

Film As Meditation: Qumra Master Toni Collette’s Inspiring Journey of Discovering Herself Through Acting

Doha, Qatar; March 2, 2024: In the first Masterclass of Doha Film Institute’s 10th edition of Qumra, the talent incubator event for Arab and international filmmakers, Qumra Master Toni Collette (*The Sixth Sense, Little Miss Sunshine, Muriel’s Wedding*) shared her transformative relationship with films, and how it enabled her to understand and be herself.

With meditation as an integral part of her life, Toni says she is at peace with herself, unaffected by what others think of her. For a long time, she said that playing other people helped her find herself and access parts of her that she didn’t realise were important or that she had denied. “But now, it has got to the point that I know who I am. And I want to protect that and I want to live my own life.”

From movies to life, from identity to individuality, from acting in the spur of the moment to exploring new learnings as a producer, her observations offered invaluable insights to a packed audience at Qumra.

On her foray into cinema, Toni said while she was uncertain about herself regarding other career choices, with acting, she knew by instinct it was meant for her. “It is weird because I didn’t grow up around this kind of thing. It was as outlandish as saying I am going to be an astronaut.” She started in musical theatre and as a kid loved tap dancing. Her breakout moment was acting in *Spotswood* (1992) with Anthony Hopkins and Russel Crowe.

In describing her approach, Toni said: “For any film to look real, each moment has to be completely alive. Personally, I don’t like to have control when I am working. I like to get messy and to be surprised and do things that come up in the moment. And if you make sure that everything is completely alive and real, you can do anything.”

Her method as an actor is to work from inside out. “I start with the emotional world of the character and try to understand how they respond to everything. Anything physical really comes from what is going on internally for me. The fun thing about being an actor is that you are stepping into somebody’s else’s world. It feels like a life experience I am going to have every single time because it [acting] feeds my soul in a way that nothing else does.”

She said what was most important – in acting or in life – is to find the real connection within oneself. “If you don’t connect with yourself, there is no real life to be had. The connection you make with yourself is the beginning of everything. And storytelling is a great connector.”

She loves what she does because “filmmaking is the most collaborative effort. It is such a collective experience and everybody is essential and everyone’s ideas should be heard and celebrated.”

On her first visit to Doha for Qumra 2024, Toni said “the city is so interesting in terms of the influences – at one spectrum you are looking at the future, and then I am looking at the old parts of the city and listening to the prayers.

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