

## Arab and international filmmakers celebrate Qumra 2023 for invaluable support in their film journey

**Doha, Qatar; March 13, 2023:** Filmmakers from the region and beyond, whose projects are nurtured at Qumra, the annual industry incubator event by the Doha Film Institute, have highlighted its role as ‘one of a kind’ and ‘very important for the world today’ to build new voices in cinema, and lauded DFI’s support for enhancing the credibility of their projects.

This year, Qumra is mentoring 44 films, including feature narratives, documentaries, web series and shorts from 23 countries as part of the Doha Film Institute’s mission to accelerate the success of emerging filmmakers and enable them to take their projects to audiences around the world.

The selected Qumra projects stand out for their powerful, original, and creative themes and cinematic sensibilities. One such project is the web series *Miara* (Morocco, Qatar), directed by Talal Selhami and Jawad Lahlou. Set in the 8th Century, North Africa, it is about a young Berberian woman, who discovers that her murdered father was a fallen Viking King.

The directors said the film is also an exploration of identity and roots and aims to dispel the notion that largely mounted series with high ambition and scale are hard to be made in the Arab world. “Recreating the period is a painstaking process, which is why financing is central to accomplishing this,” says Talal. “We have already shot the pilot, and the encouragement we receive from Qumra is exceptional. We hope to engage with more producers and this platform offers us that opportunity.”

Merging the worlds of cinema and dance, *Backstage* (Morocco, Tunisia, Belgium, France) by Afef Ben Mahmoud and Khalil Benkirane, is about Aida, a member of a contemporary dance troupe touring Morocco. Afef says she drew on her experience as a professional dancer and theatre for the film. The challenge in their journey was “financing,” with Khalil adding that “we got a lot of rejections saying our project was too ambitious. Today, we are close to landing our ‘ship’ safely by the shore. There is an audience who appreciate arts, music and theatre, and since our project is about the life of a dance troupe, it will appeal to them.”

Khalil said Qumra brings the crème la de crème of the industry to mentor emerging projects and “you don’t find all these people together in one place anywhere else. For us, we are close to completing the film. We still need finance and distribution, and with all these experts coming and watching 20 minutes of our film is an opportunity to take our film to the next level of visibility.”

Amanda Nell Eu, the director of *Tiger Stripes* (Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Indonesia, Qatar), explores the theme of empowerment, from an intimate personal level about a girl who discovers a terrifying secret about her physical self. She says being at Qumra has given a wide rope for her to network with distributors, film festival directors and other professionals. “My film is about growing up and body transformation, with the title also being inspired by the tiger in Malaysia – beautiful and ferocious – and using it to symbolise empowerment.”

Lina Soualem, director of *Bye Bye Tiberias* (France, Palestine, Belgium, Qatar) chart the journey of her mother, acclaimed Palestinian actress Hiam Abbass, who left her native village Deir Hanna in Galilee 30

years ago to follow her acting dream in France. “This is also a story about the power of relationships between women – the memories they carry despite the difficulties they face. In Palestine it could be the exile, in other places, it could be the weight of traditions. My film is about how women find their place in the world and a lot of people could relate to it.”

Laila Abbas, also from Palestine, is bringing another interesting slice of society with her film ***Thank You for Banking with Us!*** (Germany, Palestine, Qatar). Currently in the production stage, “the film is about inheritance laws in the region and how they are not fair to women,” says Laila, who approaches the subject through two sisters who, after the passing of their father, fight the system to gain a share of his wealth. She says the theme is treated with sensitivity, intensity, and humour, adding it is inspired by events that happened in her family. Laila received initial funding from the Doha Film Institute, adding that “when a very credible organisation like DFI steps in to support you, it makes it easier for others to follow. That is the beauty of what they do. They open doors for filmmakers like us.”

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#### 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.

#### About Qumra

Directors and Producers attached to DFI supported 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.