Tunisia, France, Lebanon, Qatar) by Sonia Ben Slama is set in the small Tunisian city of Mahdia. It follows the lives of Fatma, Habiba, Najeh, Ouaffeh, and Naïma – ‘machtat’ wedding musicians who escape the hardship of their daily lives through performance.
- **“The Body of René”** (Syria, Qatar) by Dani Abo Louh introduces 92-year-old Hermine Morel as she lives out her last days. Her relatives discover old letters written by her late husband René from the front line of the Indochina Wars.
- **“The Mother of All Lies”** (Morocco, France, Qatar) by Asmae El Moudir paints a portrait of a Moroccan family entangled in a web of lies as a young girl searches to find the truth about her home and country.
- **“Yalla, Baba!”** (Lebanon, Belgium, Qatar) by Angie Obeid explores the relationship between Angie and her father Mansour as she takes him on a road trip from Brussels to Beirut – a trip he had made 39 years earlier.

TV Series – Development:

- **“Faraya”** (Lebanon, Qatar) by Nadim Tabet and Mounia Akl tells the story of an inexperienced police officer investigating the death of a maid at a high-end ski resort in Lebanon. His poor judgment triggers a series of violent events.

- ***“Heim”*** (Syria, Lebanon, Germany, Qatar) by Liwaa Yazji is set in a refugee centre in Berlin and explores the psychological impact of escaping war when a murder leads old scars to turn into fresh wounds.

Feature Narrative – Production:

- ***“Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous”*** (Lebanon, France, Germany, Qatar) by Wissam Charaf is a story about star-crossed lovers Ahmed, a Syrian refugee, and Mehdi, an Ethiopian maid, whose relationship seems impossible in modern-day Beirut.
- ***“Motherhood”*** (Tunisia, France, Canada, Qatar) by Meryam Joobeur follows a Tunisian mother who seeks to protect her son Malek when he returns home from Syria with a mysterious young wife. When men from the community start vanishing, Salha slowly realises Malek is connected to the disappearances.
- ***“Passerby”*** (Syria, Palestine, Germany, Qatar) by Ameer Fakher Eldin is set in the occupied Golan Heights. The life of Adnan, a 52-year-old farmer, turns to chaos when he encounters Basel, a wounded soldier from the war in Syria.

Feature Documentary – Production:

- ***“Al Yarmouk Ghetto”*** (Syria, Lebanon, Qatar) by Abdallah Al Khateeb is about a group of Palestinian civilian activists from the Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus. Their small community faces bombing, displacement, and hunger, but they still find joy in civil work, agriculture, study, music, and theater.
- ***“Fouledh”*** (Tunisia, Qatar) by Mehdi Hmili and Abdallah Chamekh is a psychological study set in Tunisia’s biggest steel factory. Four workers are haunted by the accidental death of a colleague and must find a way to overcome their pain.
- ***“Searching for Kikhia”*** (Libya, UK, Lebanon, Qatar) by Jihan Kikhia looks at a wife’s 19-year search for her missing husband – a former Libyan foreign minister and opposition leader – through the eyes of her daughter.
- ***“The Passion According to Andrew”*** (Lebanon, France, Qatar) by Corine Shawi is an autobiographical story about the director’s experience in a hospital as her father falls seriously ill. As the hospital becomes her new home, she learns more about the human condition and the power of faith.

Feature Experimental or Essay – Production:

- ***“Firefly in The Darkness of Time”*** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Djamel Kerkar explores national myths and heroes, and how they evolved throughout the history of Algeria.
- ***“Watch Before Deletion”*** (Egypt, Germany, Qatar) by Mohammad Shawky Hassan examines gender and censorship in the Arab world. During a radio show about the life of an Arab music icon, a listener calls in and refers to an unknown, sensational film about the musician.

Web Series – Production:

- **“Kawkabani”** (Qatar) by Hossein Heydar and Amal Alshammari is an animation series that tells story of an alien who never misses a World Cup.

Feature Narrative – Post-Production:

- **“A Son”** (Tunisia, France, Lebanon, Qatar) by Mehdi Barsaoui is about a wealthy Tunisian family who are ambushed in their car by an armed group. It doesn't take long for some buried family truths to resurface.
- **“Headed South”** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Rabah Ameur-Zaimeche looks at Algeria's decent into civil war through the eyes of a hospital doctor, who receives death threats when his journalist brother-in-law is murdered.
- **“The Woodman”** (Iraq, Qatar) by Koutaiba Al-Janabi is about a woodman on the run from malevolent forces that can be heard but not seen. He finds refuge in a friendship with a woman that owns an isolated house.
- **“The Names of The Flowers”** (Canada, USA, Bolivia, Qatar) by Bahman Tavoosi takes place as Bolivia celebrates the 50th anniversary of Che Guevara's death. Julia, an old countryside teacher, shares her story about her personal experience with him.
- **“The Orphanage”** (Afghanistan, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Qatar) by Shahrbanoo Sadat follows a group of Afghani children who escape reality through Bollywood movies as the Mujahideen approach their orphanage.
- **“To Live to Sing”** (China, France, Qatar) by Johnny Ma is about a hot-tempered Sichuan opera troupe manager. Faced with the demolition of her theatre, she must find her troupe a new home.

Feature Documentary – Post-Production:

- **“After A Revolution”** (Italy, Libya, UK, Qatar) by Giovanni Buccomino was filmed over six years. It tells the intimate story of a brother and sister who struggle to re-build their lives after fighting on opposite sides of the Libyan revolution.
- **“It Comes by Night”** (Philippines, France, Norway, Qatar) by Alyx Ayn Arumpac follows the lives of people affected by killings in Manila set into motion by president Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs.
- **“Merry Christmas, Yiwu”** (Serbia, Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Mladen Kovacevic follows the lives of workers in Yiwu, where 60% of all Christmas decorations in the world are made although the city's inhabitants are not Christian.
- **“The Cave”** (Syria, Denmark, USA, Qatar) by Feras Fayyad is set in the Syrian Civil War as a group of female doctors establish a subterranean hospital to save victims of chemical and conventional weapons.
- **“The Kingdom of Malika”** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Hassen Ferhani introduces us to Malika, who runs a restaurant for truckers and occasional tourists on the Trans-Sahara Highway that connects Algeria to Mali.

Feature Experimental or Essay – Post-Production:

- **“Temporarily”** (Syria, Germany, Qatar) by Reham Alkassar Reham is about a Syrian student’s search for a new home in Berlin after she is kicked out of her apartment when she cannot pay rent.

Shorts:

- **“Hope”** (Qatar) by Abdulla Al Jananhi is about a new-born baby sea turtle. Unhappy with a disability he is born with, he leaves his nest and journeys to the sea.
- In **“J’ai Le Cafard”** (Kuwait, Qatar), by Maysaa Almumin, 42-year-old Maryam develops a relationship with a cockroach in her demanding corporate office, which becomes a saving grace and cause for angst.
- **“The Present”** (Palestine, Qatar) by Farah Nabulsi follows Yusef and his daughter, who are on a quest through the West Bank to buy a wedding anniversary gift for his wife.
- Sameh Morsy’s **“Sixteen”** (Egypt, France, Qatar) introduces 16-year-old Adam, who must hide behind a burqa when he is out in the streets of Cairo, for a reason only he knows.
- **“This Is Not a Drill”** (Qatar) by Nadia Al Khater tells the story of a young, pregnant couple who face a life-or-death decision in the wake of a radioactive blast.
- Yemini director Mariam Al-Dhubhani’s **“In the Middle”** (Yemen, Qatar) highlights young soldiers stuck in the middle of the ongoing civil war in Yemen who are forced to take up arms.

Development, production and post-production funding is available for first- and second-time directors from the MENA region for feature-length projects. Short films from the MENA region are eligible for production funding only. Development funding is available to screenwriters from the MENA region for TV series, while production funding is available to directors from the MENA region for web series. Established MENA directors can apply for post-production funding for feature-length projects. Post-production funding is also available for first- and second-time filmmakers from around the world for feature-length projects. In addition to the Grants Programme, the Doha Film Institute also supports film production through its Qatari Film Fund and co-production initiatives.

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Note to Editors

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 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.

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