

Press release

12 inspiring feature films to be screened for Ajyal Jurors at 2022 Special 10th Edition of Ajyal Film Festival

- *Line-up includes latest works from multiple Academy Award® nominated filmmaker Rachid Bouchareb, prominent Iranian filmmaker Ali Asgari and emerging Arab talent Lea Najjar*
- *Feature films curated for the Special Edition cover wide ranging themes, from coping with grief and mental health to familial bonding & friendships and the spirit of discovery*
- *Two Doha Film Institute Supported films included in the features programme*

Doha, Qatar; September 25, 2022: Nearly 600 Ajyal Jurors will assess a selection of 12 feature films, including several award-winning works by prominent and emerging film directors, at the Special 10th Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival to be held from October 1 to 8, 2022. The selected films celebrate diversity and cover a wide range of themes – from coping with grief, mental health, breezy comedies about brotherly affection, and how the millennial generation is adapting to the realities around them.

The feature films and a broad selection of 26 short films will be screened for the Ajyal Jury in the three competition categories – Mohaq (jurors aged 8 to 12); Hilal (13 to 17 years) and Bader (18- to 25-year-olds). They will watch the films, discuss with their peers from around the world and assess them to select the Festival award winners.

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha Film Institute, and Festival Director, said: “Delivering inspirational stories of bonding, optimism and the human spirit to overcome trials using powerfully creative narratives, this year’s selection of feature films stand out for audacious themes that resonate with young people around the world. Many of the films have young protagonists who are successfully navigating the challenges around them in an increasingly complex world. The themes are handled sensitively and continue to convey messages of hope and positivity to inspire our youth to reflect, build important connections, and find a deeper understanding of the shared human experience.”

Feature films in the Mohaq category include:

- ***Dounia & The Princess of Aleppo*** (Canada, France/2022), by Marya Zarif and André Kadi, is about young Dounia, who loves to play, learn and discover new recipes. As bombs drop around them, the family decide to flee in search of a new home with only a few possessions—and a little magic in hand. The film deals with displacement, war and loss, but the protagonists’ upbeat attitude along with enchanting musical scenes, make it an optimistic experience full of hope and wonder.
- ***The Apple Day*** (Iran, Turkey/2022), by Mahmoud Ghaffari, is a tale of kinship, brotherly love and perseverance. It charts young Mahdi, who is learning the alphabet and his

teacher has the creative idea of rooting the new letters in real-life objects. Since Mahdi's father is an apple seller by trade, his duty is to bring each student an apple for the class on 'S'. But when the family's van is stolen, it sets off a series of events that make 30 apples seem like a herculean challenge.

- **Bigman** (Netherlands, Germany/2022) by Camiel Schouwenaar is a classic football tale and is based loosely on screenwriter Job Tichelman's own life as a disabled football player. The film follows the lives of Dylan and his best friend Youssef who share the same dream of becoming professional footballers but a tragic accident leaves Dylan partially paralysed, who searches for new ways to participate in his beloved sport.
- **Dragon Princess** (France/2022) by Jean-Jacques Denis, Anthony Roux follows Bristle, a young girl with a very unusual childhood—she is being raised by a dragon! A little different from her two dragon brothers, Bristle makes her own way in the world and embarks on a journey of discovery into the world of humans. The story has many classic fairy-tale elements but weaves them together beautifully to create a fresh and compelling narrative about friendship, solidarity, betrayal, and greed.

Feature films screening in the Hilal category are:

- **After Yang** (USA/2022) a science fiction drama written, directed, and edited by Kogonada. The plot follows a family's attempt to repair their unresponsive robotic child. When his young daughter's beloved companion — an android named Yang — malfunctions, Jake (Colin Farrell) searches for a way to repair him. In the process, Jake discovers the life that has been passing in front of him, reconnecting with his wife and daughter across a distance he didn't know was there.
- **Comedy Queen** (Sweden/2021) by Sanna Lenken, winner of the Generation Kplus Crystal Bear Award at Berlin International Film Festival 2022. The film is about 13-year-old Sasha, who wants to become a stand-up comedian. For Sasha, stand-up comedy is an outlet that allows her to finally come to terms with loss and re-establish a relationship with her father in this touching coming-of-age drama.
- Audience Award winner at the Sundance Film Festival 2022, **The Territory** (Brazil, Denmark, USA/2022), by Alex Pritz, follows the vital, inspiring fight of the indigenous Uru-eu-wau-wau people of Brazil to defend their land from non-Indigenous farmers intent on colonising their protected territory. The film draws on both the Indigenous perspective and the farmers to chronicle a conflict that has profound implications for the survival of a people and the planet.
- Prominent filmmaker, Ali Asgari brings his second feature supported by DFI, **Until Tomorrow** (Iran, France, Qatar/2022), a compelling portrait of the millennial generation and how they are re-examining the value system in Iran and many other countries. It follows Fereshteh, a young mother facing a serious dilemma and her odyssey, taking viewers under the skin of the Iranian capital, to understand how the youth have gained the bravery and confidence to question the traditional ways of life and break away from patriarchy.

Feature films in the Bader category include:

- ***Our Brothers*** (France/2022) by three-time Academy Award® nominee Rachid Bouchareb revisits the dramatic events of Paris in December 1986 when thousands of students took to the streets to protest the harsh higher education reforms. 20-year-old Abdel is tragically shot dead by a police officer and hours later, Malik is pursued and beaten to death by three police officers. As revolt threatens to erupt amidst a population horrified by Malik’s murder in the heart of their city, the families of both victims, struggle to understand what really happened that night.
- ***Kash Kash - Without Feathers We Can't Live*** (Lebanon, Germany/2022), by Lea Najjar, a DFI supported film, is set in Beirut, torn apart by a corrupt political elite, anti-government protests, and one of the biggest explosions of the 21st century. But above the city’s roofs soars an unexpected bearer of hope—the pigeon game of chance “Kash Hamam”. In a city facing unprecedented modern challenges, its people still manage to find solace through their long-held traditions in this moving portrait of hope in the face of despair.
- ***My Sister Liv*** (Australia, USA/2022), a feature documentary directed by Alan Hicks, which follows the inseparable sisters Tess and Liv. Liv is a young girl growing up with the relentless pressures of social media, depression, body dysmorphia, and, often, suicidal thoughts. The film takes us into the intimate journey of Liv’s raw emotions and fears of a young life on the edge, and, ultimately, Tess’s desperate struggle to save her. It reveals the realities of stigma around mental health, and the aftermath for those left behind after a suicide.
- ***Hafreiat*** (Spain, Qatar, Jordan/2022) by Alex Sardà is an empathetic documentary that chronicles a man’s relationship with his family as they attempt to find security in uncertain times. Abo Day, a fugitive is hired for a Spanish archaeological expedition in Jordan. The working conditions are arduous and the only realistic solution is to return to Amman, which his family is unwilling to do because of the risk of returning to his criminal past. The film questions the possibility of genuine rehabilitation in a society that is reluctant to forget a person’s past transgressions.

The 2022 Special Edition of Ajyal is the Doha Film Institute’s tribute to the nation in an extraordinary milestone for Qatar and the Arab world, and a shining example of how ambition, dedication, and commitment to success can turn dreams into reality.

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