

Funding CINE GOUNA

16 - 22 OCTOBER 2026 — 9TH EDITION

PROJECTS BOOK

مهرجان الجونة السينمائي
EL GOUNA FILM FESTIVAL

EL GOUNA
FILM
FESTIVAL

مهرجان الجونة
السينمائي


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WELCOME TO CINE GOUNA

We are thrilled to welcome you to the 9th edition of **CineGouna**, the industry arm of El Gouna Film Festival (GFF). Through its vast range of activities, **CineGouna** upholds its mission of empowering Arab filmmakers by offering them opportunities for artistic mentorships as well as financial support for their cinematic endeavours.

CineGouna traditional two programs, **CineGouna Funding** and **CineGouna Forum**, work together to support filmmakers in their artistic work.

While **CineGouna Funding**, GFF's project development and co-production lab offers filmmakers a top-notch business environment, **CineGouna Forum** connects regional and international industry professionals.

Invited industry professionals and filmmakers will take part in workshops, roundtable discussions, panels, presentations, and master classes that deliver on **CineGouna's** promises of insightful learning opportunities.

In 2023, **CineGouna** introduced two new initiatives: **CineGouna Market**, a workspace for both established and emerging voices in the Arab film industry, including producers, distributors, sales agents, and VOD platforms, and **CineGouna Emerge**, a program dedicated to students and first-time filmmakers, inviting them to participate in and benefit from all festival activities.

The year, **CineGouna** introduces its 5th section: **CineGouna Series**, in which GFF completes the circle of supporting all the active artistic forms in the region through a professional development and promotion for 6 Arab series projects.

This year marks the introduction of **Egyptian Voices**, a non-competitive film lab supporting Egyptian filmmakers through project development, pitching, and co-production, while fostering connections with industry professionals and potential collaborators at CineGouna.

Continuing its commitment to the slogan "**Cinema for Humanity**", GFF collaborated with International Film Festival Rotterdam **IFFR** and the International Emerging Film Talent Fund **IEFTF** to start the MENA edition of **Safe Harbour** program, dedicated for supporting displaced filmmakers in the region.

For its upcoming 9th edition, **CineGouna Funding** has selected 19 projects: 13 in development, and 6 in post-production. These projects were carefully selected from more than 310 eligible projects submitted this year.

In **CineGouna** closing ceremony, the winners will be granted up to **US \$320.000** in cash and service prizes offered by El Gouna Film Festival, its revered sponsors, and its distinguished partners.

We hope that your stay in El Gouna will be both productive and enjoyable. Thank you for joining us.

Sincerely,

The CineGouna Team

AWARDS

List of CineGouna Funding Awards 2025

- **Cinegouna Platform** Award **US \$15,000** in cash for a project in development
- **Cinegouna Platform** Award **US \$15,000** in cash for a project in post-production
- **EGP 1.500.000** (US \$29,000) cash grant for an Egyptian project from **Sawiris Foundation for Social Development**
- **EUR 10,000** cash grant from **The International Emerging Film Talent Fund (IEFTF)**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **Arab Radio and Television (ART)**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant for two projects from **El Adl Group Studios**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **Chiaroscuro Film Production**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **Rotana Media**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **Pepsico**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **Good Pictures**
- **US \$10,000** (Equivalent to EGP) cash grant for an Egyptian project from **Gemini Africa**
- **US \$10,000** cash grant from **The Emirates NBD**
- **US \$7,000** cash grant from **Big Bang Studios**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Rise Studios**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Kurdistan Film Commission**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Kader Project**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Red Sea Foundation**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Rank Studios**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Sard**
- **US \$5,000** cash grant from **Filmology**
- **US \$5,000** worth of script development by **Sard**
- **US \$10,000** worth of script development of two projects by **A. A. Films**
- **US \$5,000** worth of script development with Mohamed Hisham Obia by **Kader Project**
- **US \$ 5,000** worth of post-production services from **Rank Studios**
- **US \$50,000** as MG for sales and distribution for two projects from **MAD Solutions**
- An Invitation to an African project to attend the next edition of **Durban Film Mart**
- **IEFTF** with **Torino Film Lab** Award: An invitation to **TFL Next** or an individual **TFL** script consultations to a project in development, covering the participation fees
- One year membership in the **Documentary Association of Europe (DAE)**
- **US \$17,000** worth of post-production facilities from **Big Bang Studios**, presented to two projects
- **US \$12,000** worth of full DCP package services from **Shift Studios**.
- **US \$12,000** worth of full promotion package services from **Shift Studios**.
- **US \$10,000** worth of Sound services from **The Sound of Egypt**, presented to two projects.



A.A. Films



CINEGOUNA FUNDING JURY & MENTORS

CINEGOUNA FUNDING JURY



Nadine Khan

Egypt

Nadine Khan is a prominent Egyptian director working across feature films and television. Her sophomore feature, *Abu Saddam*, premiered at the Cairo International Film Festival, winning Best Actor, while her debut feature, *Harag w' Marag* (Chaos, Disorder) took home the Special Jury Prize at the Dubai International Film Festival and acclaim from the Locarno Film Festival. Beginning her career with award-winning short films featured at major international festivals, Khan has also become a powerhouse in television, directing massive hits such as *Sabie Gar* (Seventh Neighbor), *Massar Egbary* (Forced Path) and *Beng Kully* (Full Anesthesia).



Hanna Atallah

Palestine

Hanna Atallah is a Palestinian filmmaker, producer, and cultural arts manager working across fiction and documentary. His work has screened and received recognition at major international festivals, including TIFF, Locarno, BFI London, and El Gouna. He is the founder and artistic director of Filmlab Palestine and director of Palestine Cinema Days, focusing on strengthening Palestinian film infrastructure, supporting emerging filmmakers, and expanding the international presence of Palestinian cinema. Atallah has served on juries at numerous international film festivals, film funds, and industry platforms. He is also co-founder of August Films in Palestine and Route 243 in New York, and a member of the European Film Academy.



Dorothe Beinemeier

Germany

RED BALLOON FILM, based in Hamburg, was founded in 2016 by CEO and producer **Dorothe Beinemeier** together with maze pictures. The company focuses on producing children's and family entertainment for television and cinema, as well as high-quality arthouse films and drama series for international markets, with a particular emphasis on emerging talent from the MENA region.

This passion has shaped Dorothe Beinemeier's career and expertise to this day. The founders have also demonstrated strong capabilities in national and international networking and co-production, making these areas a key focus of the Hamburg-based company.



Alaa Alasad
Jordan

Alaa Alasad is a Dubai- and Amman-based Film producer, distributor, co-founder of Tabi360, and Head of Production & Distribution at Creative Media Solutions. He specializes in art house films, documentaries, shorts, and commercial cinema across the MENA region and internationally.

His portfolio includes "Sink" (TIFF), "Yunan" (Berlinale), "Jo of Montreal", and "Birthday". He also co-produced the major Saudi blockbusters "Born a King" and "Champions"

A trusted consultant, speaker, and pitching coach, Alasad guides projects through financing, co-productions, and global market distribution.



Arianna Castoldi
Italy

Arianna Castoldi is an international media executive with over 15 years of experience in the financing, co-production, and worldwide sales of documentary content across television, streaming, and theatrical formats. She began her career at Wide House and Upside Distribution, joined Groupe AB in 2016 as Head of Documentary Sales, and spent nearly a decade leading the documentary division at Mediawan Rights, launching a documentary line-up that premiered at A-list festivals and earned Oscar nominations, including Soundtrack to a Coup d'État. She has advised French producers on co-production and pre-financing, collaborated with the CNC on selection commissions, and served as a jury member for festival and award bodies.



Melissa Parry
South Africa

Melissa Parry has worked as a freelance film editor since 2005, shaping culturally significant stories across documentary, feature film, and series. Working across both fiction and non-fiction, her work has received international recognition and multiple awards. A SAGE Acronym recipient, ACE International Partner, and global panelist, Melissa brings a strong international perspective to her editorial practice, with a particular interest in stories that engage with complex social and cultural themes.



Robyn Citizen
USA

Robyn Citizen is Director of Programming, Festival and Cinematheque at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), a role she has held since January 2022. She leads the team of programmers, overseeing the Official Selection, shapes festival strategy and is the lead for Platform, TIFF's competitive section. For Cinematheque, she guides year-round programming direction and curates programmes. Before TIFF, Citizen earned a PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University and was a Lecturer at the University of British Columbia. In 2024, Toronto City Council appointed her to the TO Live Board of Directors, which oversees three civic theatres. She is now Chair of the Human Resources Committee. Most recently, she taught a University of Toronto seminar on digital cultures, interactive storytelling, and contemporary genre cinema.



Soleil Gharbieh
Lebanon

Soleil Gharbieh is an arts management professional specializing in film and culture. She joined the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) in 2017 as a Grants Manager and currently manages AFAC's Film Programs, including Documentary and Cinema, as well as the Music Program.

Through her work with AFAC, she has served on numerous film funding panels and pitching forums, including Chicken & Egg Pictures, El Gouna Film Festival, Carthage Film Festival, and IDFA Forum. She has also served as a jury member for the IDA Awards Feature Documentary Jury, Cannes Docs, Aflamuna Connection, and Sharjah Film Platform.



SAWIRIS FOUNDATION
مؤسسة ساويرس

25 YEARS OF
IMPACT
25 عام من
التأثير

Supporting Egyptian Storytelling from Script to Screen

Sawiris Foundation Production Grant

For the second consecutive year, Sawiris Foundation supports the CineGouna Funding program through the Sawiris Foundation Production Grant, dedicated to supporting the production of one outstanding Egyptian film.

Last year, the grant supported
"Captain Kabonga"

by distinguished Egyptian filmmaker
Amir El Shenawy.

Sawiris Screenplay Lab

Showcase is on

October 21th - at 12:00 pm

Sawiris Screenplay Lab takes winning stories beyond the Award and closer to the screen.

In partnership with **Sard-Mariam Naoum**, the Lab supports winners and selected shortlisted screenwriters from the 2025 Sawiris Cultural Award – Screenplay Category through mentorship and script development.

The journey culminates in a dedicated showcase session at CineGouna Funding, connecting selected projects with producers and key industry players.

 **CineGouna Funding at the Festival Plaza**





IEFTF, an Athens-based funding body is proud to support the El Gouna Film Festival, presenting a cash award worth €10,000, to a project pitching at this year's CineGouna Funding Platform.

IEFTF.org

Award funded by IEFTF, a Greek based entity funding cash awards in the film industry.



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موسم الفنون
STUDIOS



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CHIARO SCURO
FILM PRODUCTIONS
كياروسكورو للإنتاج الفني والسينمائي

THE CREATORS OF



OFFERS A PRIZE OF
10,000 \$

TO SUPPORT FEATURE FILM PROJECTS IN
THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE

ROOTED IN CULTURE. DRIVEN BY VISION.

Established in Cairo in 2019 by producer **Mohamed Agamy**, ChiaroScuro Film Productions was built to nurture independent voices across Egypt. Our mission is simple yet vital: to craft deeply rooted stories that reflect our rich cultural tapestry and bring distinct Egyptian perspectives to international screens.

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
120 min



Director(s)
 Ayten Amin
Producer(s)
 Louay Khraish

ARABS OF MAADI

Egypt

Log-line

In a local Cairene neighborhood amid the pandemic, Hagar (17) is thrown into chaos when her best friend vanishes. As gossip and suspicion collide, Hagar must navigate a community rotting from its secrets—where not even her mother can be trusted.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 Not First or Second Feature

Stage of Development
 Early Development

Total Budget
 \$613,298

Confirmed Financing
 \$40,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
 N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
 Malmo Film Market

Film Needs
 Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

In a popular Cairene neighborhood amid the pandemic, Hagar (17) is thrown into chaos when her best friend Passant (19) vanishes mysteriously right after being married. Her disappearance triggers a wave of gossip, suspicion, and distrust across the neighborhood. As pressure builds to find her, the community looks to Hagar for answers, but she begins to spiral into a web of lies that she fabricates. The gossip drives Ahmed Kamal, a respected teacher, to take the search into his own hands, but beneath his goodwill lie secrets. His righteous image cracks when a hidden stash of explicit videos is found on his computer, featuring young women from the neighborhood, including both Passant and Hagar. The discovery threatens to tear away the mask of a community where appearances matter more than truth. With the community's eyes turned on Hagar, she finds herself cornered, with only one way out.

Director's Biography

Started her career in 2006 with her short film Her Man which was officially selected in Clermont Ferrand. Made her feature debut in 2013 Villa 69, Special Jury prize in Abu Dhabi Film Festival. In 2017 directed the female led big hit series Seventh Neighbor which had more than 20 million views.

In 2020 made her second feature film Souad officially selected in Cannes 2020 and Berlin Panorama 2021, . Souad was selected for the official competition of Tribeca Film Festival June 2021 and won the best actress award, and was distributed by the prestigious BFI in the UK .

Was a jury member in Berlinale Film Festival February 2023 in the GWFF First Feature Film Award.

In 2023 made the comedy "The Shanabs".

Currently working on the development of her fourth feature film Arabs of Maadi and her first animation project Summer Tales

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Ayten Amin
Director

Director's Statement

This film explores reality through the lives of two teenage girls: Hagar and Passant. One disappears. One is left behind. Their personalities are extreme: one is erratic, the other hypersexual. But together, they represent the fractured and wounded state of girlhood I witnessed and I'm part of. The stories in the film are inspired by my experience with the girls of "Souad" my previous film, they shared so many personal stories as we became friends. I wrote them down as short stories

This is why Afnan Fehead, who was not only an actress I worked with on Souad but also the inspiration behind one of the film's main characters, is now part of the writing team, collaborating with me on the dialogue and drawing from the stories she and her friends shared with me. My ambition is making films that are cinematic novels, My creative influences are rooted in cinema and literature, shaped by works like *Al KitKat* by Daoud Abdel Sayed, *Another Country* by James Baldwin, *The Neapolitan Novels* by Elena Ferrante, and Mohamed Khan's *Dreams of Hind & Camilia*.

I follow a unique creative process with my co-writers. While we draw from the structure and discipline of conventional screenwriting, our approach blends it with improvisation, experimentation, and deep collaboration with our cast, often non-actors drawn from the world we're portraying. This film is a continuation of my commitment to exploring intimate stories about women in marginalized communities in Egypt.



Louay Khraish
Producer

Producer's Note

I'm drawn to stories rooted in realities rarely depicted authentically on screen, stories that challenge how we see the world, push creative boundaries, and offer fresh perspectives, while honoring our cinematic heritage.

This is what draws me to Ayten Amin's work, and why I'm so invested in collaborating with her on *Arabs of Maadi*, a film that captures a Cairo neighborhood and way of life that's rapidly disappearing. Ayten is one of the few filmmakers in the region who bridges two worlds: her films pay tribute to the great masters of Arab cinema while forging a distinct, original path of their own, combining sharp social observation with a unique creative voice.

Set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Arabs of Maadi* documents a pivotal moment in recent history while honoring the resilience, humor, and complexity of the people who lived through it. Through Ayten's vision, this community becomes both deeply specific and universally relatable.

My aim is to turn this vision into a producible film, balancing creative ambition with practical realities while protecting the story's authenticity.

Production Company profile

Otouro Media is a dynamic film and television production company with offices in Los Angeles and Beirut, bridging East and West through bold, character-driven storytelling. With a strong foothold in both commercial and narrative spaces, Otouro Media produces high-quality corporate videos, branded content, and commercials, delivering sleek visuals and compelling messaging tailored to each client's vision.

Beyond its commercial portfolio, Otouro Media is committed to original storytelling from the Arab world.

The company has produced acclaimed narrative projects including the feature film *Arzé*, which premiered in Tribeca in 2024 and was Lebanon's submission to the 97th Academy Awards.

Louay is the Director of International Programs at Film Independent in Los Angeles, where he oversees a diverse range of initiatives in collaboration with global partners.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
120 min



Director(s)
Adel Ahmed Yehia
Producer(s)
Sawsan Yusuf

AWAY FROM THE PACK

Egypt

Log-line

After her sister vanishes from a girls' detention center, Hanaa (14), escapes with her nephew to find their absent mother, only to be pulled into a brutal world that forces her to grow up too fast.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Early Development

Total Budget
\$649,298

Confirmed Financing
\$40,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
N/A

Film Needs
Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Regional Funds, Script Consultancy, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

Fourteen-year-old Hanaa lives inside a girls' juvenile detention center in Helwan with her older sister Safi, seventeen, and Safi's son. Imprisoned for a crime committed by the sisters, the three survive in a world of cigarettes, drugs, corruption, and shifting loyalties. Hanaa clings to Safi, fearing the day Safi turns eighteen and is finally transferred to prison, while Safi promises she is saving money to escape and start a new life together.

Attending classes, Hanaa remains haunted by the mother who abandoned them after years of abuse by their father. Safi, tougher and more cynical, slips out at night through corrupt guards, sells sex, and works with Yasser Dollar, a small-time drug dealer living on a boat by the Nile. When Hanaa steals crystal meth for her, Safi trades it for a mobile phone, giving the sisters new status inside the center. But when Hanaa begins writing Safi's messages to Yasser, her fascination with the outside world and her jealousy of her sister deepen.

After a rooftop fight ends with another girl's death, Safi disappears, leaving her child behind. When the boy is about to be sent to an orphanage, Hanaa escapes with him and seeks refuge with Yasser. Through him, she enters Cairo's underworld and meets Fahd, a delivery driver who shows her kindness. But after Yasser is murdered, Hanaa flees again. With Fahd's help, she finally finds her mother in a village in Dakahlia, only to discover that the reunion offers no rescue, only another version of loss.

Director's Biography

Adel Ahmed Yehia is an Egyptian filmmaker who graduated from the High Cinema Institute in Cairo. He made his directorial debut in 2018 with the short film Nada, which won multiple awards at regional and international festivals. His second short film, Abu Judy, was released in 2024. Adel is currently developing his first feature film, continuing to build his unique cinematic voice.

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Adel Ahmed Yehia
Director

Director's Statement

While filming the documentary, an incident completely changed the way I understood the film. As I arrived at the reformatory, a young girl fell from the building in front of me. It was the first time I had ever witnessed someone die. Because I was carrying a camera, the staff immediately moved me away from the scene.

Upstairs, I saw another girl being escorted away. She was accused of pushing the girl who had fallen. I recognized her immediately. I had filmed with her only a few days earlier. She was fourteen years old.

I never discovered the truth of what happened. Maybe she was guilty, maybe she was not. But what stayed with me was the thought that she might become another child judged before anyone tried to understand her.

As filming continued, I became more and more frustrated. Whenever the cameras were off, the girls would tell me about their lives, their fears, and the violence around them. But as soon as the camera was turned on, and the supervisors stood nearby, their voices changed or disappeared completely. The reality I wanted to capture simply could not exist in front of the lens.

That was when I understood that this story could not be told honestly as a documentary.

This film is my way of reopening the door that was closed to me. It is an attempt to return to that world and finally tell the story I could not tell then, not through judgment, but through curiosity and humanity, and with the freedom that fiction allows.



Sawsan Yusuf
Producer

Producer's Note

A few years ago, Adel and I spoke on the phone for the first time. He wanted to make a film about a mutual friend who had passed away in a very tragic accident. I still remember how passionate he was about telling his story, and I also remember very clearly the sadness in his voice. What struck me then was his ability to turn grief into art, and the courage he had to put his feelings out into the world.

This time, when he told me about this story, I saw that same passion and that same grief. He wants these girls to be remembered, seen, and considered. At the same time, he is trying to go beyond his own personal experience and tell the story not only as it happened, but also as he wished it could have happened, transforming that pain into cinema.

What moves me most about this film is that it does not approach these girls with judgment, but with tenderness, complexity, and humanity. It looks at a world that is often hidden or reduced to stereotypes, and gives it emotional depth and dignity. Through Hanaa's journey, the film opens up questions of love, survival, abandonment, and the fragile bonds that can grow inside violent systems. I believe this story belongs to Adel, and to him alone; with his experience and delicacy that he made his previous short films with. I am deeply passionate about helping audiences experience the sincerity and originality of this story through his cinematic language.



Production Company profile

Bonanza Films, a Cairo-based production company established in 2019 aiming to help in developing film industry by co-producing or producing shorts and feature films for directors in their 1st or 2nd project that can be presented internationally, its productions created in collaboration with international production and distribution companies that share enthusiasm for cinema. It has produced more than 10

shorts over the past 3 years which were selected in reputable festivals and won more than 35 international awards. The latest short film "I promise you paradise" was selected in Semaine de la critique – Cannes 2023 and exceeded the 100 film festivals and 35 prizes until this moment. In 2025 "Aisha Can't Fly away Anymore" for the director Morad Mostafa was premiered in Cannes Un Certain Regard.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Marwa Zein

Producer(s)
Marwa Zein

Co-Producer(s)
Baho Bakhsh, Chanice Paraiba

LILY'S MAKKAH

Sudan, Egypt, Brazil & Germany

Log-line

Caught between the Gulf War outside and her family's collapse inside, eight-year-old Lily must navigate survival in Makkah. But will the strength she uncovers in the holy city be enough when history echoes thirty years later?!

Is it a First or Second Feature
Second Feature

Stage of Development
Advanced Development

Total Budget
\$1,500,000

Confirmed Financing
\$400,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Red Sea Development, AFAC, Malmo Arab FF Grant SFI, Goteborg grant, Red Star Films and Private investor

Previous Labs/Markets
Malmo Arab FF

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals

Synopsis

In the early 1990s, eight-year-old Lily lives in Mecca with her Sudanese parents, Ibrahim and Farah. Lily harbours an unshakable dream of performing a double kick like her cartoon hero, Captain Majed. However, her world rapidly unravels under the weight of immigration. Driven by fear and insecurity, the family fractures. Ibrahim cracks under intense pressure, while Farah suffers from a mysterious illness.

After a violent quarrel, and with Lily's teenage sister rebelling against their restrictive world, Farah flees to escape an impending divorce. She leaves her daughters in the care of supportive Sudanese and Saudi neighbours. Lily desperately tries to hold the broken family together, but external geopolitics soon intervene. When Sudan backs Iraq, Ibrahim is forced to relocate with his daughters to a remote northern city.

For Ibrahim, this disaster paradoxically offers a second chance to feel the weight of transformation. For Lily, staring at a small suitcase that cannot hold everything she loves, it is a devastating loss. Her father's advice to "take only what's most important" becomes her first lesson in survival.

Thirty years later, Lily is a Sudanese immigrant in Germany. Facing an expired passport and another forced relocation, she packs her life once more. Revisiting that first childhood wound, Lily calls her mother. Remembering her family's legacy of moving forward anyway, Lily reflects on what she holds and what she has to fold.

Director's Biography

An award-winning international Nubian film director, scriptwriter, and producer best known for her acclaimed debut feature 'Khartoum Offside' and short fiction films 'A Game' and 'One Week, Two Days'. Her work has premiered and been officially selected at top-tier global festivals, including the Berlinale, TIFF, IDFA, CPH:DOX, Carthage FF, Cairo FF, BOZAR, Hot Docs, Sheffield and Visions Du Reel amongst others. Khartoum Offside swept over 39 national and international accolades, notably winning the 15th Africa Movie Academy Award (AMAA) for Best Documentary and the TV5 Monde Best First Work award.

Based in Berlin, since 2023 Marwa lectures film at SRH University and Catalyst Institute.

She holds a diverse background, having studied Chemical Engineering, Film, and Media Arts across Cairo, Copenhagen, and Cologne.

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Marwa Zein
Director

Director's Statement

Screenwriting and filmmaking are my ultimate gateways to a liberated, deeply fulfilling existence. From my early short films to my latest feature-length documentary, my work has always centered on the realities of women and the exposure of raw emotional conflicts. I am driven to explore how the intersections of politics, religion, and everyday existence shape our reality.

Lily's Makkah is the next step in this profound creative journey.

Partly rooted in my own family history, this narrative captures that fragile moment of first heartbreak—the initial fracture in our lives—unfolding against a multi-layered world. It is a season of dancing with life and its vast questions, struggling to keep our inner compass burning bright and resilient. This pivotal threshold marks our very first conscious engagement with the universe beyond our family, and with the depths of our own identity. It is an armor we carry forward when life tests us again and again. How we kept moving as kids holds the key to both the art of letting go and the art of survival. This is what my film is ultimately about.

Through the lens of an immigrant family and their unique bond with a Saudi family, this is an authentic, irreverent tale of liberation and non-conformity. Speaking a universal language of discovery, faith, and family, the film layers innocence onto its central quartet. Together, they navigate profound human contradictions through a delicate balance of humor, love, and drama.



Marwa Zein
Producer

Baho Bakhsh, Chanice Paraiba
Co-Producers

Producer's Note

Some films arrive at the right moment. Lily's Makkah reached me shortly after I had spent nine months living and working across Saudi Arabia, producing international sporting events from the Red Sea to the Eastern Province, from Riyadh to places that rarely appear on a map of international cinema.

Marwa's screenplay brought back the Saudi Arabia I had come to know through everyday life. Football in the street, neighbours, family rituals, music, humour, small rebellions. Nothing feels decorative. The Kingdom becomes the place where different histories meet. Sudanese, Saudi, Egyptian and other Diaspora experiences move through the film without claiming to represent entire regions. That is where I see its international potential. Lily's Mecca speaks to people shaped by migration, war, bureaucracy, family rupture and the difficult choice of what to carry forward.

With Indigenous roots in Brazil, I read this film from a place of recognition. The screenplay understands that memory travels through ordinary things. A bracelet, a cassette tape, a football game, a suitcase that cannot fit everything. These details carry the emotional weight of displacement.

Where do we build our Mecca after history asks us to begin again?

Every migration carries its own answer, yet the search feels deeply familiar.



ORE PRODUCTIONS

Production Company profile

TFS: TFS Media House, an independent company dedicated to creative collaborations between Latin America and the Arab world.

- Lily's Mecca (Feature Film, Producer, In Development)
- O Tesouro de Irene (Feature Film, Executive Producer, Post-production)
- Santa Dica (TV Mini-Series, Associate Producer, 2027)
- Ecoloucos – Uma Comédia Sustentável (Feature Film, Executive Production Coordinator, Post-production)
- Silvio (Feature Film, Second Assistant Director, 2024)
- Parkour Changed Our Lives (Documentary, BBC Three, Production Manager, 2018)
- The House of Ana (Short Film, Production Manager, 2017)
- O2 Filmes International
- Track Record

- City of God (2002)
- Blindness (2008)
- The Two Popes (2019)

Red Star Films: The company has produced over 40 short films, features and documentaries across the MENA region.

- The Tale of Daye's Family (2025) premiered in Berlinale
- Love, Imagined (2025), premiering at the El Gouna Film Festival
- One More Show (2025), shown at the Cairo Int. Film Festival
- Complaint No.713317 (2026), and Life After Siham (2025), co-produced by Red Star and selected for the Cannes Film Festival's ACID programme.
- Goodbye Julia (2023), which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
120 min



Director(s)

Marie-Rose Osta

Producer(s)

Alaa Alasad, Marie-Rose Osta

Co-Producer(s)

Ana Maria Pirvan

MINA

Lebanon

Log-line

Nine-year-old Mina believes her mother can change the world with her words. Then, one day, the words stop working.

Is it a First or Second Feature

First Feature

Stage of Development

Late Development

Total Budget

\$1,412,000

Confirmed Financing

\$50,000

Confirmed Financial Partners

Private Investment

Previous Labs/Markets

Rawi Script Writing Lab & Amman Industry Days

Film Needs

Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds

Synopsis

One November night, 9-year-old Mina wakes at 3 A.M. to strange sounds. Her mother tells her to get the demon out of her, and black liquid begins to seep from Mina's ears. In 90s Lebanon, under Syrian occupation, Mina lives in a mountain village of silences, secrets and coded words. Her mother Ranin, however, speaks without filters, unaware that Mina believes everything she says comes true. When Ranin says the electricity will return, it does. When she speaks of hyenas, Mina sees them. When Mina's father Selim is detained at a Syrian checkpoint, Ranin curses the soldiers as "filthy rabbits" and assures Mina he is fine. Taking her literally, Mina leaves to find him. At the checkpoint, the soldiers have vanished. Selim is there, alive, waiting. On their way home, rabbits cross the road. For Mina, it is proof. Mina's best friend Elias is a believer too. His father Toufic has been missing since the civil war. Selim's return makes him hold Mina to an old promise: make Ranin say, "Toufic is back." Ranin says it, and the children wait, but Toufic never returns. Refusing to let go of her belief, Mina tests her mother: Ranin says Mina's blood is blue, like a demon's. Mina cuts her finger. It is red. As Mina begins to see the world differently, she discovers what the adults hide: the abandoned house next door shelters a resistance group. When Syrian soldiers raid the village, Ranin says nothing. Yet Mina sees the soldiers become rabbits, chased by hyenas.

Director's Biography

Marie-Rose Osta is a Lebanese screenwriter and director working across film, series, and video essays.

Her latest short film *Someday, a Child* (2026) won the golden bear in Berlinale Shorts. Her previous short, *Then Came Dark* (2021), won the Special Jury Prize at the 43rd Cairo International Film Festival and was selected for the 22nd Biennial Sesc_VideoBrasil. Alongside her authored work, she explores alternative production models through collective, filmmaker-led feature projects, including *Home Bitter Home* (IFFR) and *Letters* (Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival), and is currently developing a video essay as part of the collective documentary-art project *Trois Couleurs*.

She is developing her debut feature *Mina* and her series *Echoes*.

Contact

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Marie-Rose Osta
Director

Director's Statement

I always wondered how much of me was me, and how much was my mother's words. MINA grew from that confusion. At nine, Mina loves her mother with the kind of love that can turn a parent into a compass, a prophet. Ranin is excessive, impulsive, funny, frightened; she speaks and moves on. Mina doesn't. She keeps her mother's words and lives through them. Around her is another language she cannot decipher: the silence of a village after the civil war and under Syria's Assad regime, a father who doesn't explain where he has been or what happened to him, an abandoned house adults insist is empty while Mina keeps seeing moving shadows. A world of missing pieces she has to fill in. I grew up in Lebanon in that era, and remember how it felt to look over your shoulder. Mina's perception dictates the frame. The camera stays at her height and discovers the world at her rhythm. She is small within wider spaces; adults are fragmented. Shadows, distortions and incomplete images become part of her perception. Sound follows the same principle: intention reaches her before words, effects before their source. We won't be able to tell where perception ends and imagination begins. When a hyena appears or a street fills with rabbits, they simply enter the world; the film does not change register. Before Mina understands the world, she absorbs it. Meaning comes later. As an adult, I can only hope to bring back something of that way of experiencing the world.



Alaa Alasad, Marie-Rose Osta
Producers

Ana Maria Pirvan
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

My conviction in the screenplay and filmmaker began when I encountered MINA while reading projects for the Al-Rawi Screenwriters Lab, where it immediately stood out. This was well before Marie-Rose's short film *Someday, A Child* received the Golden Bear at Berlinale Shorts; seeing her work find an international audience has since confirmed that her cinematic voice can travel, a voice I first recognized through MINA. Set in 1990s Lebanon under Syrian occupation, MINA follows a nine-year-old who believes her mother's words can alter reality: soldiers become filthy rabbits, hyenas enter her home and she pets them, in what Marie-Rose calls a "disobedient fairy tale." She approaches this story through the free imagination of a child. The fall of the Syrian regime that shaped this period gives the film unexpected contemporary resonance, while its codes remain deeply recognizable across our Levant. Yet MINA remains inside the intimate, unruly world of its young protagonist. With the screenplay in advanced development, we are building MINA as a Lebanese-led international co-production, consolidating European and regional partnerships and entering financing. We are seeking co-producers, financing, sales and distribution partners. Our ambition is to launch the film at a leading international festival. At its heart, MINA is a family drama, but it moves freely between the real and the fantastic; its refusal to settle into a single genre is precisely what gives the film a broader range of audience potential.



Production Company profile

Tabi360 is a prominent production company based in Amman, Jordan. Specializing in producing art house films, documentaries, and short films, Tabi360 is committed to delivering high-quality, culturally rich stories to international audiences. The company plays a vital role in nurturing regional talent and fostering global collaborations, positioning itself at the forefront of the MENA film industry.

Tabi360 has been instrumental in the production of critically acclaimed films, including *Sink* (2025) by Zain Duraie, *Yunan* (2025) by Ameer Fakheraldin. Tabi360 also has upcoming projects such as *Jo of Montreal* (2026) by Ameen Nayfeh, *Birthday* (2027) by Lara Zeidan and *Freedom Theatre* (2027) by Rishi Pelham, which are set to capture the attention of international audiences and film festivals.

Feature Narrative
Color
Algerian Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Zoulikha Tahar

Producer(s)
Manon Messiant

PARADISE BEACH

France

Log-line

On Algeria's Oran coast, after an assault leads mothers to lock their daughters indoors, 14-year-old Fifi and her friends flee to an abandoned seaside casino, where they fight to reclaim their freedom, bodies, and stolen summer.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Development – First treatment completed, screenplay in development. Currently participating in the Doha Film Institute Feature Script Lab 2026.

Total Budget
\$1,000,000

Confirmed Financing
\$30,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
Doha Film Institute – Feature Script Lab 2026; Casell'Arte 2022; Groupe Ouest – Puissance et âme 2023

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

Algeria, the Oran coast, one summer. In a housing estate, 14-year-old Fifi lives with her parents, her grandmother, and her older brother Elyes, whose baccalaureate exams have taken over the household. As the whole country holds its breath for the exams, Fifi and her three best friends, Rony, Chahinez, and Manal, spend their days in the estate's central park, dreaming of their future. But their summer is shattered by a rumor: a girl in the estate has been assaulted by a neighbour. The victim is Fifi, who has confided in her mother. To avoid scandal and protect baccalaureate candidates from further tension during exam week, the mothers decide to keep the incident quiet and confine all the girls indoors "for their own safety."

Deprived of the outside world, the girls begin to suspect one another: who spoke? Desperate to reclaim their freedom, Fifi leads her friends on a nocturnal escape. They try to swim to a small island offshore, but the current carries them to a secluded beach beside an abandoned casino, a relic of Algeria's independence.

Inside this ghostly place, they invent a night of freedom and celebration. But buried tensions erupt. Fifi admits she was the one who spoke, and discovers that her three friends had all been assaulted by the same man before her, but remained silent out of fear. At dawn, the girls return to the estate and brick up their abuser's front door, under the finally supportive gaze of their mothers.

Director's Biography

Zoulikha Tahar is an Algerian poet and filmmaker based in Paris. Her writing explores the complexity of family ties and attachment to one's homeland, recurring themes in her films and in *El'Sardines* (2025), her first series, co-written with Kaouthar Adimi, broadcast on Arte and awarded a Special Jury Mention at Séries Mania. Her latest documentary short film, *On Your Tenderness* (2026) has premiered at Camden IFF. Zoulikha is a member of the Rawiyat-SIF collective and a Berlinale Talents alumna.

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Zoulikha Tahar
Director

Director's Statement

Paradise Beach is a film about confinement, and about the strength of a group of girls who decide, together, to cross the boundaries imposed by adults.

The story is rooted in a working-class Algerian housing estate inhabited. Structured by discipline, fear of scandal, and a culture of silence, it becomes an arena where every female gesture is watched and where speech itself can be dangerous.

Through Fifi and her friends, we wanted to tell a story of adolescent friendship caught in this vice: an age when one dreams, looks at the world through the window, and begins to understand that adults may protect, but may also hurt.

The assault Fifi suffers is never shown, yet it infuses the narrative. It creates the film's central tension: the fear of the outside and the burning desire to reach it. This fracture shapes the mise-en-scène: inside, the image is close, compact and repetitive; outside, the city unfolds. The breaking point is the abandoned casino, a suspended colonial relic transformed into a sanctuary where the girls dress up, dance, and briefly reclaim a stolen freedom. The film becomes more dreamlike and festive, but joy prepares the explosion. Like adolescence itself, the casino is a place of transition between childhood and lucidity.

Paradise Beach is a realistic fable about sisterhood, rebellion, and the possibility of inventing change when adults remain frozen in silence.



Manon Messiant
Producer

Producer's Note

Zoulikha Tahar and I met at Berlinale Talents in 2023 and have stayed close ever since, sharing our projects and a desire to collaborate. *Paradise Beach* (italic) is our first film together and an important step in both our careers.

Written in Arabic and rooted in the Oran coastline, the film is conceived as a fully Algerian story. We intend to shoot entirely in Algeria with local crews and talent. We are currently seeking an Algerian co-producer and envision a tripartite co-production between France, Algeria and another European country.

The project is in development. A first treatment is complete, and Zoulikha is currently participating in the Doha Film Institute Feature Script Lab. Financing will begin second semester of 2027 through French support mechanisms, including Cinema du Monde, alongside international funds dedicated to Arab and African cinema. The estimated budget is around USD 1 million.



Production Company profile

Iliade et Films is a Paris-based independent production company developing and producing auteur-driven films in live action, documentary and animation, with a particular focus on emerging filmmakers. Its recent productions include *Goodbye Cruel World* by Félix de Givry (2026, 93', fiction), closing film of Cannes Critics' Week 2026; *Yuck!* by Loïc Espuche (2024, 14', animation), winner of the 2025 César for Best Animated Short Film and Academy Award nominee.



Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic (Lebanese)
90 min



Director(s)
Noel Keserwany

Producer(s)
Michelle Keserwany

PRINTEMPS

Lebanon

Log-line

Soha, 25, feels trapped selling replica perfumes in a shop in Jounieh, Lebanon. With her younger sister Rania, she develops a risky business to challenge their rigid reality. When an encounter with a TV fiction series crew disrupts her path.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Development

Total Budget
\$908,648

Confirmed Financing
N/A

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
CNC Parcours d'auteur, Amman Film Festival

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

Soha, a vivid young woman in her early twenties, sells replica luxury perfumes at Perfume Palace, a small shop in the crowded souk of Jounieh, Lebanon.

Alongside her parents and sister, she lives in a small seaside resort meant for summer visitors, where they only spend winters when the rent is affordable. Soha feels that her parents live in a constant state of delay with the seasons, a delay passed down through generations in her family, in her wider circle of friends, and throughout her entire neighborhood, where the repercussions of political turmoil on the small details of everyday life leave the youth of this working-class perpetually on hold. Soha, extremely protective of her teenage sister Rania, feels the urge to prevent her from inheriting this sense of suspension.

Together, the sisters dream up a small business, hoping to push against the social and economic limits closing in around them.

When, on a rainy day, a television drama crew takes shelter inside Soha's perfume shop. Soha feels for the first time that she might still catch up with her own youth, gradually leaving Rania behind. What starts as a chance to reclaim lost time, gradually becomes a dilemma, as the boundary between Soha's desire to finally live in sync with her age and the integrity she owes to those closest to her begins to blur.

Director's Biography

Noel Keserwany is a Lebanese multidisciplinary artist, known for her satirical political music videos created with her sister Michelle since 2012. Their debut short film, *Les Chenilles*, which Noel co-directed and starred in, won the Golden Bear at Berlinale 2023, and *El Gouna Golden Star*, Mieres Best Actresses Award, Jury Prize at Malmo Film Festival, amongst other recognitions. In 2020, Noel was selected by the French Institute for a writing residency at La Cité des Arts in Paris. Since then, she has been based between Lebanon and Paris.

Noel is currently developing her first feature film, *Printemps*, for which she got the CNC Parcours d'Auteur support, and is also directing her animated short film, *Seven Mountains and Seven Seas*.

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Noel Keserwany
Director

Director's Statement

Printemps, is a colourful film that traces a social portrait of a working-class Lebanon, caught in a delay with its age and the seasons. Despite dramatic situations, the film never loses its humor, mirroring the complexity of the society it portrays.

The film explores the repercussions of political dysfunction on the smallest details of personal and social life: delayed love stories, the weight of nepotistic governance, micro-humiliations at work, and temporary survival plans turning permanent. These tensions unfold through the relationship between sisters Soha and Rania, their family, and their entourage. The sisters' strong yet conflictual bond embodies two opposing ways of surviving a permanent state of emergency: withdrawing from reality or confronting it with relentless determination.

Set in Jounieh, where I grew up, the film emerges from a world I know intimately. Unlike the capital Beirut, youth in Jounieh felt isolated. My family rented an off-season apartment in Amwaj, a seaside compound. Like Soha's family, we always knew that, come summer, we would have to leave.

Television melodramas were deeply woven into this environment. People spoke about fictional characters as if they were family members, projecting onto the series, the lives they were never able to experience themselves.

In *Printemps*, familiar landscapes of seasonal displacement and imagined lives become a portrait of a generation learning to navigate a reality that never allows life to begin on time.



Michelle Keserwany
Producer

Producer's Note

The CNC Parcours d'Auteur fund gave Noel a full year to develop *Printemps* through writing, research, and work on the ground in Jounieh. This time was essential for the film to take shape from within the world it portrays, deepening its characters, locations, and social dynamics. Today, the project has a strong foundation and is ready to enter its next stage of development.

For the two of us, *Printemps* is a deeply personal project. Set in Amwaj Resort, where we once lived as a family, the film draws from the world we grew up around. Its universe is shaped by the public school, the local municipality, the churches, and the complex relationships between these institutions, families, and local politics, we know intimately, yet have rarely been represented on screen.

Our experience developing Michelle's first feature, *Amara*, and working with its international co-producers has given us the know-how to develop *Printemps* on strong foundations. With this film, Noel builds on the intimate sisterly tension and bold storytelling of *Les Chenilles* (Golden Bear, 2023), bringing these elements into a longer and more complex form.

We are deeply invested in protecting the specificity of Noel's vision while creating the right conditions for it to grow. We are building local and international partnerships to bring *Printemps* to life with the care, rigor, and freedom needed to remain true to the world it comes from.

BARR

Production Company profile

Barr is a production company founded in Lebanon by sisters Michelle, Angèle, and Noel Keserwany, following over a decade of socially engaged audiovisual work and their first short film, *Les Chenilles* (Golden Bear, 2023; El Gouna Golden Star, 2023). Barr is currently co-producing Michelle's first feature film, *Amara*, which is in the late development stage, in co-production with Tanit Films (France), Zentropa (Denmark), and X Filme (Germany). The company is also developing Noel's first feature film, *Printemps*, which is currently in the development stage.

Barr loosely translates to "raw land." The sisters seek to tell grounded local stories. Through their company, they build solid ground for developing and producing their own films locally, while expanding collaborations with international co-producers and reaching both local and international audiences.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
 Emad Eskander
Producer(s)
 Munthir Altuwayrib, Bakr Alduhaim

SHORRAB

Saudi Arabia

Log-line

In an era where you're considered irrelevant if you're not part of the social media culture, a disconnected 59-year-old family man disrupts the current scene of local Saudi hip-hop in an unconventional way...

Is it a First or Second Feature
 First Feature

Stage of Development
 Late Development

Total Budget
 \$2,000,000

Confirmed Financing
 \$20,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Blue Bus Entertainment

Previous Labs/Markets
 Saudi Film Festival

Film Needs
 Distributors, Sales Agents, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

Yaqoub is a man who has spent all 59 years of his life living what most would call a stable and respectable life. He is a dedicated finance lecturer, husband, and father. But as he is turning 60 and his looming retirement approaches, he finds himself grappling with a haunting question: Is this all there is? After years of routine and quiet obedience to the expectations of his society and family, Yaqoub feels like a ghost in his own life, unseen and unheard.

One night, in an unexpected twist of fate, Yaqoub stumbles upon the world of rap. At first, it's a joke—a way to amuse himself and break the monotony. But soon, his alter ego, "Shorrab", a masked, anonymous rapper, begins to gain traction online. His music, filled with unspoken thoughts and frustrations, resonates deeply with a generation he barely understands. As Shorrab's popularity rises, Yaqoub begins to develop an ego, taking bolder actions that shock his workplace and alienate his family. The people closest to him no longer understand the man he's becoming, and Yaqoub himself begins to lose sight of the balance between his anonymous success and the life he's lived for years.

However, as his actions spiral, Yaqoub comes to a realization, that he was seen all along by those who mattered. This newfound understanding forces him to confront the cost of his choices, both as Yaqoub and as Shorrab.

Director's Biography

Emad Eskander is a Saudi filmmaker whose career began in advertising, working as a creative before gaining experience at multinational companies including Unilever and P&G. His passion for film led him to leave the corporate world for a more creative path. Between 2013 and 2015, he wrote and directed "The 10th Floor" (Al Dor Al Ashir), a stop-motion series released on YouTube, followed in 2015 by "Sondouq", another YouTube series he wrote and directed. In 2019, he founded the writing studio Blue Bus Entertainment, producing marketing campaigns for companies such as STC, Subway, and Ideation. SHORRAB marks his feature directorial debut.

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Emad Eskander
Director

Director's Statement

While the logline may read as a mainstream comedy, SHORRAB is not that film. Most of my concepts return to elderly people. It took me years to understand what they once represented in my life, as guides, against what they have become: figures burdened by inferiority complexes and diminished relevance in today's world. In Saudi Arabia especially, a person past fifty is often assumed to have nothing left to discover, as though whatever was going to happen to them already has. That assumption is exactly what fascinates me about aged protagonists who go through life-changing experiences.

Through this film, I want to give the audience a glimpse into what people like this go through, and what they actually think. At the same time, it is not realistic to expect a younger generation, shaped by social media into believing the world revolves around them, to spontaneously grant elders their due respect. Elders need to be themselves and speak their minds, drawing on lives fully lived, even when they are wrong. What matters most is the dialogue between the two generations, not who is right.

With SHORRAB, we aim to plant these simple but meaningful insights in the audience's mind, while they laugh and enjoy the story along the way.



Munthir Altuwayrib, Bakr Alduhaim
Producers

Producer's Note

In late 2022, I sat with Emad and a group of colleagues as he casually shared the story of Shorrab. It struck a chord with everyone, especially me. The concept is quirky and unexpected, yet what resonated most was how it explores real insights into our lives through an unconventional narrative, locally, regionally, and globally. I knew this film had to be made.

Yaqoub, the protagonist, is someone I deeply relate to, and I believe many others will too. At some point, we all face the choice between a safe, conventional life and a risky, unclear path that could lead to either failure or fulfillment. It comes down to courage, the courage to take a leap of faith even at the risk of failure. Many people don't realize their untapped potential until they think it's too late, which is scarier than failure itself. This internal conflict is what makes Yaqoub's story so relatable.

Over the past two and a half years, I've had the privilege of working alongside Emad, witnessing his artistic vision across various mediums. His talent in ideation, storytelling, and music is unparalleled. Collaborating with Emad and Bakr on this project has been incredibly fulfilling, and together we are building a strong foundation to bring this film to life. I'm confident audiences will find it both entertaining and meaningful.



Production Company profile

Blue Bus Entertainment is a pioneering creative studio based in Saudi Arabia, specializing in conceptualizing and producing high-quality local content with global appeal. With a strong foundation in creative writing, branded content, film, and TV production, Blue Bus collaborates with top content creators to bring compelling stories to life.

Driven by innovation and storytelling expertise, the studio offers services in movies, TV shows, commercials, digital content, music production, and talent management. Working with major brands and talents to craft culturally resonant and impactful media.

Through collaborations with renowned influencers, artists, and brands, Blue Bus Entertainment continues to push boundaries, ensuring that Saudi content is recognized on the international stage.

Feature Documentary
Color
Hassaniya Arabic
93 min



Director(s)
 Ibrahim Nash'at
Producer(s)
 Elijah Stevens, Ibrahim Nash'at

THE GIFT OF BLINDNESS

Germany, USA

Log-line

In a village of the blind, a family planning to have a child is offered a cure, putting them at a crossroads of science and faith

Is it a First or Second Feature
 Second Feature

Stage of Development
 Pre-Production

Total Budget
 \$1,243,613

Confirmed Financing
 \$157,158

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Catapult Film Fund, Narrow Vision
 Endeavors, Rolling Narratives, FFA
 Development Fund, FFA Production
 Reference Grant

Previous Labs/Markets
 N/A

Film Needs
 Distributors, Private Funds, Regional
 Funds, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

In the remote Mauritanian desert, a community has been blind for nine generations. It is believed their blindness is a spiritual force that gives them the power to divine groundwater in this increasingly arid landscape. Word of their power has spread far beyond the village. Those in need of water seek their guidance, for a price, and those abroad give charity. However, scientists have recently discovered the cause of the community's blindness - congenital cataracts - and for the first time have offered a cure, but only in infancy. As husband and wife, Cheikhna and Naisha, plan to have another child, they face a profound choice: give their newborn sight or preserve the gift that sustains them - for survival and in spirit.

Director's Biography

Ibrahim Nash'at is an Emmy nominated Egyptian, Berlin-based filmmaker. His debut feature, Hollywoodgate premiered at Venice and Telluride in 2023, was shortlisted for the Academy Awards and IDA Awards, nominated for the German Film, DGA, Cinema Eye, and Peabody awards, won dozens of festival awards, and screened internationally. Nash'at holds an MA in Documentary Filmmaking from Met Film School, Germany. He is a member of the European Film Academy.

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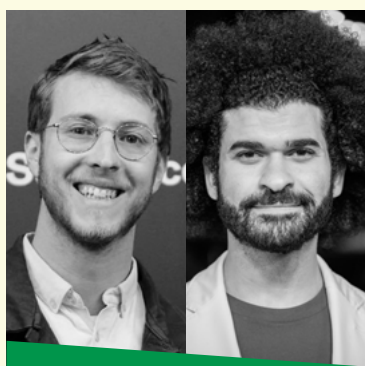
Ibrahim Nash'at
Director

Director's Statement

The Gift of Blindness weaves between a naturalistic, observational style and a magical realist approach, drawing on both vérité and sensory ethnography traditions. The film will be shot in an observational style, with no interviews, or imposed narrative. The camera will remain close to the families, allowing their daily lives to unfold naturally over seasons and years.

In parallel, the film will invite audiences into a space of myth and surreality. A village like an oasis. A blind tribe navigating the desert without canes or guidance. Men revered as seers of the unseen world. It will depict inverted realities without attempting to explain them. A world not of fiction, but one that challenges our assumptions of what we know. These observations will be heightened to a mystical space through rich, layered sound design, close studies of weather, light and darkness, distortions of the horizon line in the framing, and extended takes that distort our sense of time.

The camera will focus on placing the blind at the edge of the shot, creating a visual imbalance and a sense of disorientation. This composition mirrors their relationship with a world designed for sight, while also challenging the audience's assumptions about blindness. We aim to search for the most intimate moments to tell the story with the fewest words possible. Wide shots of the desert will contrast the intimacy of family life, showing both the immensity of their world and the fragility of survival within it.



Elijah Stevens, Ibrahim Nash'at
Producers

Producer's Note

I worked with Ibrahim on HOLLYWOODGATE, through which I developed a strong creative collaboration with Ibrahim and came to know him as a diligent, hard-working, creative, and thoughtful director. He approaches his subjects with curiosity and openness, with rigorous preparation and a deep commitment to building trust. These qualities will be key to the success of THE GIFT OF BLINDNESS.

I was immediately drawn to the subject matter and story, particularly the interplay between human stories and technological/scientific ones. I have worked on a number of films over the years, that have explored the human elements of scientific stories, including TIME AND WATER (Sundance 2026), HUMBOLDT USA (Visions du Reel 2026), FIRE OF LOVE (Sundance 2022), and THE INVISIBLE EXTINCTION (CPH:DOX 2022). I look forward to bringing my story producing experience to this new narrative.

I also bring logistical and creative experience in producing observational, artist-driven documentaries shot over long periods of time, key elements in this film.

I have significant experience with financing and distributing documentaries on the global market. I have raised funds through co-productions, public funds, tax incentives, studios, grants, and private investment. I have successfully distributed films via festivals, theatrical release, streaming, broadcast and educational release. The rest of our team has also had tremendous track records with independent documentaries, and we will draw on our past experiences and relationships to finance and distribute this film.



Production Company profile

Rolling Narratives GmbH is an Emmy-nominated Berlin-based production company founded by Ibrahim Nash'at and Mehmet Elbanna. The company is dedicated to building bridges between cultures. Its work includes the Academy Award-shortlisted HOLLYWOODGATE (Venice / Telluride), also nominated for the German Film Awards and the Directors Guild of America Awards, as well as line-producing UNDER THE SKY OF DAMASCUS (Berlinale). Current productions include the documentaries THE GIFT OF BLINDNESS and A LOVING SOUL, while the fiction films KHALAS, THE QUIET WOMAN and LOYAL CITIZENS are currently in development.

Signpost Pictures is a production company in the US founded by Sara Dosa, Shane Boris, and Elijah Stevens, filmmakers behind Oscar, BAFTA, Peabody, DGA, and PGA Award-winning and nominated films. We tell stories about how humans make meaning with non-human nature, centering the sentience of the earth, and the political, social and geological processes that shape our relationships to it. We aim to spark wonderment, conjure connection, provoke critique and inspire new ways of seeing for a changing world. Our most recent film is TIME AND WATER, which premiered at Sundance in 2026 and released by National Geographic / Disney+.

Executive Producers - Shane Boris, Sara Dosa

Co-Executive Producers - Senain Kheshgi, Jameka Autry

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic, English, French, German
105 min



Director(s)
 Abdullah Alkhatib

Producer(s)
 Claire Chassagne

Co-Producer(s)
 Abdallah Al-Khatib

THE PESSOPTIMISTS

France, Palestine

Log-line

The Pessoptimists is a dark comedy following four Palestinians—from Lebanon, Syria, Haifa, and Jerusalem—whose travel documents land them in unexpected, absurd situations, until their paths eventually converge in Berlin with Sarah, a lawyer from Haifa.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 Second Feature

Stage of Development
 First draft of the script and work with Torino Lab

Total Budget
 \$2,000,000

Confirmed Financing
 \$80,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Shortlist for Doha Film Institute Grants

Previous Labs/Markets
 Bourse d'Aide au Développement of the 47th Cinemed Festival - Festival Cinéma Méditerranéen de Montpellier, France.
 TorinoFilmLab

Film Needs
 Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

It is a dark comedy about five Palestinians facing a shared obstacle: their travel documents, which block their simple dreams. Abdullah tries to enter a casino in Budapest, hoping to earn quick money to make his first film, but the three Xs in the nationality field of his passport stand in his way. Omar, a ship assistant captain, becomes stranded in the Mediterranean after his shipping company goes bankrupt, unable to return to Syria due to the war or travel elsewhere because of his travel document. Jamal dreams of going to Turkey for a hair transplant to regain his confidence and appearance, but his simple plan is complicated when he tries to obtain a travel document. Hanna travels from Jerusalem to Germany via France to meet his girlfriend for the first time, but his bag containing his travel document is stolen. Their paths cross with Sarah, a lawyer from Haifa living in Berlin, who tries to defend them for crimes they did not commit, while we also discover her personal story.

Director's Biography

Abdallah Jamal Al-Khatib, born in Damascus in 1989, began his academic studies in sociology at the University of Damascus. He is currently continuing his studies in social work in Germany, where he lives and works as a writer, social researcher, and filmmaker.

In 2014, he was selected by the German magazine "Greenpeace" as "Peace Maker of the Year," and in 2016 he received the Swedish Human Rights Award.

In 2021, he directed his first feature documentary, Little Palestine, which received several awards and critical acclaim at various film festivals.

In 2023, he completed his first short film, Sokrania.

In 2026, he finished his first narrative feature film, which won the Best First Film Award at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Contact
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Abdallah Al-Khatib
Director

Director's Statement

Homeland is the place where none of this can happen.

Thirty-six years ago, I was born in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. I grew up in a world shaped entirely by displacement, and when I arrived in Germany, one thing had not changed: I was still a refugee, only carrying a travel document of a different color.

The Pessoptimists grew out of my own experiences and those of friends and Palestinians I know. It is a dark comedy about people struggling to achieve ordinary dreams while bureaucracy, borders, and political systems turn basic rights into privileges.

The film's multi-character structure reflects the fragmented reality of Palestinians dispersed across the West Bank, Gaza, the territories of '48, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the wider diaspora. Rather than five separate stories, these characters form one interconnected narrative about displacement, survival, and the search for dignity.

My previous films, *Little Palestine: Diary of a Siege** and **Chronicles from the Siege Time*, explored collective Palestinian experiences through documentary and fiction. My work in sociology and anthropology has further shaped my interest in stories where individual lives reveal broader social and political conditions.

I want to bring Palestinian refugee experiences outside Palestine to the center of the frame, using humor to approach a reality that is painful, absurd, and deeply human.



Claire Chassagne
Producer

Abdallah Al-Khatib
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

I have followed Abdallah's cinematic journey from the beginning with admiration and respect. His work is driven by lived experience and an unwavering commitment to the issues he explores. Abdallah does not tell stories; he embodies them.

Having moved from documentary to fiction, he has developed a distinctive sensitivity to form, structure, and emotional resonance. His ability to combine political urgency with poetic subtlety makes his work particularly powerful.

When Abdallah introduced **The Pessoptimists**, I immediately recognized its urgency and emotional weight. The film is not about refugees; it is a meditation on belonging, dignity, survival, and the absurd systems that shape people's lives. Most importantly, it is a story told from within: Abdallah is himself a refugee, bringing an intimate perspective that cannot be replicated from the outside.

The film's ambition to bring together different Palestinian communities within one interconnected narrative is rare and necessary. It offers a perspective on Palestinian refugees beyond Palestine that remains largely underrepresented in contemporary cinema.

Following Abdallah's previous film, *Chronicles from the Siege*, which achieved remarkable results despite extremely limited resources, I believe he is ready to take this exploration further, in scale and cinematic vision.

As a producer, I seek projects that matter—films that challenge, move, and remain with audiences. *The Pessoptimists* is exactly that.



Production Company profile

Claire Chassagne is a French film producer working at **Dolce Vita Films**, a Paris-based independent production company specializing in arthouse and international cinema.

She joined Dolce Vita Films in 2014, where she has been actively involved in the development, financing, and production of feature films and international co-productions. Her work focuses particularly on supporting emerging filmmakers and debut features, as well as fostering collaborations between French and international partners.

Chassagne plays a key role in guiding projects from development through production and festival distribution, contributing to the company's strong presence in the international independent film circuit.

Filmography (Producer / Co-producer)

2024 – *Girls Will Be Girls* (Producer)

International feature film presented at major film festivals, produced in collaboration with multiple international partners, including Dolce Vita Films.

2024 – *The Brink of Dreams* (Co-producer)

International co-production supporting emerging filmmakers and cross-border.

Feature Documentary
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Hamda Dhaouadi
Producer(s)
Aida Schlaepfer Alhassani

THE SACRED THIRST

Switzerland

Log-line

A Tunisian father travels to Karbala to fulfil his dream of playing Husayn in the sacred Tashabih. Instead, he is cast as Husayn's killer, while his nine-year-old son performs on the opposing side.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Early Pre-Production

Total Budget
\$232,300

Confirmed Financing
\$15,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Da-Production / INSIDE Production

Previous Labs/Markets
Pitching Lab Dothouse Tunisia

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals

Synopsis

In Monastir, Tunisia, Salim divides his life between selling phone plans and quietly sustaining a Shiite community through gatherings, children's workshops and small performances about Husayn. His nine-year-old son Yahya grows up inside this shared world of handmade costumes, stories and play. For years, Salim has dreamed of entering the Tashabih in Karbala, Iraq, where thousands of people perform the death of Husayn during Ashura. He travels ahead of Yahya hoping to play Husayn, but the sacred roles are inherited and closed to outsiders. Instead, a troupe offers him the part nobody wants: Husayn's killer. Salim accepts the black armour and the role that reverses the dream he has shared with his son. When Yahya arrives, he prepares to play the young martyr Qasim on the opposing side of the same story. Father and son rehearse in the same dust, mourn in the same rooms and grow silently apart. During the Tashabih, Yahya falls as Qasim while Salim steps forward for the final killing blow. Afterward, they join the Arbaeen walk from Najaf to Karbala. On the road, exhaustion and the care of strangers create another way of being together. Yahya brings his father a cup of water and takes his hand. Back in Monastir, he begins to lead the community's children himself. The dream has not been fulfilled as Salim imagined it; it has changed hands.

Director's Biography

Hamda Dhaouadi is a Tunisian director and photographer from Kelibia. He studied cinematography at the Central University of Tunis and earned a master's degree in Film Directing from the Higher School of Audiovisual and Cinema (ESAC) in Gammarth. He made his directorial debut in 2022 with the short film *The Man Who Was Abandoned By God*, which screened at international festivals in Russia, Annaba and Kelibia. In 2024, he directed his second short film, *Blue*, co-produced with CinéFabrique Lyon and released in early 2025. *Blue* has had a notable festival run, including selections at the Golden Grape International Short Film Festival, Sétif Cinema Days, Cinemana Mare Nostrum and the Duemila30 Film Festival.

Contact
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Hamda Dhaouadi
Director

Director's Statement

The boundary between play and lived reality completely dissolves. Returning to Tunisia, I sought traces of this shared imagination within my own culture and eventually joined a discreet Shiite community near my hometown. Sitting in their quiet gatherings without a camera, I learned that faith and grief there are not public spectacles, but intimate daily practices. This film stems from a direct pact with the community. I am fascinated by how sacred traditions operate, how roles are inherited and what happens when an outsider attempts to step inside a fourteen-century-old tradition. Rather than documenting from a distance, the project explores the psychological cost of sacred performance and the weight actors carry when embodying complex historical figures. Cinematographically, the project balances two visual points of reference: the quiet, earthy simplicity of North African domestic art and the dense, vibrant staging of Islamic miniatures. Through a static camera, patient framing and immersive sonic architecture, the film observes human gestures, collective breath and atmospheric soundscapes. The Sacred Thirst explores how sacred art inhabits human bodies, how beauty emerges from tragedy and how inherited dreams are passed down across generations.



Aida Schlaepfer Alhassani
Producer

Producer's Note

The Sacred Thirst centres on a powerful dramatic inversion in documentary cinema: a foreign performer is denied the hero's role in Karbala's sacred theatre and is cast as the executioner opposite his young son. The story engages with the core of Iraqi heritage. It follows a Tunisian father who travels to Iraq to fulfil his dream of playing Imam Husayn, only to be given the role of Husayn's killer on the opposing side of the battlefield. The film addresses profound themes of sacrifice, conscience and moral responsibility. It examines how a story central to regional consciousness relies on someone willing to embody the ultimate villain so that the wider narrative of refusing to submit to injustice can be told. This resonance is especially urgent because genocide remains tragically present in the world today. Produced by Da-Production (Zurich) alongside Inside Production (Tunis), the project bridges the Arab world and Europe. It translates complex cultural traditions for international audiences, drawing on decades of cross-regional filmmaking, an extensive professional network and dedicated production experience to bring this story to the screen with cinematic care.



Production Company profile

Da-Production (Zurich, Switzerland), founded in 2003 by producer-director Aida Schlaepfer Alhassani, is an independent Swiss company specialising in documentaries and cross-cultural cinema between Europe and the Arab world. Focused on human rights, social justice and author-driven narratives, it combines local access with European co-production standards across Switzerland, Iraq, Egypt and the MENA region. For "The Sacred Thirst", Aida Schlaepfer Alhassani leads production, drawing on her experience in artistic development, international festivals and culturally engaged filmmaking. She is also co-founder and co-president of the International Arab Film Festival Zurich.

Selected filmography: "Souls in Transit" (2021) — qualified for the 95th Academy Awards; Best Human Rights Film, World Cannes Film Festival; screened at the European Parliament. "NouN" (2015) — Best Arab Film, Muscat; Best Film, Tangier. "Gangs of Baghdad" (2007) — investigative feature documentary. "Marionette" — Bronze Medal, Houston International Film Festival.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic, French
110 min



Director(s)
Mehdi M. Barsaoui

Producer(s)
Habib Attia, Marc Irmer, Flaminio Zadra

TO THE CORE

Tunisia, France, Italy

Log-line

After returning to the country where he was abandoned as a child, a renowned surgeon sees his carefully built life unravel following an incident involving his son, sending him on a deeply personal journey into the wounds of his past.

Is it a First or Second Feature
Not First or Second Feature

Stage of Development
Development

Total Budget
\$2,860,300

Confirmed Financing
\$94,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
N/A

Film Needs
Distributors, Co-Producers, Private
Funds, Regional Funds

Synopsis

Sam (58) is a professor of medicine in Paris, specializing in reconstructive surgery. He lives a carefully ordered life with his wife Valeria (57) and their seventeen-year-old son, Adam. When Sam accepts an opportunity to return to Tunisia, the country where he was born and abandoned by his biological parents, he believes he is opening a new chapter in his life: professionally, personally and perhaps even intimately. But one winter night, an incident involving Adam shatters the fragile balance of the family. As Sam and Valeria struggle to protect their son, a series of decisions draws them into a situation they can no longer control. What begins as an attempt to preserve the life he has built gradually forces Sam back toward the life he left behind, confronting a buried past and the wounds he has spent decades trying to escape.

Director's Biography

Born in Tunis in 1984, Mehdi M. Barsaoui graduated in film editing in Tunis before earning a degree in film directing in Italy. He directed three short films that screened and received awards at numerous international film festivals. His first feature film, *A Son* (2019), premiered in the Official Selection of the 76th Venice International Film Festival, where it received two awards. Released in around twenty countries and awarded at festivals worldwide, the film became the first Tunisian feature film to win a César Award in France. His latest feature, *Aïcha* (2024), also premiered in the Official Selection of the Venice International Film Festival before screening at numerous international festivals and being released in several countries. Mehdi is currently writing his third feature film.

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Mehdi M. Barsaoui
Director

Director's Statement

I have very few memories of my early childhood. What remains is a sense of absence, something I sensed before I could understand it. Over time, I came to understand that some wounds leave invisible fractures within us, ones we carry for the rest of our lives. I believe my cinema was born from that fracture. In *A Son*, I unconsciously explored the lengths to which a parent will go to protect a child. Then I became a father. This experience deeply shaped my thinking about *Aïcha*, my second film. Film after film, I realized I kept returning to the same subject: the bond between parents and children, what shapes us and ultimately defines us. With *To the Core*, I want to explore the wounds of childhood as a shockwave that reverberates throughout an entire life. These invisible wounds are not only psychological; they can leave a physical memory that shapes the way we love, fear, and move through the world. I see *To the Core* as a journey into the deepest layers of a man. A journey that forces him to confront his past, until he reaches himself.



**Habib Attia, Marc Irmer,
Flaminio Zadra**
Producer

Producer's Note

It is with great enthusiasm that we present *TO THE CORE*, the third feature film by Mehdi M. Barsaoui. Following the remarkable critical and audience reception of *A Son* (2019) and *Aïcha* (2024), continuing our collaboration with Mehdi feels like both an obvious artistic choice and a crucial professional step. Our previous collaborations have established Mehdi's cinema on the international stage. Both films had their world premieres in the Official Selection of the Venice Film Festival, before enjoying wide theatrical releases and receiving prestigious awards. These successes confirm the universal resonance and the distinctive strength of the director's cinematic voice. *TO THE CORE* represents the culmination of a reflection that began with his previous films, once again delving into the intimate and profound complexities of parenthood, belonging and identity, while this time exploring the raw emotional territory of abandonment through a fresh and powerful perspective. We are fully committed to bringing this ambitious project to fruition and to devoting all our energy to sharing Mehdi M. Barsaoui's deeply moving vision with audiences around the world. Together, we aim to deliver a grand international film that matches Mehdi's brilliant vision and our shared ambitions. It will be a generous piece of cinema that carries a distinct auteur voice capable of shining in major festivals, while remaining highly accessible to a wide audience for a strong worldwide theatrical release.



Production Company profile

Since 1983, CINETEFILMS has been one of the leading production companies in Tunisia and the Arab region. True to its editorial line and philosophy, the company focuses on fiction and documentary projects dealing primarily with contemporary sociocultural issues. Its productions as a main producer have been distributed worldwide and acclaimed and awarded at some of the most prestigious international festivals, including Cannes, Venice, San Sebastian and

Toronto. CINETEFILMS has had three films nominated for the Academy Awards: *Four Daughters* (2024), *The Man Who Sold His Skin* (2021) and *Brotherhood* (2020). Habib Attia, Managing Director of CINETEFILMS since 2007, was awarded the prestigious rank of Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters of the French Republic in 2021, in recognition of his career. Habib Attia has been a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences since 2025.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
86 min



Director(s)
 Mohamed Siam

Producer(s)
 Mohamed Siam

Co-Producer(s)
 Fady Atallah, Brandy Miller

WAITING FOR PARADISE

Egypt, Belgium, Sweden, Italy

Log-line

At 20, defiant Amber flees a dark past by staging fake conversions from Christianity to Islam in Cairo's mosques, conning believers to fund her escape to Europe.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 Second Feature

Stage of Development
 Late Development

Total Budget
 \$490,000

Confirmed Financing
 \$120,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Development Award, Siam Films
 Investments, Post-Production Services,
 Fee Deferrals

Previous Labs/Markets
 Malmö

Film Needs
 Private Funds, Regional Funds,
 Co-Producers, Markets and Labs,
 Distributors and Sales Agents

Synopsis

In the Nile Delta, a barefoot Amber runs through the fields to hop on a train, escaping to Cairo. Amber is a misfit, sharp-witted runaway from the countryside, drifting through Cairo's hidden underbelly, driven by one goal: escape to Europe, the promised land across the sea from Alexandria, where smugglers trade dreams for cash.

Desperate and running out of time, she devises a morally murky plan. Posing as a Christian converting to Islam, staging tearful testimonies and spiritual awakenings in mosques scattered across Cairo. Each performance is crafted to stir hearts and open wallets. But with every act, Amber loses track of the line between reality and her true self. Haunted by a past she refuses to name, and hardened by a city that doesn't make space for women like her, Amber crosses paths with other wounded souls and outcasts: Fairuz, a Sudanese refugee hiding her sexuality and much more than her skin color; Yakut, an animal chiropractor doubling as an underground pharmacist and all-hours fixer; and Morgan, aka Bazooka, a worn-down motel worker who sees through her tomboy defiance.

The scam unravels when Amber is recognized during a final performance. In a high-stakes race to the coast, with police closing in, Amber arrives at the smugglers' meeting point at Abu Qir port. There she must decide: cling to the masks that kept her alive, or face a haunting truth and a past she has long denied.

Director's Biography

Siam is an award-winning documentary and fiction filmmaker. His debut narrative feature, *My Father's Scent* (2025), won five awards at La Biennale di Venezia Final Cut, the Audience Award at Red Sea, El Gouna, and Carthage, among other 16 accolades. Siam built a documentary career directing *Whose Country?* (Sundance/ITVS, NYFF, Kino Lorber) and *AMAL* (Sheffield Jury Prize, IDFA Opening).

His film projects were selected at the Cannes Cinéfondation and La Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde. A Berlinale Talent and Sundance alumnus, and a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Siam is the co-producer of *MY FATHER AND QADDAFI* (Venezia 2025), *SINK* (Toronto 2025), and *JO MONTREAL* and *BIRTHDAY* - to be released in 2027, and the Executive Producer on *THE STATION* (Cannes 2026), *Chronicles From The Siege* (Best First Feature - Berlinale 2026).

Contact
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Mohamed Siam
Director

Director's Statement

What must a woman become to be seen, heard, or survive in today's Egypt? This cinematic journey is my deeply personal response to a burning question I've carried since childhood, raised by a resilient single mother. Amber exposes the dual reality of Arab women pursuing freedom in a patriarchal landscape: one visible, docile, tailored to men's egos and religious expectations; the other hidden, free, craving absolute emancipation.

Set in the moral grey zones of Cairo's secret corners that only come alive after dark. This film unravels the psychological cost of wearing survival masks. Amber thrives by shape-shifting into whoever the world forces her to be. With each performance, she loses track of her calculated con and her true self. Her sexuality, beliefs, appearance, and gender expression shift constantly. Visually, the film merges raw documentary grit with haunting magic realism. Navigating Cairo's exotic hidden night world, neon-lit mosques. Secret refugee networks. Animal clinics that treat stateless outcasts. Rundown motels. Hypnotic hammams & Zar rituals. All culminating at the silent liminal ports and flickering sirens where people wait for their promised paradise: Europe, a myth people die chasing.

As a filmmaker and migrant trained in psychology, I'm drawn to characters navigating fractured identities and the cost of escape. I draw on my documentaries and years of fieldwork tracking real women who vanish from the streets, resurfacing under new identities. This is guerrilla filmmaking: small budget and crew, real locations, mostly street-cast performers, raw intimacy.



Mohamed Siam, Brandy Miller
Producers

Fady Atallah
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

Migration is rarely a choice, often driven by a greater force in an uncertain world. Amber lives inside that uncertainty, cornered between an authoritarian, repressive society and the promise of hope elsewhere. Her odyssey is no fairy-tale escape; she must navigate the exploitation and dehumanization facing women migrants. To survive, Amber becomes a chameleon, reflecting a wider reality in Egypt where religion, gender, and power intersect to create duplicitous identities. Moving with a fierce survival instinct, her choices are morally murky, born from a deep need to find a way out.

Although rooted in Egypt, this story's relevance transcends borders. As global borders harden, the question of why people flee becomes desperately urgent, framing migration as an act of risk, necessity, and imagination, fueled by the belief that somewhere else offers another life.

Building on the trajectory of our previous collaboration, MY FATHER'S SCENT, its awards, funding, and co-productions- we leverage this momentum for our new film. Our ambition is a bold, entertaining, auteur-driven film. We are engaging experienced partners known for politically resonant, visually distinctive work, targeting tailored distribution across key territories. Backed by personal investments and in-kind services from co-productions, our small team shares a deep belief in this film and its universal resonance.



E U R A V A S I A M F I L M S

Production Company profile

AK Profile Founded in 2013, Cairo-based ArtKhana is an award-winning production company championing bold Arab and African cinema. Its acclaimed film slate has graced all top-tier festivals. The first film was *Whose Country?* NYFF, distributed by Kino Lorber. ArtKhana's projects were selected by Sundance Lab, Berlinale Programs, Venice Final Cut, and Cannes Cinéfondation. Backed by Cinereach, World Cinema Fund, Red Sea Fund, Sundance, Doha Film Institute, Sorfond, and OIF, the company's latest co-productions include: *SINK* (TIFF 2025), *MY FATHER AND QADDAFI* (Venice 2025), *CHRONICLES FROM THE SIEGE* (Best First Feature - Berlinale 2026), *EP in THE STATION* (Cannes 2026), and co-producing *JO MONTREAL* and *BIRTHDAY* - to be released in 2027.

Eurava is a Brussels-based production company working across Arab-European co-productions, focused on auteur-driven films exploring identity, displacement and contemporary social realities. Eurava was founded by Brandy Miller, who specializes in EU migration and cultural policy.

B-RETTA Film (also stylized as Berätta, meaning "to tell" in Swedish) is a Stockholm-based film production company founded by Fady Gamal Atallah and Youstina Demetry in 2020. Its mission is to bridge cultures through compelling storytelling. In addition to production, it provides educational services and screenwriting SaaS tools.

Feature Animation
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
 Sameh Alaa

Producer(s)
 Mark Lotfy

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES I SEE YOUR EYES

Egypt, Belgium

Log-line

A woman in a cramped Cairo neighborhood faces tragedy when her husband takes his life. Determined to transport his body to their distant hometown near the border, she embarks on a rugged journey, discovering self-reliance and her true self.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 First Feature

Stage of Development
 Mid-Stage of Development

Total Budget
 \$956,000

Confirmed Financing
 \$96,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Fig Leaf Studios; Doha Film Institute; Red Sea Souk; Dot On The Map

Previous Labs/Markets
 Red Sea Souk

Film Needs
 Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

Living in a cramped neighborhood on the edge of Cairo, a quiet, isolated woman in her forties feels lost without her husband of over twenty years, upon whom she has always depended. He spends his days working in a lonely sign workshop.

Then, he suddenly disappears. Days of searching through crowded streets end in heartbreak when she discovers the truth: he has taken his own life.

Left all alone with her grief, she carries the duty of taking his body back to their distant hometown near the border. With nowhere else to turn, she begs a cold, unfeeling mortuary truck driver, handing over every last thing she owns just to get him home.

As night falls, the trip transforms into a dreamlike, surreal psychological journey. Inside the moving truck, reality begins to blur under the vast desert night. Surrounded by darkness, the long highway turns into a floating space between life and death. In this hypnotic atmosphere, she slips into dreamlike states, confronting traumas, buried secrets, and the ghosts of her past.

Drifting between sleep and waking, she and the cynical driver share quiet confessions in the dead of night, forming a strange, tender bond in the middle of nowhere.

Traveling through rugged mountains far from anything they know, this surreal night strips away her fear. By the time morning finally breaks over her destination, she is a different person—discovering a powerful inner strength and learning, for the first time, how to stand on her own feet.

Director's Biography

Sameh Alaa is an Egyptian director and producer based between Cairo and Brussels. His first short film, FIFTEEN, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and won several international awards. His second short film, I Am Afraid to Forget Your Face, became the first Egyptian film to win the Palme d'Or for Best Short Film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2020. The film screened at major international festivals including San Sebastián, Clermont-Ferrand, Palm Springs, and Busan, and was later featured at the Museum of Modern Art. His work has been broadcast on Canal+, ARTE, and Shahid. His first animated short, S The Wolf, premiered at SXSW in 2025. He is currently developing his first feature film, When I Close My Eyes I See Your Eyes, developed at the Cinéfondation Residency and Ikusmira Berriak.

Contact
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Sameh Alaa
Director

Director's Statement

Women in our country still suffer from oppression and patriarchy. Even their mobility is restricted by a husband's accompaniment or permission. This shackles women's thoughts and makes them live without knowing their true selves. Our character is one of those women who only meets herself after the death of her husband.

I used to live near a public hospital. Women would come from remote villages, arriving before sunrise after exhausting journeys just to treat their children.

I also worked near an old steam-operated public bath. A case of debauchery was fabricated against the bath, and the police arrested its regulars under the charge of deviant sexual practices. Although the accusation was false for most people, society was harsh towards them upon their return. One of them could not bear the contempt and decided to commit suicide.

These two realities stayed with me: women forced to cross long distances with their children to seek care, and the imagined journey of a mother or wife carrying a rejected man's body back to his distant village.

In this film, my protagonist is not a victim but a survivor — a warrior who discovers her limits, tests them, and emerges victorious. As I reflect on this story, I am reminded of the countless women I have met — including my own cousin — who found their voices and broke their chains, showing us that even in the darkest moments, we can rise and become the heroes of our own stories.



Mark Lotfy
Producer

Producer's Note

I am deeply moved to be part of this project, which explores women's empowerment, self-discovery, and the complexities of toxic relationships. When Sameh shared the story, I felt a strong connection to its powerful message. The film's portrayal of a woman's journey toward independence and dignity resonated with me, and I believe it will resonate with audiences worldwide.

Through its nuanced storytelling, this film offers a unique perspective on the human experience.

I am excited to bring this story to life and share it with audiences, inspiring empathy, understanding, and positive change.

I believe this film has the potential to make a significant impact on our global conversation, and I am committed to ensuring it reaches as wide an audience as possible.



Production Company profile

Fig Leaf Studios is an Egyptian production company founded in 2005 by Mark Lotfy, a producer and director/writer. Based in Alexandria, Egypt, the studio focuses on supporting emerging filmmakers and has become one of the most prominent independent production companies in the region. They've produced notable films including *Souad* (2020), selected for the 2020 Cannes Official Selection, *I Am Afraid to Forget Your Face* (2020), which won the Short Film Palme d'Or at Cannes, *The*

Mother of All Lies (2023), which won the L'Œil d'Or and the Un Certain Regard Best Director Prize at Cannes, *Amplified* (2024), which received a Special Mention in Berlinale Generation Kplus, and *Khufu* (2026), which received the Pardino d'Argento (Silver Leopard) Arts3 Foundation Award at the 79th Locarno Film Festival.



روتانا ميديا
rotana media

في 2000+ لم

قناة 16



تُعد مجموعة روتانا ميديا

إحدى أهم المنظومات الإعلامية في المنطقة، وتضم روتانا ستوديوز التي تمتلك أكبر مكتبة سينمائية عربية بأكثر من 2,000 فيلم، وشبكة قنوات روتانا التي تضم 16 قناة متنوعة مثل روتانا خليجية، دراما، كلاسيك، وسينما؛ وقنوات متخصصة مثل الرسالة وLBC.



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من الفكرة... إلى الشاشة

SUPPORTING THE NEXT
GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS

Empowering Ideas. Creating Impact

FILMS IN POST-PRODUCTION



Feature Narrative
Color
French, Algerian Arabic, Russian, Chinese
110 min



Director(s)
Sofia Djama
Producer(s)
Jean Bréhat, Emma Binet
Co-Producer(s)
Patrick Quinet

A QUARTER TO THURSDAY

France, Algeria, Belgium

Log-line

Once upon a time, in an imaginary country where presidents never die, there were three friends, three bumbling idiots: Goussam, Cherifa Griffa, Riad and a dead Jack Russel named Trump.

Is it a First or Second Feature
Second Feature

Total Budget
\$1,156,878

Confirmed Financing
\$945,838

Confirmed Financial Partners
CNC Avance sur recettes, Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, Doha Film Institute, Institut Français d'Algérie, JHR Films, The Bureau Sales

Previous Labs/Markets
Venice Final Cut, El Gouna

Film Needs
Private Funds, Festivals, Tv Channels, Post Production Services

Synopsis

Once upon a time, in an imaginary country where presidents never die, there were three friends, three bumbling idiots: Goussam, Cherifa Griffa, Riad and a dead Jack Russel named Trump. Goussam, a young woman with lungs full of hope and a plump bottom, is pregnant.

Director's Biography

Born in Oran in 1982, Sofia Djama is an Algerian screenwriter and director. In 2011, she directed her first short film, *Mollement, un samedi matin*, an adaptation of one of her own short stories. Encouraged by the awards it received, including two at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, she went on to write her first feature film, *The Blessed*, which had its world premiere at Venice in 2017 and introduced actress Lyna Khoudri to international audiences. The film was nominated for a César Award in 2018, and at the Prix Lumière and awarded at Dubai, Best film. Since then, Sofia Djama has continued developing ambitious projects at the intersection of political satire and intimate storytelling, with *A Quarter to Thursday*.

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Sofia Djama
Director

Director's Statement

When writing *A Quarter to Thursday*, I was thinking of Algiers, Marseille and Rome, not for what they are, but for what I wanted to make of them: my filmmaker's playground. My film is a tale, a kind of fable, and for it to work, we need to invent an imaginary city where we lose ourselves, both geographically and temporally. The only identifiable thing is its "Mediterraneanness", neither South nor North, neither East nor West, only this azure blue basin with turbulent shores that bind us inseparably through our shared history.

My three characters are all in their forties, shaped by decades of civil war, corruption, and crushed hopes. They want to believe in the uprising shaking their city, but past failures have turned them into what I call "ultra-normalized" subjects, on the verge of nihilism. Disconnected from the upheavals around them, they seem incapable of prioritizing values and appear amoral and skeptical. From their point of view, the world is senseless, so they interact with it without seeking purpose or truth. Hence the absurd logic of burying a dachshund in a military barracks before dealing with an illegal abortion.



Jean Bréhat, Emma Binet,
Charles Meresse
Producers

Sofia Djama, Patrick Quinet
Co-Producers

Producer's Note

The singularity of the writing and the tragicomic strength of the script of Sofia Djama's second film, *A Quarter to Thursday*, immediately convinced us, driven by the director's sharp and uncompromising artistic vision. The film plunges us into "a strange country where presidents never die," a phrase that is as absurd as it is deeply political, and which encapsulates the film's tone: that of a contemporary fable, lucid and offbeat, rooted in a very concrete reality that it then shifts into an imaginary world.

Following *The Blessed* (Venice Film Festival 2017 Best Actress for Lyna Khoudri, Orizzonti section), Sofia returns with a second feature that shifts perspective and where a new imaginary emerges, where laughter becomes a form of resistance. *A Quarter to Thursday* is a coproduction between France (Tessalit and Furry Films) and Belgium (Artémis) and has received the national grants from CNC Avance sur recettes, as well as Federation Wallonie Bruxelles and production support from the Doha Film Institute and Institut Français of Algeria. JHR Films in France for distribution and The Bureau for sales. The film was shot in Marseille in May-June 2026, with an exceptional cast: Zita Hanrot, Grégory Montel, Hadjar Benmansour, Faouzi Bensaïdi, and Bulgarian actress Antonia Malinova. It is a composite film, with strong visual ambitions, with Pierre Aim as DOP, some animated sequences from Mehdi Bardi's painting and an important role for music with the composer Issam Krimi.



Production Company profile

TESSALIT Productions, based in Paris, is a film production company dedicated to excellence in independent cinema. Founded with the vision of promoting bold and innovative cinematic works, Tessalit stands out for its commitment to producing films that push the boundaries of traditional cinema, exploring profound and often controversial themes.

Jean Bréhat has produced 45 films with 11 official entries at the Oscars (best foreign language films) and 4 nominations, 12 awards at Cannes including 3 Palmes d'Or for Best actor and Best actress, 2 Grand Prix, 2 Silver Bear at Berlin and many other awards in major festivals. He has produced films by many directors such as Rachid Bouchareb, Bruno Dumont, Youssef Chahine, Ziad Doueri. And wants to produce new authors on current and societal themes.

FURYO Films is an independent production company founded in 2020, based in France. The company is born as the result of several years of complementary experience in various fields, in production, financing and distribution on an international level. The producers want to help bring to life the subtle vision of talented filmmakers on current and societal themes, across all formats, in all genres and countries. They care for the international dimension of the films, thus working closely with European and international partners.

Feature Documentary
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
 Muslim Habeeb

Producer(s)
 Huda Al Kadhimi, Muna Al Kadhimi

Co-Producer(s)
 Tamara Amir, Akram Sadoon

BESSO

Iraq

Log-line

When grief pushes Besso into the boxing ring, she discovers a path toward a new life. As her two sisters join her, the three women face fear, sacrifice, and family expectations in a shared fight for their dreams.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 First Feature

Total Budget
 \$250,000

Confirmed Financing
 \$90,677

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Iraqi Film Fund (Iraq), Blue Bee Productions during El Gouna Film Festival (Egypt), Iraqi Women's Rights Platform (Denmark), Qatar Film Community (Qatar), AFAC - Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (Lebanon)

Previous Labs/Markets
 AFLAMUNA Documentary Lab IRAQ 2025, A Showcase Spotlighting the Revival of Iraqi Creative Docs" at Sheffield DocFest 2025, CineGouna Funding-Development 2025, DFI First Cut Lab 2026, Baghdad Film Connection 2026

Film Needs
 Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Market and Labs, TV Channels, Post Production Services

Synopsis

Besso (17) lives with her family in Baghdad. A year after her friend died by suicide, the loss continues to haunt her. She finds an outlet for her anger and grief in boxing. What begins as a way of coping with pain gradually becomes a dream, and a space where she can test her strength and try to understand herself.

Besso silence and her struggle to express what lies within her reveal a complicated relationship with her father, Ali Al-Taweel, who carries his own unfulfilled dream of becoming a boxer. Caught between his aspirations and his daughter's ambitions, a distance grows between them, as each struggles in their own way to bridge the gap. Her sisters, Zahraa and Ruqayya, also enter the world of boxing, but each has a different vision of the future.

Zahraa remains committed to her academic ambitions, while Ruqayya, the youngest, tries to discover who she is beyond her family's expectations. In a home weighed down by economic, social and emotional pressures, their mother, Hanan, struggles to hold the family together and support her daughters, while carrying a dream of her own that remains unfulfilled.

Through the lives of this family, the film explores how dreams intersect with loss and constraint, and how a modest boxing ring can become a space for confrontation, self-expression and freedom. For Besso and her sisters, it becomes a place where they begin to imagine lives beyond the limits of the reality they inhabit.

Director's Biography

Muslim Habeeb is an Iraqi filmmaker, writer, and producer. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and further developed his practice through training at the Iraqi Independent Film Center and international workshops in Baghdad, Beirut, Paris, and Doha. His short documentaries, AS MY FATHER WAS (2017) and THE ROOF OF THE CITY (2019), screened at international festivals and received several awards, including Best Documentary at The Hague and Tyre Film Festivals. With over a decade of experience across more than 40 film productions, he has collaborated with BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera Documentary, and other international broadcasters. BESSO is his debut feature-length documentary.

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Muslim Habeeb
Director

Director's Statement

I have always been drawn to the question of how a dream is born. Do we choose our dreams, or does life sometimes lead us to them by chance?

In Baghdad, Banan and her two teenage sisters navigate a world of small possibilities, unspoken anger, and dreams that are still taking shape. Banan's journey into boxing did not begin as a clear ambition. She found her way to the ring almost by accident, but soon discovered a space where she could release her anger, confront her fears, and express what she could not put into words. Gradually, that space became a dream.

What begins with Banan slowly draws her sisters into the same world. Through boxing, the three girls find a language of their own and a way to imagine lives beyond the boundaries surrounding them. Yet each of them responds differently to the expectations placed upon them, revealing the complexity of growing up and searching for an identity. For me, BESSO is not a film about boxing. It is about the search for freedom within a confined reality, and about the human need to find something that gives us the strength to continue, to imagine, and to dream.

Through Banan's intimate journey, I want to explore how a seemingly accidental encounter can transform the course of a life. Every time she raises her gloves, she is not only preparing to face an opponent, but confronting something within herself and moving closer to the person she wants to become.



Huda Al Kadhim, Muna Al Kadhim
Producers

Producer's Note

For years, films about women's freedom in Iraq have often portrayed women primarily as victims. As an Iraqi woman born and raised in Baghdad, I have chosen to build my filmmaking career from within Iraq, committed to creating stories that reflect women's agency, complexity, and strength.

This is where BESSO begins. Three teenage sisters from a working-class neighborhood enter the world of boxing, not simply as a sport, but as a space for self-expression, resistance, and possibility. Their father, who once dreamed of becoming a boxer, supports their ambitions, creating a complex relationship between protection, expectation, and freedom.

My collaboration with director Muslim Habeeb began over five years ago at the Iraqi Independent Film Center in Baghdad. Our shared approach is rooted in trust, authenticity, and long-term engagement with the communities we film.

BESSO is currently in production, primarily in Baghdad. Since 2024, we have worked closely with the family to establish a safe and ethical filming process, particularly given the girls' age and social context.

We are now completing financing through international co-production partnerships, with the ambition of reaching international festivals and audiences.

BESSO is ultimately a story about agency, identity, and the courage to redefine one's future.



Production Company profile

Founded in 2017 by producers Huda Al-Kadhim and Muna Al-Kadhim, **Ishtar Iraq Film Production** is an independent production company dedicated to developing and producing internationally oriented feature films and creative documentaries. Headquartered in Iraq with a second office in Jordan, the company serves as a dynamic platform for international co-productions, connecting the Middle East with the global film industry.

Ishtar Iraq has built a strong international reputation through acclaimed productions, including *MOSUL 980*, *HANGING GARDENS*, *OUR RIVER ... OUR SKY*, and *THE BLIND FERRYMAN (AL BASEER)*. The company provides comprehensive production services, including project development, production, executive production, line production, and production services for international co-productions, with a commitment to delivering high-quality, globally relevant cinema.

Feature Documentary
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
 Rama Abdy

Producer(s)
 Hazar Yazji

Co-Producer(s)
 Diana El Jeiroudi, Orwa Nyrabia

HOUSE NO. 7

Syria, Germany, Qatar

Log-line

In the shade of an old house in Damascus, three women build a free world inside four walls, and wait for the chance to leave it.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 First Feature

Total Budget
 \$490,654

Confirmed Financing
 \$172,736

Confirmed Financial Partners
 Arab Fund For Arts And Culture AFAC,
 Doha Film Institute (DFI) , International
 Media Support IMS, The Cultural
 Resource, Ettijahat Independent Culture,
 Chicken & Egg Films.

Previous Labs/Markets
 CineGouna funding, Centre d'écriture
 cinématographique (CÉCI), EURODOC
 Creative Producers Lab, CIRCLE
 Women Doc Accelerator Lab, Points
 North Fellowship, Between Women
 Filmmakers Caravan- BWFC, No Nation
 Films Fellowship, Qumra- Doha Film
 Institute, CPH:DOX Forum, Montpellier
 Mediterranean Film Festival (Cinemed)
 professional encounters.

Film Needs
 Distributors, Private Funds, Regional
 Funds, Festivals

Synopsis

In a weathered old house in Damascus's ancient Bab Touma quarter, three young women, Rama, Marah and Lilian, find a new home. Each has run from something: a father's house, a coastal village, a marriage waiting for her. Over three years, as Syria moves through the final chapter of Assad's regime and into its uncertain aftermath, they build a small world of their own: dancing through blackouts, trading dark jokes, dreaming out loud about futures they're not sure they'll get to have. Rama films all of it and lives inside it, and their bond becomes something like family: steady, funny, fiercely protective. But life keeps pulling at the seams, visa papers, family expectations, the tug of elsewhere. One by one, Marah and Lilian begin to leave, while Rama lingers, unsure whether staying is loyalty or fear. Alone, she starts filming the next women who arrive to fill the empty rooms, and wonders if she's watching a new beginning, or the same story finding new women to hold it.

Director's Biography

Rama Abdi is a director of photography, editor and independent director from Damascus, Syria. She began her filmmaking journey in 2018, working across commercial, journalistic and cinematic productions as a camerawoman and director. In 2022 she directed her first short documentary, Fish Dance, and now she's working on her first feature-length documentary House No.7.

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Rama Abdy
Director

Director's Statement

My earliest memories of Damascus are of small rooms, and of watching the women around me learn to live inside them. In 2018 I left my family's home determined to build something different. What I built was a life in a shared house in the old city, with two women who became my closest friends and, eventually, the protagonists of this film. We had come from different places and different lives, and we wanted the same thing: room to decide for ourselves.

House No. 7 was the first home the three of us chose, and it held a liberty impossible outside it. I started filming to understand how that liberty narrowed, slowly, into a form of confinement, and how, as women, as Syrians, a generation exhausted by tragedy and conflict can still find strength in each other. This film is the record of that House, their story as much as mine; three women who built a fragile independence inside the same walls, and watched it come apart together.

That is why the camera never leaves the house. Everything is filmed within this one Damascene home, and in the rare moments we step out, the outside comes with us. The confinement is not a limitation; it is the form of the film. A home closed to the street, open around its courtyard, built for an extended family and left to three women becomes a character, and its emptiness the map of what we felt there.



Hazar Yazji
Producer

Diana El Jeiroudi, Orwa Nyrabia
Co-Producers

Producer's Note

House No. 7 is a unique film to me, both as a woman and as a Syrian. It has an extraordinary sense of access, and it refuses to generalise. It does not explain Syria, womanhood, or post-war life in the abstract; it stays inside one house, with three women, and lets everything it has to say emerge from that specificity.

What strikes me most about Rama's work is her ability to carry heavy subject matter with wit, warmth and profound humanity. This is not a film about suffering; it is a film about connection as a means of survival. That sensibility carries into the visual language of the film itself: an artistic, intimate eye that lingers close to its subjects, finding beauty in the frame even in the most quotidian moments. Rama's perspective, as a Syrian woman who has lived this story, lends the film an authenticity impossible to manufacture. Her subjects do not perform for the camera; they live beside it.

I view this project as both artistically ambitious and pragmatically viable, and that viability rests on the team we have built around it. Filmed over three years in Damascus, House No. 7 is now in post-production: the material exists, and the film will be found in the cutting room. Working with editor Qutaiba Barhamji and co-producers Diana El Jeiroudi and Orwa Nyrabia, all of whom bring extensive experience carrying Syrian stories to international audiences, ensures a grounded post-production process capable of sustaining the intimacy and visual care the material demands.



Production Company profile

HARA Films is an independent documentary production company founded in Damascus after the fall of the regime by producer Hazar Alyazji and director Rama Abdi. The company aims to produce author-driven documentaries rooted in Syrian life, with themes focusing on pressing social issues in the region.

The company is currently in post-production on House No. 7 (dir. Rama Abdi), a feature documentary co-produced with **No Nation Films** (Berlin).

Feature Narrative
Color
French and Arabic (Tunisian)
98 min



Director(s)
Yann Rabanier
Producer(s)
Sophie Roudaut
Co-Producer(s)
Imed Marzouk

IBRAHIM'S VOICE

France, Tunisia

Log-line

Ibrahim, a solitary man who heals others by singing at the cost of his own health, meets Nour amid the city's unrest. Grieving and lost, she finds healing in their fragile bond and helps him choose life.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Total Budget
\$1,295,993

Confirmed Financing
\$908,304

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
CNC, Cinemage, FranceTV Distribution
(international sales)

Film Needs
Distributors, Co-Producers, Private
funds, Festivals, TV Channels, Post
Production Services

Synopsis

In a Middle Eastern city, Ibrahim, a mysterious healer with a cleft lip, secretly visits Saïda, an elderly woman. Through a haunting song, he puts her to sleep and inexplicably cures her. Saïda's nurse, Nour, disturbed by what she witnesses, tracks Ibrahim down and becomes fascinated by his strange, solitary existence.

She also wants him to heal Mohamed, the father of her late husband.

Living hidden away in a dark apartment, Ibrahim archives traces of the people he heals. But his gift is destroying him: a medical examination confirms that one more healing session could kill him. Pushed to continue by the doctor who exploits him, he collapses after treating another patient. Nour cares for him, and a fragile bond begins to grow between them.

When police violence erupts after a nightclub raid, Nour and Ibrahim flee the city together. Nour seizes the opportunity to take Ibrahim to Mohamed and Khadija's place in the south. Gravely ill, Mohamed refuses Ibrahim's healing powers and instead encourages him to stop sacrificing himself for others. The next day, news spreads that the political leader has fled the country. Ibrahim drives Nour back to the city, now overtaken by celebration. She joyfully disappears into the crowd. Returning home to his devastated apartment, Ibrahim finally opens his shutters and lets the outside world back in.

Director's Biography

Yann Rabanier is a French of Tunisian origins portrait photographer whose work has appeared on the covers of Libération, Télérama, The New York Times, Vanity Fair, and Le Monde. He has created portraits for the Cannes Film Festival (2011–2024) and the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles. His work has been exhibited at Paris Photo, the Martell Foundation, and Amnesty International. He teaches regularly at the Arles Photography Festival and ETPA. Ibrahim's Voice starring Dali Benssalah and Lyna Khoudri marks his debut as a film director.

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Yann Rabanier
Director

Director's Statement

As a portrait photographer, I felt the limits of still imagery and turned to cinema for more expansive storytelling.

Ibrahim's Voice began with a memory: when my daughter Fleur couldn't sleep, simple improvised melodies soothed her instantly. That spark became Ibrahim—a man who sings people to sleep and heals them. With co-writer Mehdi Ben Attia, we set this against a people awakening from political lethargy. Ibrahim's gift is mysterious, perhaps supernatural. His power comes at a cost: a harelip, few words, and his patients' pain absorbed into himself, weakening him with each healing. His doctor, Nabil, exploits him for profit.

Nour's arrival—grieving, defiant—slowly transforms him. Mohamed offers Ibrahim the chance to live his own life.

Ibrahim lives in a sealed apartment with a camera obscura that inverts the world outside—an echo of his solitude. At the end, his silhouette finally projects right-side up: he has rejoined the world.

Light and sound carry the film's inner life. Cinematographer Antoine Héberlé renders light as emotion, in a soft, faded, nostalgic style. Composer Bachar Mar-Khalifé builds an organ-based score shifting from minor to major, and crafts Ibrahim's voice with actor Dali Benssalah.

Rooted in the Maghreb, my family's ancestral land, this journey traces Ibrahim's slow reawakening through silence, conflict, and connection.



Sophie Roudaut
Producer

Imed Marzouk
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

Yann, a celebrated portrait photographer, painter and sculptor, has been nurturing this project for several years, and we're thrilled to support such a richly creative vision on his first feature.

The script was a 2024 Screenplay Award finalist, selected from 200+ submissions. We shot 28 days in Tunisia : 24 in Tunis, 4 in the desert between Tozeur and Tataouine. Dali Benssalah stars as Ibrahim, Lyna Khoudri as Nour. We assembled a talented crew: first AD Nasreddine Ben Maati (Mektoub My Love), sound recordist Aymen Labidi (Red Path, In a whisper), script supervisor Safe Messadi (Hedi), cinematographer Antoine Héberlé (Bik Eneich), editor Sandie Bompar (Michael Kohlhaas), and casting director Youna de Peretti (The Rapture).

Composer Bachar Mar-Khalifé is scoring the film and shaping Ibrahim's singing voice with Dali—one recurring theme running throughout, in the spirit of the film Paris, Texas.

We're very excited to pursue this journey and can't wait to share the film with the audience.



Production Company profile

LE GRAND SAUT PRODUCTIONS was founded in 2023 by Sophie Roudaut. She gained industry experience working at Wild Bunch Distribution, Unifrance, and in international sales at SND (M6 Group) and Upside (Havas). She then worked for producer Saïd Ben Saïd for six years, collaborating on the production, distribution, and international sales of over ten feature films (Benedetta, Passages, Frankie, Bacurau...). In 2024 she was selected to participate in the Rotterdam Lab dedicated to emerging producers. In 2025, she teamed up with TV fiction production company Perpetual Soup. With Le Grand Saut Productions she produced three short films and one feature film. She received in 2026 the France Televisions Best Young Producer Award.

PROPAGANDA PRODUCTION was founded in 2002 by producer Imed Marzouk and director Nejib Belkadhi. Propaganda Productions have built its reputation as one of the leading names in film production in Tunisia with the goal to introduce a modern, innovative vision to the region's audiovisual production industry.



Feature Documentary
Color
Arabic
70 min



Director(s)
Rama Ayasra
Producer(s)
Asmahan Bkerat

LANDWARDS

Jordan

Log-line

An elderly shepherd wanders the mountains of his ancestral homeland, paying rent for the land his family lost, as his fading world becomes a portrait of Jordan's disappearing rural memory.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Total Budget
\$255,000

Confirmed Financing
40%

Confirmed Financial Partners
JORDAN FILM FUND, AFAC, SDI, DOK.fest
München, Thessaloniki Agora Docs

Previous Labs/Markets
Edinburgh Pitch, Thessaloniki Agora
Docs, Amman Film Industry Days, DOK.
fest München, Sunny Side of the doc,
Doc Edge

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Private
Funds, Regional Funds, Festivals, Post
Production Services

Synopsis

Abu Tareq has spent seventy years walking the same mountains and valleys in the Jordanian countryside. Every morning he herds his sheep and tends the fields that feed them. Yet the land he was born in, where his parents are buried, no longer belongs to him. Each year he must collect enough money to pay rent to the owners of his ancestral land.

Abu Tareq possesses an extraordinary sensitivity to the world around him. He speaks of visions that arrive before events unfold, intuition of a man whose relationship with the land reaches beyond the visible.

As drought, debt, urban expansion, and political constraints make farming increasingly difficult, Abu Tareq's way of life slowly fades. His daily routines become acts of quiet resistance against a landscape that is disappearing beneath buildings and neglect.

Through one shepherd's life, the film reflects on what remains when people lose not only the land, but the faith, knowledge and identity rooted within it.

Director's Biography

Rama Ayasra is a Jordanian filmmaker, with a BA in Digital Filmmaking. She has written and directed several short films. Her narrative short "Cadence of the Valley" screened at more than 20 international festivals and won over 10 awards. She is currently directing several projects, including her debut feature documentary, "Landwards".

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Rama Ayasra
Director

Director's Statement

My father who is now a neurosurgeon, used to farm wheat with his parents in their village. I grew up in the capital city Amman, disconnected from that world, as if agriculture belonged to another generation.

Meeting Abu Tareq changed the way I understood the relationship between people and nature. He does not simply live on the land; he listens to it. He reads the sky, notices seasonal signs in the soil, and even leaves a share of his harvest for ants and birds. Spending time with him felt like finally meeting my grandfather who died before I was born.

What moves me most is the contradiction at the center of his life. He devotes every day to caring for land that no longer belongs to him. He farms it, grazes his sheep upon it, and visits the graves of his parents there, yet every year he must sell part of his herd to pay rent for simply remaining there.

Through an observational approach, "Landwards" allows time for silence, landscapes, and melancholy to reveal themselves poetically. Rather than explaining rural life, I want audiences to experience its rhythms and feel what is disappearing alongside it. Through Abu Tareq, I find myself reaching toward a heritage I inherited without ever truly knowing.



Asmah Bkerat
Producer

Producer's Note

"Landwards" is an urgent, necessary documentary examining vital global questions through the local realities of Jordan, addressing environmental erosion and the quiet struggle to preserve identity amidst rapid change. Though rooted in a specific landscape, its universal resonance speaks to audiences worldwide. This project is deeply personal to me, echoing core themes I have long been interested in.

The film is currently in the final stages of production while actively editing in parallel. We are on track to complete the film by 2027. Following completion, our strategy centers on an international festival run to generate critical acclaim and visibility. We will partner with a sales agent and key distribution partners to maximize the film's reach globally.

"Landwards" possesses immense potential to connect with diverse audiences and challenge perspectives. I have no doubt Rama will bring this vital story to life with the sensitivity, artistry, and uncompromising impact that define her cinema.



Production Company profile

Based in Jordan, Arkima Films is an independent production company dedicated to powerful storytelling in fiction and documentaries.



Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic (Tunisian Dialect)
100 min



Director(s)
Housseem Sansa
Producer(s)
Housseem Sansa
Co-Producer(s)
Sahbi Kraiem

OF DEBT AND MONEY

Tunisia

Log-line

Even when a fall at work becomes his lifeline, Ammar, a Tunis bricklayer, must still wrest it from a system completely indifferent to his plight.

Is it a First or Second Feature

First Feature

Total Budget
\$563,000

Confirmed Financing
\$433,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Ministry of Cultural Affairs Tunisia/
National Centre for Cinema and Image
Tunisia/Arab Fund for Arts and Culture
(AFAC)/International Organisation of La
Francophonie (OIF)

Previous Labs/Markets
Cairo Film Connection (2024) - Chabaka
(2023)

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-
Producers, Private Funds, Regional
Funds, Festivals, Market Labs, TV
Channels

Synopsis

Ammar, a mason in his fifties living in Tunis, survives a severe fall at his workplace.

Against all odds, this accident opens up a window of opportunity: the chance for a possible fresh start. The compensation he hopes to receive could allow him to temporarily escape his precarious situation and, above all, wipe out a debt that has been gnawing at him for over a year.

But to obtain it, Ammar must face a true obstacle course: Kafkaesque administrative hurdles, an exhausting quest for his medical records, and increasingly bitter concessions.

As he moves forward against the wall of a deaf system, it turns out that Ammar is secretly preparing an entirely different project, a radical undertaking that, curiously, no one around him seems to notice...

Director's Biography

Housseem Sansa is a Tunisian director and screenwriter. After studying cinema, he began his career as an assistant director and creative in the advertising industry. His first film, "Naufrage", is a short documentary made in Paris. He then directed two short fiction films, "En attendant demain" and "Hommage".

In 2023, he founded his production company, Incognito Films, through which he produced the documentary "Nadia's Harmony" for Al Jazeera Documentary, as well as his first feature fiction film, "Of Debt and Money", currently in post-production.

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Housseem Sansa
Director

Director's Statement

In a post-revolutionary Tunisia marked by disillusionment and social fractures, "Of Debt and Money" follows Ammar, a bricklayer facing an economic and human reality that gradually crushes him.

The city becomes a reflection of the social tensions and isolation that permeate the daily lives of its inhabitants. Through Ammar's status as a marginalized individual, as well as his trade as a mason –a symbol both of urban construction and fragile destinies– I seek to bring visibility to the silent struggles that many face in the shadows, largely unnoticed by society.

I also wish to question individual responsibility in the face of the disillusionment currently dominating Tunisia, exposing a dysfunctional system that nevertheless continues on its course.

By filming Tunis, where I was born and raised, I am also seeking a sense of reconciliation, with the city and with myself. This explains why I chose to tell Ammar's story rather than that of another character among the ensemble in the film's narrative. With Ammar, I share a great deal, starting with the condition of living on the margins due to my status as an artist.

This quest for reconciliation and the desire to give form to these muted voices constitute my true motivation. My intention is to approach this through a realistic and intimate style, using restrained staging and a dark yet deeply human tone, in service of a story about survival that invites empathy and solidarity, the lack of which forms the central theme of the film.



Housseem Sansa
Producer

Sahbi Kraiem
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

Driven by passion and a firm belief in independent cinema, I founded my own company to bring "Of Debt and Money" to life. Faced with the structural challenges of financing a debut feature, I chose not to wait indefinitely. As both director and producer, I took the calculated risk of moving forward by waiving my artistic fees and reinvesting them directly into production.

Thanks to the decisive support of our institutional partners: the Tunisian Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF), and AFAC, alongside crucial in-kind contributions from our co-producers, we successfully completed principal photography despite an incomplete financing plan.

Today, after six years of development and perseverance, the film exists. We are no longer presenting a promise or a script, but a tangible work currently in post-production.

We are now entering the final stretch. To bring the film to completion and ensure its international outreach, we need to complete post-production (picture finishing, color grading, sound design, mixing...) and establish a strategic festival and distribution roadmap.

We are actively seeking partners, sales agents, and co-producers who share our artistic vision to join us in completing this final chapter and bringing the film to its audience.



Production Company profile

Incognito-Films is a Tunisian film production company founded in 2023. Its approach relies on the thorough development of each project, an essential step to ensure the quality and depth of cinematic works. The company is dedicated to producing films that highlight the richness and diversity of Tunisian culture, addressing industry challenges with authenticity and narrative innovation.

Incognito-Films specializes in the creation of documentaries, fiction, and hybrid projects that tell captivating stories deeply rooted in Tunisian reality, aiming to reach a broad international audience.

REHLA is a Tunisian film production company dedicated to supporting projects driven by distinctive voices and contemporary forms of storytelling, with a particular focus on emerging authors and new generations of filmmakers. Its editorial vision is rooted in the diversity of narratives, forms, and perspectives, with a commitment to championing cinema that is free, bold, and authentic, grounded in local realities while engaging with universal questions.



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EGYPTIAN VOICES



Feature Documentary
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Mahmoud Rashad
Producer(s)
Amir El-Shenawy

DINA: THE LAST WOMAN DANCING

Egypt

Log-line

Denied the stage she has sought for decades, Egypt's most celebrated belly dancer embarks on a final quest to perform at Cairo Opera House before retirement. Her journey becomes a reflection on fame, womanhood, sexuality, and a changing Egypt.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
In-Development

Total Budget
\$341,000

Confirmed Financing
\$45,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Digital Tales Productions, Personal Investment

Previous Labs/Markets
N/A

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

At 62, Dina, Egypt's most iconic belly dancer, is preparing for the final performance of a career spanning more than four decades. Before retiring, she is determined to achieve one last goal: to perform at Cairo Opera House, a stage that has remained closed to her for over twenty years despite her appearances at some of the world's most prestigious opera houses and cultural venues.

For Dina, this is more than a personal ambition; it is a fight for recognition. As conservative social currents reshaped Egyptian society from the 1980s onward, belly dancing became increasingly marginalized, caught between its status as a celebrated cultural tradition and the stigma surrounding female performers. Dina hopes her final performance will affirm the art form's place within Egypt's cultural heritage.

Following her in the present, the film revisits defining moments of her life and career, from her rise to international fame to the 2001 sex-tape scandal that threatened her career. Through intimate access, archival material, and personal reflection, Dina's story becomes a lens through which to explore four decades of social, cultural, and political transformation in Egypt.

Director's Biography

Mahmoud Rashad is an Egyptian filmmaker, photographer, and visual storyteller. He studied Theatre at the American University in Cairo before spending fifteen years as a makeup artist in Egypt's film and television industry, building close creative relationships with leading actors and public figures.

He later transitioned to photography and documentary filmmaking. Rashad is the creator, writer, and director of *Om El Donia*, a successful documentary series exploring Egyptian history that reached audiences across the Arab world. He has also contributed to international documentary productions for PBS and other history-focused broadcasters, and develops historical and documentary content for broadcasters including National Geographic. "Dina: The Last Woman Dancing" is his debut feature-length documentary.

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Mahmoud Rashad
Director

Director's Statement

I still remember my uncle taking us to the Semiramis Hotel in Cairo to watch Dina perform. I was captivated by her costumes, music, and especially her facial expressions, which seemed to tell stories without words. Afterward, I watched her leave the hotel surrounded by assistants, admirers, and photographers, a diva who seemed to know exactly who she was.

Years later, I met Dina while working as a celebrity makeup artist. That work gave me access to a private moment before public figures faced the world: seated before a mirror, bare-faced and unguarded. This is the Dina I want to reveal; not only the icon, but the woman within it.

I later photographed her, and our images appeared on the cover of ELLE. Over the years, our relationship grew through trust, honesty, and mutual respect. As a filmmaker, returning to Dina feels natural.

To me, she represents resilience, self-determination, and the courage to remain herself despite judgment. Through her life, I see a larger story about contemporary Egypt: women, identity, family, religion, personal freedom, and the female body as both celebration and conflict.

As Dina approaches the final chapter of her career, I want to capture the woman behind the public image and explore the society that shaped her, and that she helped shape. Ultimately, this is a film about legacy, survival, and the price of remaining unapologetically yourself.



Amir El-Shenawy
Producer

Producer's Note

Throughout my career as a documentary filmmaker, I have been drawn to characters who challenge conventional ideas of belonging and identity. I have consistently been fascinated by individuals who occupy a unique place within society; people who are often misunderstood, marginalized, or perceived as different, yet whose lives reveal deeper truths about the communities around them. For me, these characters are not simply subjects; they are mirrors through which we can examine broader social, cultural, and political realities.

"Dina: The Last Woman Dancing" feels like a natural continuation of this journey. As one of Egypt's most iconic and controversial cultural figures, she has spent decades navigating admiration and criticism, fame and scrutiny, empowerment and marginalization. Her story embodies many of the questions that have shaped my filmmaking practice: Who gets to define cultural identity? How does a person maintain agency in the face of public judgment? What does it mean to remain true to oneself in a rapidly changing society?

As a producer, I am committed to supporting a film that goes beyond the public image of Dina to reveal the complexity, vulnerability, and strength of a woman whose life reflects four decades of transformation in Egypt.

I believe this film has the potential to resonate far beyond Egypt, offering audiences around the world an intimate portrait of a woman who has continuously fought to define her own narrative.



DIGITAL TALES
PRODUCTIONS

Production Company profile

Digital Tales Productions is an Egyptian independent production company dedicated to developing and producing distinctive documentary and fiction films with strong artistic voices and international potential. The company focuses on character-driven stories rooted in the social and cultural realities of Egypt and the wider Arab world, while seeking to connect local stories with global audiences. Digital Tales has produced and co-produced award-winning films that have screened at major international festivals, including Cairo International Film Festival, Carthage Film Festival and Tribeca Festival. Its productions reflect a commitment

to auteur-driven filmmaking, compelling narratives, and meaningful collaborations with filmmakers and international partners. The company is currently developing and producing a slate of feature documentaries and fiction projects, with a focus on stories that explore identity, society, culture, and contemporary life through intimate and visually compelling storytelling. This year, Digital Tales' production *The Return of Captain Kabonga* has been officially selected for the Feature Documentary Competition at the 9th edition of El Gouna Film Festival.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
95 min



Director(s)
Reem Morsi
Producer(s)
Miral El Fakharany

NO CONDOLENCES FOR CHILDREN

Egypt, Canada & USA

Log-line

After her father dies, an imaginative eight-year-old discovers that the last mango he left her opens portals into his final morning. As the fruit ripens, she races to save him before finding the goodbye she never had.

Is it a First or Second Feature
Not First or Second Feature

Stage of Development
Late Stage of Development

Total Budget
\$538,000

Confirmed Financing
\$95,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Canada Arts Council, Producer/Director Deferrals, Plot Heads & Scarab Films Inc. contributions.

Previous Labs/Markets
As a short script with the title Mango: Rawiyat El Gouna 2023 & Cascadia Festival SCRIPT STUDIO USA 2018

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

Cairo, 1985. Eight-year-old Farida loses her father, Hany, in a sudden accident. While adults fill the family apartment with condolences, Farida discovers the last mango Baba had hidden for their Friday morning ritual. Eating a slice inside his cedar-scented closet opens a portal into the morning he died.

With her six-year-old cousin Tutu as accomplice, Farida reconstructs Baba's final morning, convinced she can reach him before he leaves home and save him. But each visit consumes another piece of the ripening mango. Replacement fruit does not work, and as mango season ends, Farida's chances disappear with it.

Her determination turns possessive as she struggles with a family whose memories of Baba do not always match hers. With one slice remaining, Farida enters the portal intending to prevent his death. But as the morning collapses, she asks him instead to look at her. He does. He says her name and finally sees the drawing she made for him.

Farida returns unable to change the past, but finally able to share Baba with the people who loved him too. Days later, the mango seed she planted begins to crack the soil.

Director's Biography

Reem Morsi is an Egyptian-Canadian writer-director based between Cairo and Toronto. Her debut feature Banned was produced through Telefilm Canada's Talent to Watch, with support from the CFC/Netflix Accelerator and Canada Council for the Arts. Her screenplay Bootleg received the SFFILM Rainin Grant and Telefilm Canada New Voices Award and was developed through Berlinale Script Station, TorinoFilmLab, Realness and La Fabrique des Cinemas du Monde at Cannes. Her shorts have screened at TIFF and Whistler and received three Golden Sheaf Awards, including Best Director. She has directed for CBC Gem and Netflix and participated in Berlinale Talents, TIFF Talent Lab and the CFC Directors' Lab.

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Reem Morsi
Director

Director's Statement

My father died in a car accident when I was eight, at the end of mango season. I was sitting in our Alexandria apartment, about to eat the last mango he had bought me, when my mother and sister returned from identifying his body. Nobody explained what had happened. The mango was taken away and I was told to dress for the funeral.

During the days that followed, I kept hearing that children were too young to understand grief. But I understood that my father had disappeared. What I could not understand was how an ordinary morning could suddenly become the last one.

No Condolences for Children comes from that child's logic. I gave Farida what I desperately wanted then: a door back.

The film's magic grows from ordinary things: mango flesh ripening in a refrigerator, cedar trapped in a shirt, a watch that keeps stopping, burnt onions, a tram bell. I want to shoot close to Farida's height, allowing Cairo and the rituals of mourning to be experienced from the margins where adults place children.

For me, the film is not about overcoming grief. Farida cannot save her father. What she can do is make him look at her one last time, then learn that his memory does not belong to her alone.



Miral El Fakharany
Producer

Producer's Note

I met Reem Morsi through the Realness Institute, and No Condolences for Children stayed with me immediately. I was drawn to its understanding of something adults often underestimate: children do not experience grief less deeply because they are young. They simply experience it differently.

My connection to this is personal. When my sister went through a painful divorce, her children were eight and six, the same ages as Farida and Tutu. Our family was overwhelmed by crisis, and it took time for us to understand what the children themselves were losing. I began using stories to help them express feelings they could not yet explain.

That is what moved me about Reem's film. Farida is never treated as a child waiting for adults to explain grief to her. She investigates it, fights with it, tries to outsmart it and finally finds her own way through it.

As producer, I want to protect the intimacy, humor and specifically Egyptian world of the screenplay while building an international co-production around it. Its magical realism grows from performance, sound, practical effects and production design rather than spectacle, allowing us to make an ambitious film at a contained scale.



Production Company profile

Plot Heads Productions is an independent production company founded by Egyptian-American producer Miral El-Fakharany, developing culturally specific, filmmaker-led stories across Egypt, the MENA region and international markets. Its work is guided by three priorities: authentic storytelling, empowering emerging talent and amplifying women's voices.

El-Fakharany brings more than 18 years of experience across film, television, advertising and digital production.

Her feature *Snow White* was selected for Cairo Film Connection, receiving awards from UNFPA and UN Women, and for the RAWI Screenwriters Lab. It premiered at the Red Sea International Film Festival in 2024. She also produced the Syrian drama series *Dahab Ghaly*, filmed in Lebanon and acquired by Amazon Prime Video. In 2025, she was selected for the Realness Institute's Creative Producer Indaba and became the Institute's official representative in the MENA region.

Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
100 min



Director(s)
Abanoub Youssef

Producer(s)
Mohamed Rashad

Co-Producer(s)
Lamia Guiga, Amel Bouzid

ROAD TO BLUE

Egypt, France, Belgium and Tunisia

Log-line

In an isolated Christian village in the mountains of Upper Egypt, a widow deceives her family, five women and a man, into searching for "Paradise of Eden" beyond the mountains. All she wants is to show them the sea for the first time in their lives.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Developing

Total Budget
\$645,212

Confirmed Financing
\$47,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Hassala Production

Previous Labs/Markets
Meet the talent- JCC Tunisia

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

In an isolated Christian village nestled among the mountains of Upper Egypt, Sokra, a young widow in her mid-thirties, learns that the sea lies beyond the mountains she sees every morning from her window. At the same time, she watches her mother fade into the same mourning Sokra has worn for years. The discovery sparks an idea: she leads her family to believe that the Garden of Eden exists on earth, claiming the nun living in the village showed her the way. Borrowing the priest's car under the pretext of visiting a monastery in the east to receive a blessing, they leave the village for the first time in their lives. In this secluded world, Eden and the sea are one and the same: neither has ever been seen, yet both are equally real. Crossing seven mountains and a long desert road, what begins as a religious pilgrimage gradually becomes a journey of discovery, revealing that a single new experience, no matter how small, can be enough to give life a meaning they had never known before.

Director's Biography

Abanoub Youssef is an Egyptian screenwriter and director whose work is rooted in the landscapes and communities of Upper Egypt, bringing these unseen realities into dialogue with a transnational cinematic language. Born in Minya, he graduated first in his class from ESAC, Carthage University, Tunisia, on an Egypt-Tunisia scholarship. He is completing a Research Master's in Cinema at Católica University, Porto (2024-2026), studying how Global South filmmakers build a distinct cinematic identity in their first feature. He has written and directed seven short films across Egypt, Tunisia, and Portugal. His latest, *Breaking Out of Ali and Maher's Base*, won Best Director at Zawia, Best Cinematography at Manassat, and Bronze at Rotterdam, screening at El Gouna and Carthage. He is now developing his debut feature, *Road to Blue*.

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Abanoub Youssef
Director

Director's Statement

I was born in an isolated Christian village in Upper Egypt, a community that believes more than it knows. I grew up among women who never left it. Like the sesame in our fields, they grew, ripened and were harvested in the same place. When I asked my grandmother about the sea, she said, "The Nile is the sea." At school, I learned it lay beyond the eastern mountains. At the feast of Komaria, the village climbs to a church on the mountain. I climbed looking for the sea. I reached the first peak, never the second. For those women, the sea and Eden were equal: neither ever seen, both certain.

In *Road to Blue*, I give that unfinished climb to Sokra, a widow watching her mother fade into the mourning she has worn for years. To take her to the sea, she borrows the only language her village trusts, faith, knowing they only ever walk one road: to church. The village has two authorities: the priest, who owns meaning, and the village chief, who owns paperwork. When the priest leaves on retreat, the family takes over his house and its only television. Their freedom lasts exactly as long as his absence.

I film Upper Egypt as destiny: a valley where geography decides who you become. The comedy is spatial: five women, each alone in the frame, within calling distance. When the blue finally appears, it arrives for everyone at once. Not believed this time.



Mohamed Rashad
Producer

Lamia Guiga, Amel Bouzid
Co-Producers

Producer's Note

I first met Abanoub at the Carthage Film Festival in 2025, where his short film was selected for the Short Fiction Competition. I was impressed by how he shot the film entirely in his hometown in Upper Egypt, working with local people and a small team of friends, bringing his community to the screen with honesty and originality.

During the festival, he also presented the idea for his first feature. The story follows a Coptic family living in a remote village in Upper Egypt. After discussing the project and reading the first draft, I immediately wanted to become part of it.

I have always believed the strongest films come from personal experience, and that the people best able to represent a community are those who truly belong to it. Having grown up in this environment, Abanoub tells this story with authenticity and deep understanding.

The project goes beyond portraying a place. It explores the dreams, fears, and inner lives of its characters, asking meaningful questions about faith, freedom, and the search for a better life, and how religious authority and bureaucracy shape everyday life, ending on a hopeful note.

I am proud to support this ambitious first feature. Developing the script, preparing the real locations, and helping a talented new filmmaker bring this story to life is a journey I am excited to share, one that offers a rare perspective on Upper Egypt and its Coptic community.



Production Company profile

Hassala Films is an independent film production collective based in Cairo, Egypt, founded by filmmakers willing to take maximum risks with their artistic tools within a challenging context. We are committed to producing films that stand apart from the mainstream, primarily supporting emerging filmmakers creating their first or second feature-length fiction or documentaries.

Our journey began in 2012 with our first feature, "Coming Forth by Day," written, directed, and produced by Hala Lotfy. It premiered at the Berlinale Forum 2013, won the FIPRESCI

for Best Director at Abu Dhabi FF, and was named to DIFF's "Greatest 100 Arab Films" list within a year of release. It screened at over 70 festivals and in museums including MOMA and the EYE Museum.

Hassala has received funding from major initiatives including AFAC, SANAD, IDFA, Hot Docs, the Doha Film Institute, International Media Support, and the Robert Bosch Stiftung Fund. Other productions include *The Settlement* (Berlinale 2025), *Night/Ext* (TIFF 2018), *Light upon Light* (CPH:DOX 2022), and *Mother of the Unborn* (IDFA 2014).

Feature Hybrid
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Mai Elkamhawi
Producer(s)
Bassam Mortada
Co-Producer(s)
Mai Elkamhawi

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

Egypt

Log-line

For decades, crossing to Italy became the dream that shaped Egyptian village Mit Suhail, despite the collective grief this journey has brought. Through observation, memory, and reenactment, the film explores how a dream survives across generations.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Project in Development

Total Budget
\$417,725

Confirmed Financing
\$10,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
See Media Production

Previous Labs/Markets
N/A

Film Needs
Distributors, Sales Agents, Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Festivals, Script Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

How do dreams travel? And what can kill a dream if death itself doesn't?

In Mit Suhail, a village in Egypt's Nile Delta, migration to Italy has shaped the landscape for generations. Mansions built with money sent from abroad stand beside modest homes, stories of success circulate, and young people grow up surrounded by evidence that another life may be possible elsewhere. Italy is present in the village's architecture, economy, and imagination.

The filmmaker returns to a village held in her childhood memories, searching for traces of the place she remembers in the place it has become, and for a story that has remained unresolved since a family member disappeared attempting to migrate to Italy.

The film follows four young men who dream of making the journey themselves, each at a different point in this inherited desire. Their experiences intertwine with the filmmaker's family story, moving between the personal and the collective.

Blending observation, reenactment, humor, and intimate portraits of village life, the film resists reducing Mit Suhail to grief or aspiration alone. Through participatory reenactments, the young men perform stories around crossing: secret preparations, hidden phone calls, and farewells. The reenactments gradually move closer to the village's most traumatic migration memory: the day four young men returned home in coffins on Eid, transforming celebration into collective mourning. Will embodying death alter a dream, or will it survive even this?

Director's Biography

Mai Elkamhawi is an Egyptian filmmaker and producer with an MA in Filmmaking (Screen Documentary) from Goldsmiths, University of London.

Alongside her independent filmmaking practice, Mai has built more than 13 years of experience in film and television production across the Middle East. She has worked in senior editorial and executive production roles at MBC MASR and Al Jazeera, leading the development and production of documentaries, current affairs, and entertainment programming. As a freelance filmmaker, she has directed and produced documentaries for international broadcasters and organizations including France 24, Le Monde, DW, Shahid, and the National Council for Women. Her work is drawn to stories that examine migration, identity, memory, and social transformation.

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Mai Elkamhawi
Director

Director's Statement

I was a teenager when my cousin Gad left our family's village, Mit Suhail, in 2008. He boarded a boat to Italy. Since then, he has been missing. His absence became a quiet but persistent presence in our family, especially for his mother, who continues to wait for news that may never come. I could only avoid his disappearance; I could not understand why he left, or what kind of future could outweigh the possibility of never returning.

Sixteen years later, I returned to a place I knew through childhood summers, family, and memories. I found myself looking at a familiar place as a stranger. People asked me about relatives abroad, opportunities, and crossing. I became a surface onto which hopes and expectations were projected. I carried memories of the village and of Gad, my cousin whom I never had the chance to know or understand as an adult.

This insider and outsider position became central to my approach. I became interested in what could emerge when I invite stories to be embodied through reenactment. What happens when a story is performed rather than told? What surfaces through the body that words alone cannot reveal?

The Road to Paradise grows from this tension. I am not trying to resolve migration into tragedy or aspiration, but to understand how a dream can be inherited, lived, and carried forward.

For me, the film is an attempt to understand what happened to Gad, and to find the closure that my family story never had.



Bassam Mortada
Producer

Mai Elkamhawi
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

The Road to Paradise is a feature hybrid that brings together what I love about nonfiction films: a story moving between the personal and the collective, between director Mai Elkamhawi's family wound and the dream of thousands of young people in her family's village in Sharqia to escape to Italy.

Mai moves between artistic forms in search of what was lost after her cousin left. She confronts guilt and the pain of failing to save a young, angry family member who couldn't belong, while searching for him in the film's protagonists: young people dreaming of migration and a radically different life.

The Road to Paradise is not an attempt to escape the family ghost haunting Mai, but to place it before the camera: to shape it, move it, and rebuild it on screen.

In a small village, the dream of leaving could transform the social status and future of entire families, while putting lives at risk. Danger, adventure, dreams, death, social mobility, and family wounds become Mai's keywords as she explores them through different artistic forms.

While her protagonists dream of leaving, Mai returns from the capital to her family's village, creating a shared artistic space built on intimacy, reflection, and shared pain. Perhaps to create what she could not with her missing cousin, and find peace.

This spirit of experimentation is what we wanted to produce when we founded SEE Media, and I found all of it in The Road to Paradise.



Production Company profile

See Media Production is an independent audio-visual production company based in Cairo, Egypt, dedicated to producing socially relevant and thought-provoking independent cinema. Co-founded by filmmakers Kesmat El Sayed and Bassam Mortada, the powerhouse focuses on uncovering human-centric Arab narratives through high-quality creative documentaries and impactful alternative media projects that resonate globally.

The company's prominent filmography highlights a diverse slate of short and feature-length documentaries.

Its short documentary achievements include *Waiting for His Descent from the Mountain* (2015) directed by Bassam Mortada, *Khairalla* (2015) directed by Mohamed Rashad, and *Searching for Ghazal* (2019) directed by Bassam Mortada. Expanding into feature documentaries, See Media Production has produced Omar Khaled's *The Troublemaker* (2015), Inez Marzouk's *My Mohamed Is Different* (2020), and Hala Galal's award-winning *From Cairo* (2021). Its most recent landmark project is Bassam Mortada's critically acclaimed *Abu Zaabal 89* (2024).



CINEGOUNA
MARKET
2026

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Lam Shamseya
TV Series



THE COLOR BLUE
TV Series



YEARS OF DARKNESS- TV Series



A Girl Named Zat
TV Series



Face & Back
TV Series



Why Not?2
TV Mini Series



Between Two Seas
Narrative Fiction Film



ALL BUT DIVORCE
TV Series



SEVENTH YEAR ITCH
TV Series



ELHABAYEB RESTAURANT
TV Series



BETWEEN THE LINES- TV Series



TAKE CARE OF ZIZI
TV Series



MBC Academy Screenwriting Bootcamp Program 2025



Sawiris Screenplay Lab - with Sawiris Foundation and El Gouna Film Festival 2025



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**CONVERSATION WITH
THE SEA**
BY MUAYAD ALAYAN



AL BARANEYA
BY ASHGAN EL-HAMUS



**IN THIS DARKNESS
I SEE YOU**
BY NADIM TABET



THIRTEEN IN GAZA
BY HOSAM ABU DAN



GOD'S WORK
BY MICHAEL JAMES



HOME BITTER HOME
BY GHINA ABBOUD-NAIM EL HAJJ-SALIM
MRAD-ALINE OUAIS-JIHAD SAADÉ-
MARIE-RTOSE OSTA



KENTUCKY GAZA
BY OMAR RAMMAL



LAUNDRY
ZAMO MKHWANAZI

SAFE HARBOUR MENA



Feature Hybrid
Color
Arabic, Indigenous languages
(Beja, Nuba)
100 min



Director(s)
Ahmed Shams Nagm Eldin
Producer(s)
Alyaa Musa
Co-Producer(s)
Med Lemin Rajel

SABARY

Sudan, Rwanda, Mauritania

Log-line

Amid Sudan's war and displacement, a Beja youngster and a retired Nuba wrestler embark on a mentorship road trip across Sudan. Sabary explores masculinity, identity and the living wisdom of two ancient warrior traditions.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Research, Writing and Financing

Total Budget
\$550,000

Confirmed Financing
\$10,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
Tooma Production (Rwanda)

Previous Labs/Markets
Durban Talents, CineMed

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Script Consultancy, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

Oshaik, a youngster from the eastern hills of the Red Sea Mountains, embarks on a risky and magical road trip with Daoud, a retired wrestler from the Nuba Mountains of the west who once fled his legacy. Oshaik accompanies Daoud, his wrestling mentor, seeking permission from the Nuba ancestors to initiate him, as a warrior from outside the tribe. A heroic road trip set during real-time civil war and displacement of Sudan, against the backdrop of a revolution and ethnic wars. In this journey of self-examination, the two men develop a challenging relationship beyond mentorship, age and tribal tension.

Director's Biography

Ahmed is a rising Sudanese filmmaker and director making his mark on the regional and global film scene. Trained with the British Council and GFMI, he won the Greener Screen Award for "Sabary" and a Sheffield Doc/Fest scholarship in 2024, the same year he joined the Aflamuna and CineMed Meetings in Montpellier. Across film, TV, and commercials, Ahmed has written, produced, directed, and edited, while leading filmmaking workshops in Sudan with Local Films Initiative and Goethe-Institut. He is currently developing "Sabary" and the documentary "(x)," and producing the short "Frequencies." Ahmed has been selected for Talents Durban 2026

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Ahmed Shams Nagm Eldin
Director

Director's Statement

Sabary explores masculinity and manhood through the contrasting rites of passage of two Sudanese tribes: the Beja and the Nuba. At a time when masculinity has been weaponized to justify violence and division, the film asks what it truly means to be a man. Beyond the flat narrative of war, I wanted to excavate the psychological tension many Sudanese men carry silently. As a counterweight, I invoke the spirit of legendary Beja and Nubian warriors, building a local mythology through magical realism, letting myth and reality blur. Traditional songs, dances, and folklore become the film's texture preserving a cultural depth that war threatens to erase. This is the right moment for this story: the fog is thick and the path uncertain, but perhaps that is exactly when such stories matter most not for answers, but to hold space for reflection.



Alyaa Musa
Producer

Med Lemine Rajel
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

Through Oshaik and Daoud's road trip, we journey in the societal confusion between manhood and vulnerability. However, we quickly unfold that manhood is a socially constructed archetype rather than a fluid identity. The director's gaze at this lively universal discussion is what has drawn me to this story and caught my attention in the first place. Ahmed's authorship spirit of the story, the metaphors and the deep understanding of the 'hero's journey' echo the depth to his writing and the cinematic language of his directorial intentions. Together we embarked on a newfound courage to place the road trip element in a troubled reality without compromising the magical gaze and the spiritual monologue that are deeply rooted in our ancestral reality. From a distribution standpoint, "coming of age" and "sport" are two popular genres that continue to bridge generations and challenge stereotypes. The mentorship-mentee relationship exposes power dynamics while fostering respect, wisdom and unity. Investing in a high production value is key to bring 'Sabary' commercially forward to a universal mass-audiences beyond borders.



Production Company profile

A sister company of Black Balance Artistic Production in Sudan, Tooma Production is based in Kigali, Rwanda. Tooma focuses on working with emerging young storytellers from East Africa and the Middle East while bringing more co-production projects between the two regions. Currently leading two feature documentaries in post production, two feature fictions in development, an animation, a hybrid and a doc series in production. Tooma's international co-productions includes Tunisia, Mauritania, South Africa, Poland, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands.

Culturim Agency is a Mauritanian audiovisual production company founded in 2018 and based in Nouakchott. Specializing in documentaries, fiction films, and immersive storytelling, it has produced award-winning films screened at international festivals.



Short Film
Color
Turkish, Arabic
20 min



Director(s)
Ezel Manay

Producer(s)
Ezel Manay

TEMPORARY PROTECTION

Türkiye, Syria

Log-line

On the night the Syrian regime falls, a former Syrian major general living under temporary protection in Gaziantep receives an unexpected phone call from his past, forcing him to confront the identity and sense of belonging he suppressed for years.

Is it a First or Second Feature
Not First or Second Feature

Stage of Development
In Search of Funding

Total Budget
\$42,211.90

Confirmed Financing
\$7,171.94

Confirmed Financial Partners
N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
N/A

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Private Funding, Festivals,
Markets and Labs

Synopsis

Muhammed, a former Syrian major general living as a refugee in Gaziantep, is spending an ordinary evening with his family when news of the regime's collapse begins to spread in Syria. Amid the sounds of the television, everyday arguments, and uncertainty about the future, an unexpected phone call from his past changes the course of the night. A young soldier who once served under his command asks for his advice on whether to surrender. Muhammed tries to respond, but the connection is lost.

As celebrations grow outside, life inside the home carries on. While his family discusses the possibility of a new beginning, Muhammed remains silently caught between his past and his present. As the night wears on and the fate of a country shifts, those under the same roof experience the night in very different ways.

Director's Biography

Ezel Manay (Yezen ELŞEMELİ) was born in Jableh, Syria, and moved to Turkey following the war. He graduated from Selçuk University's Department of Radio, Television and Cinema and is pursuing a master's degree in the same field. His work explores migration, identity, belonging, and trauma. As a director, cinematographer, editor, and project consultant, he combines independent filmmaking with academic inquiry. His experimental and documentary films have screened at national and international festivals, receiving awards and finalist selections.

Through a minimal, poetic cinematic language, Manay explores the impact of war and displacement on individuals. His projects connect personal memory with collective history, focusing on silence, inner conflict, and Middle Eastern narratives. He examines how people rebuild a sense of place.

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Ezel Manay
Director

Director's Statement

This film comes directly from my life. Its central character is my father. As a refugee, I have lived within this story for years. Through cinema, I seek to convey a reality I know firsthand. The war in Syria is often told through politics. I focus on the silence it leaves within people and how a country's collapse echoes through one person's life.

Muhammed is neither a hero nor a victim. Once a man of power, he was forced to leave everything behind after a decision he made. I choose to stay with his silence rather than explain him.

At the film's heart lies an inability to decide. Caught between past and present, Muhammed cannot move forward. Unanswered questions reflect his suspended existence.

The visual approach is minimal and observational. The camera keeps its distance. Television and city lights illuminate a confined space, while limited movement reflects his inner entrapment. Television, wind, telephone sounds, and silence become part of the storytelling.

In the final scene, an ending and a beginning unfold together, while Muhammed's condition remains uncertain. This ambiguity carries the film's emotion beyond its final image.

The film seeks to reveal those unseen in moments of triumph: people left behind, trapped by circumstances, and quietly disappearing.



Ezel Manay
Producer

Producer's Note

This film is rooted in my personal experience. Its central character is my father. As a refugee, I have lived within this story for years. Through cinema, I seek to convey a reality I know firsthand.

The war in Syria is often told through politics. I focus on the silence it leaves within people and how a country's collapse echoes through one person's life.

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Feature Narrative
Color
Arabic
90 min



Director(s)
Yasir Faiz
Producer(s)
Ibrahim Snoopy
Co-Producer(s)
Bruno Tanya

THE MARTYR'S WEDDING

Sudan, Kenya

Log-line

During the Sudan–South Sudan civil war, a jihadist fighter faith falters in captivity, torn between a rebel lover and the wife he longs to return to.

Is it a First or Second Feature
First Feature

Stage of Development
Early Development

Total Budget
\$970,000

Confirmed Financing
\$50,000

Confirmed Financial Partners
In Deep Visions and Jenga Visuals

Previous Labs/Markets
Carthage Pro - Carthage Film Festival,
Great-Lakes Creative Producers Lab

Film Needs
Co-Producers, Regional Funding, Script
Consultancy, Market and Labs

Synopsis

During the final years of the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan (2002-2005), Samer Al-Tuhami, a jihadist fighter affiliated with the government of Sudan, is captured by South Sudanese rebels. In captivity, Samer's beliefs are shaken. His internal conflict reaches its peak when he is torn between his rebellious lover and the wife he longs to return to.

Believed to have died in Khartoum, Samer's friend Rabie- who miraculously escaped captivity - fabricates a heroic story about Samer's death, in order to convince Samer's wife (Aya) to accept marriage to him. Rabie weaves this false story into a ritual celebration known as the " Martyr's Wedding", held by the ruling Islamists to glorify the dead of the civil war.

Among his captors, Samer is amazed by their discipline, which challenges his convictions about jihad. A fraught relationship develops with Angelina, a commander in the southern rebel army, who becomes a mirror and catalyst for his transformation.

Years later, upon his release, Angelina revealed that she is carrying his child. Samer rejects her and asks her to abort the child. She refuses, he abandons her, and returns to Khartoum, to find Aya married to Rabei and they are raising a son named after Samer.

Desperate, Samer tries to restore ties with Angelina in the south, but she rejects him. Samer is lost and stripped of faith, family, and belonging, faces a void from which he cannot escape. A film is exploring love, faith and the collapse of identity amid a war.

Director's Biography

Yasir Faiz is a Sudanese film director, writer, and cultural producer. He was one of five African filmmakers selected for the Open Doors Directors 2025 program at the 78th Locarno Film Festival, where his short film Bougainvillea was also officially selected.

A former journalist with nearly a decade of experience in Sudanese and Arab cultural media, Yasir brings a strong focus on history, memory, and identity to his filmmaking.

His credits include serving as second unit director on The Dog's Shitter and producing and co-writing Journey to Kenya. Both films received awards at the Sudan Independent Film Festival: The Dog's Shitter won the Black Elephant Award, while Journey to Kenya received the Special Jury Award.

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Yasir Faiz
Director

Director's Statement

In my films, I strive to craft a visually captivating world that not only mirrors reality but also serves as a creative testament of my generation and my homelands.

In this film, I address the crisis faced by a large segment of Sudanese youth exploited in a futile war masked by religious pretexts. The events portrayed — echoing real-life stories — the suffering endured by an entire generation over the 30 years during which Sudan underwent radical changes, rendered rapid pace of transformations, which impacted many, resulting in characters who appear stable outwardly but are internally disturbed.

I could have easily been one of these young men, if not for the awareness instilled in me by my family. However, I grew up in the neighborhood where President Omar al-Bashir lived; which was influenced by the ideology of Islamic extremists.

Many of my age peers perished in this war. They were killed, injured, or left with psychological scars. As someone who survived by an unintended twist of fate, I present a personal testimony of myself in a story where I could have been the protagonist.

The film's relevance is heightened by the fact that the same arguments used in the South Sudan conflict are being recycled today, in new forms under the banner of "jihad" and religious slogans. A new generation finds itself ensnared in similar predicaments as the film's protagonist.

While this reality poses challenges for narrative and cinematic representation, it also offers an untapped resource for exploration.



Ibrahim Snoopy
Producer

Bruno Tanya
Co-Producer

Producer's Note

The Sudan and South Sudan civil war was the longest war in Africa. This conflict was politically driven by the Islamist regime, which manipulated narratives. The war killed countless people and left families without closure.

I am producing this film to give these families the answers they deserve and expose the exploitation behind these tragedies, which remains deeply relevant today, as similar tactics continue to fuel the ongoing full-scale war in Sudan

This film delves into the roots of this conflict, exposing how warring factions brainwash young men and girls into joining it. Often unaware of the gravity of their actions, they become unwilling participants in a war they did not choose. By shedding light on the historical and social dynamics fueling these wars, this film seeks to foster understanding and provoke meaningful dialogue. The Martyr's Wedding marks my first feature film as a producer. It is directed by Yasir, with whom I have collaborated since 2016. Together, we co-founded In Deep Visions in Sudan and Kenya, developing several projects, including his short film Bougainvillea. Our long-standing partnership is built on trust, a shared vision, and a deep understanding of storytelling.

We have begun the project's development by conducting research on the Sudan–South Sudan civil war, interviewing former fighters from both sides, carrying out initial location scouting, establishing partnerships with a Kenyan co-producer, while completing the first draft of the script.



Production Company profile

In Deep Visions is a Sudanese production company with an experimental approach, seeking to expand the boundaries of innovation in filmmaking in Sudan and East Africa. The company has produced films including Journey to Kenya and Bougainvillea, and co-produced The Dog's Shitter. Its recent production, the short documentary Burials in Exile, is currently being submitted to film festivals.

Following the outbreak of conflict in Sudan, In Deep Visions relocated to Nairobi, Kenya, where it established an alternative platform to sustain and continue Sudanese cinema production.

From Nairobi, the company continues to develop and produce Sudanese films while building creative and professional bridges between the Arab world, East Africa, and beyond.

Currently, In Deep Visions is producing The Martyr's Wedding, directed by Yasir Faiz, and co-producing the feature documentary Where Do I Belong?, directed by Ibrahim Snoopy.

Short Film
Color
Arabic
15-20 min



Director(s)
 Hadi Bakhit
Producer(s)
 Hadi Bakhit

THE SEARCH FOR MEMORY OF A LOST HOMELAND

Sudan

Log-line

A young refugee discovers a magical notebook that restores fragments of his vanishing homeland, but each memory he brings back erases one of his own.

Is it a First or Second Feature
 First Short Film

Stage of Development
 In Development

Total Budget
 \$20,000

Confirmed Financing
 0

Confirmed Financial Partners
 N/A

Previous Labs/Markets
 N/A

Film Needs
 Co-Producers, Private Funding, Regional Funding, Script Consultancy, Markets and Labs

Synopsis

After fleeing the war in Sudan, Jalal lives in Alexandria, carrying the silence of a homeland that seems to be disappearing. When Sudan begins vanishing from digital maps and familiar songs disappear from his devices, he discovers a blue leather notebook that belonged to his late father.

Jalal begins writing in it, and what he writes starts materializing around him: the smell of Sudanese coffee, a jebena, familiar gatherings, food, music, places and faces from a life he thought he had lost. For a moment, his empty apartment becomes a living archive of Sudan.

But the notebook comes with a price. Each fragment he restores takes one of his own memories in return. As the apartment fills with traces of his homeland, Jalal begins forgetting the people and moments that made him who he is.

He continues writing, knowing that every memory he brings back may cost him another part of himself. Eventually, he faces the ultimate choice: preserve the memory of a homeland by sacrificing his own, or stop writing and allow it to disappear.

Director's Biography

Hadi Bakhit is a Sudanese filmmaker, multidisciplinary visual artist, and Creative Director whose practice moves fluidly between cinema, visual storytelling, and experimental image-making. Rooted in themes of living archives, cultural memory, and displacement, his work examines the relationship between people and the places they leave behind. He navigates personal and collective experiences through experimental narrative structures, placing a profound emphasis on atmospheric sound and image.

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Hadi Bakhit
Director & Producer

Director's Statement

The film takes its title and initial inspiration from *The Search for Memory of a Lost Homeland*, a poem by Sudanese poet Mohamed El Hassan Salem Hemid. The poem became a starting point for my exploration of memory, displacement and the fear of losing not only a homeland, but the memories that keep it alive.

The film also grew from witnessing the destruction and looting of Sudan's museums, archives and cultural institutions during the war. Places created to preserve the country's history became themselves vulnerable to disappearance. This led me to a question: what happens when the physical places that hold a nation's memory are destroyed?

I wanted to approach this through an impossible situation: what if Sudan began disappearing not only from the map, but from the world's memory? What if its songs, places, objects and stories could no longer be found? And what if bringing them back meant sacrificing your own memories?

The notebook represents the human need to document, preserve and prove that something existed. Through Jalal's relationship with his late father Abdulbaqi, memory also becomes something inherited, carried and reshaped.

I am interested in the space between reality and memory, where objects, sounds and smells become portals rather than explanations. Ultimately, the film is not about restoring a country. It is about the fear of losing the ability to remember it at all.

Producer's Note

The Search for Memory of a Lost Homeland tackles the urgent and universal themes of displacement, identity, and memory through a unique lens of magical realism. The film's deeply personal narrative and striking visual approach give it strong potential to resonate with both regional and international audiences.

Currently in the development phase as an independent production, the primary focus is on establishing the project's core creative foundation. We are actively seeking to attach an experienced co-producer and secure development funding. We welcome collaborations with creative and financial partners who share our vision and can help navigate this ambitious story toward a successful production.

Production Company profile

The project is currently being developed independently by Hadi Bakhit

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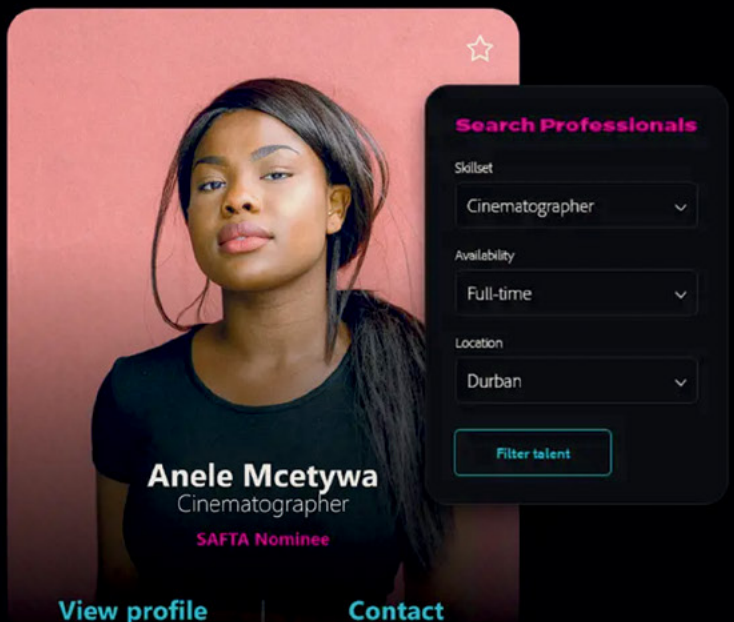
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CINEGOUNA FUNDING SCHEDULE

CINEGOUNA FUNDING SCHEDULE

MENTOR SESSIONS WITH PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT & DOCUMENTARY & CINEGOUNA OPENING

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026 — DAY 1

CineGouna Series Room · Festival Plaza

10:00 – 5:00 PM **Mentor One-on-One session with Fictions in Development (Robyn Citizen)**

CineGouna Forum Room · Festival Plaza

9:00 – 10:30 AM **Mentor One-on-One session with Documentary in Development (Arianna Castoldi)**

11:00 – 12:00 PM **Mentor One-on-One session with Documentary in Post Production (Arianna Castoldi)**

CineGouna Funding Room · Sheraton Miramar Hotel

10:00 – 1:20 PM **Mentor One-on-One session with Fictions in Development (Soleil Gharbieh)**

2:20 – 2:40 PM **Mentor Group Meeting with Fictions in Development (Soleil Gharbieh)**

Megumi

09:30 PM **CGP Opening @Megumi brought to you by Pepsi**

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026 — DAY 2

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza

9:00 – 9:30 AM *Coffee Break*

9:30 – 10:00 AM **Orientation**

PITCHES SESSIONS

TIME	TITLE		DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
10:00 – 10:25 AM	Paradise Beach FEATURE NARRATIVE	France	Zoulikha Tahar	Manon Messiant
10:30 – 10:55 AM	Shorrab FEATURE NARRATIVE	Saudi Arabia	Emad Eskander	Munthir Altuwayrib & Bakr Alduhaim
11:00 – 11:25 AM	The Gift of Blindness FEATURE DOCUMENTARY	Germany & USA	Ibrahim Nash'at	Elijah Stevens & Ibrahim Nash'at
11:30 – 11:55 AM	The Sacred Thirst FEATURE DOCUMENTARY	Switzerland	Hamda Dhaouadi	Aida Schlaepfer Alhassani
12:00 – 12:30 PM	<i>Break</i>			
12:30 – 12:55 PM	Printemps FEATURE NARRATIVE	Lebanon	Noel Keserwany	Michelle Keserwany
1:00 – 1:25 PM	When I Close My Eyes I See Your Eyes FEATURE ANIMATION	Egypt, Belgium	Sameh Alaa	Mark Lotfy

1:30 – 1:55 PM	Away From the Pack FEATURE NARRATIVE	Egypt	Adel Ahmed Yehia	Sawsan Yusuf
2:00 – 2:25 PM	Waiting For Paradise FEATURE NARRATIVE	Egypt, Belgium, Sweden, Italy	Mohamed Siam	Mohamed Siam & Brandy Miller
2:30 – 2:55 PM	Lily's Makkah FEATURE NARRATIVE	Sudan, Egypt, Brazil & Germany	Marwa Zein	Marwa Zein
3:00 – 4:00 PM <i>Lunch Break · Festival Hub</i>				
CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza				
4:00 – 4:30 PM 4:30 – 5:00 PM 5:00 – 5:30 PM 5:30 – 6:00 PM	One-on-One Meetings with All Projects			

MENTOR SESSIONS WITH POST PRODUCTIONS FILMS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2026 — DAY 2

CineGouna Funding Room · Sheraton Miramar Hotel				
10:00 – 4:00 PM	Mentor One-on-One session with Post Production (Melissa Parry)			

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT & EGYPTIAN VOICES & SAFE HARBOUR

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 — DAY 3

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza				
9:30 – 10:00 AM <i>Coffee Break</i>				
PITCHES SESSIONS				
TIME	TITLE		DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
10:00 – 10:25 AM	To the Core FEATURE NARRATIVE	Tunisia, France, Italy	Mehdi M. Barsaoui	Habib Attia, Marc Irmer, Flaminio Zadra
10:30 – 10:55 AM	The Pessoptimists FEATURE NARRATIVE	France, Palestine	Abdallah Al-Khatib	Claire Chassagne
11:00 – 11:25 AM	Arabs of Maadi FEATURE NARRATIVE	Egypt	Ayten Amin	Louay Khraish
11:30 – 11:55 AM	Mina FEATURE NARRATIVE	Lebanon	Marie-Rose Osta	Alaa Alasad & Marie-Rose Osta
12:00 – 12:30 PM <i>Break</i>				
EGYPTIAN VOICES				
TIME	TITLE		DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
12:30 – 12:50 PM	No Condolences for Children FEATURE NARRATIVE	Egypt, Canada & USA	Reem Morsi	Miral El Fakharany

12:50 – 1:10 PM	Dina: The Last Woman Dancing FEATURE DOCUMENTARY Egypt	Mahmoud Rashad	Amir El-Shenawy
1:10 – 1:30 PM	The Road To Paradise FEATURE HYBRID Egypt	Mai Elkamhawi	Bassam Mortada
1:30 – 1:50 PM	Road to Blue FEATURE NARRATIVE Egypt, France, Belgium and Tunisia	Abanoub Youssef	Mohamed Rashad

2:00 – 3:00 PM *Lunch Break · Festival Hub*

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza

SAFE HARBOUR

TIME	TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
3:00 – 4:00 PM	Temporary Protection SHORT FILM Türkiye, Syria	Ezel Manay	Ezel Manay
	Sabry FEATURE HYBRID Sudan, Rwanda, Mauritania	Ahmed Shams Nagm Eldin	Alyaa Musa
	The Martyr's Wedding FEATURE NARRATIVE Sudan and Kenya	Yasir Faiz	Ibrahim Snoopy
	The Search for Memory of a Lost Homeland SHORT FILM Sudan	Hadi Bakhit	Hadi Bakhit

4:00 – 4:30 PM
4:30 – 5:00 PM
5:00 – 5:30 PM
5:30 – 6:00 PM

One-on-One Meetings with All Projects

MENTOR SESSIONS WITH POST PRODUCTIONS FILMS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 — DAY 3

CineGouna Funding Room · Sheraton Miramar Hotel	
10:00 – 10:30 AM	Mentor One-on-One session with Documentary in Post Production (Arianna Castoldi)
11:00 – 12:00 PM	Mentor One-on-One session with Post Production (Melissa Parry)

FILMS IN POST PRODUCTION

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026 — DAY 4

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza	
9:30 – 10:00 AM	<i>Coffee Break</i>

PITCHES SESSIONS

TIME	TITLE	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER
10:00 – 10:35 AM	Besso FEATURE DOCUMENTARY Iraq	Muslim Habeeb	Huda Al Kadhimy & Muna Al Kadhimy
10:40 – 11:15 AM	Ibrahim's Voice FEATURE NARRATIVE France, Tunisia	Yann Rabanier	Sophie Roudaut

11:20 – 11:55 AM	Landwards FEATURE DOCUMENTARY	Jordan	Rama Ayasra	Asmahan Bkerat
11:55 AM – 12:25 PM	Break			
12:25 – 1:00 PM	Of Debt and Money FEATURE NARRATIVE	Tunisia	Housseem Eddine Sansa	Housseem Eddine Sansa
1:05 – 1:40 PM	House No. 7 FEATURE DOCUMENTARY	Syria, Germany, Qatar	Rama Abdy	Hazar Yazji
1:45 – 2:20 PM	A Quarter to Thursday FEATURE NARRATIVE	France, Algeria, Belgium	Sofia Djama	Jean Bréhat, Emma Binet & Charles Meresse
2:30 – 3:00 PM	Closing Notes and Certificates for Safe Harbour & Egyptian Voices			
3:00 – 4:00 PM	Lunch Break · Festival Hub			
4:00 – 4:30 PM 4:30 – 5:00 PM 5:00 – 5:30 PM 5:30 – 6:00 PM	One-on-One Meetings with All Projects			

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026 — DAY 5

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza	
9:30 – 10:00 AM	Coffee Break
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Film Lab Palestine - Pitching
12:00 – 12:30 PM	Break
12:30 – 4:30 PM	One-on-One Meetings With All Projects

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026 — DAY 6

CineGouna Series Room · Festival Plaza	
9:30 – 10:00 AM	Coffee Break
10:10 – 3:05 PM	Jury Meeting with All Projects
3:00 – 4:00 PM	Lunch Break · Festival Hub

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026 — DAY 6

CineGouna Funding Room · Festival Plaza	
12:00 – 2:00 PM	Sawiris Foundation Showcase

CINEGOUNA CLOSING CEREMONY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2026 — DAY 7

CineGouna Theatre · Festival Plaza	
5:30 PM	CGP Closing Ceremony
7:30 PM	Meet the Winners



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TFL LABS & FUNDS 2027

LONG-TERM PROGRAMMES

ScriptLab

Developing your feature film script in its early stages.

ScriptLab Story Editing

Increasing your expertise in the scriptwriting feature film process.

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
NOVEMBER 3RD, 4:00 PM CET**

FeatureLab

Enhancing advanced feature film projects in every aspect of filmmaking.

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
NOVEMBER 5TH, 4:00 PM CET**

ComedyLab

Pairing scriptwriters and comedy writers/performers to explore the potential of comedy projects.

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
NOVEMBER 30TH, 4:00 PM CET**

SeriesLab

Working on your original and commercially viable TV series project.

SeriesLab Story Editing

Advancing career prospects through scriptwriting for television series.

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
DECEMBER 16TH, 4:00 PM CET**

GREEN LABS

Green Narratives

Developing films with environmentally conscious storytelling.

Call open on October 13th

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
DECEMBER 4TH, 11:59 PM CET**

Green Film Lab

Getting into production with a greener approach for the first time.

**Upcoming call
in December 2026**

SHORT TERM WORKSHOPS

TFL Next

Diving into feature film development and exploring story editing tools, all just a click away.

Call open on October 20th

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
DECEMBER 11TH, 11:59 PM CET**

Boost IT Lab

Co-production workshop welcoming Italian and international film projects.

**Upcoming call
in spring 2027**

TFL FUNDS

Audience Design Fund

Distribution support of €45,000 grant and tailored sessions to craft innovative audience-focused strategies.

Call open on October 26th

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
JANUARY 13TH 2027,
3:00 PM CET**

Co-Production Fund

Consultancies and a €50,000 award supporting the realisation of international feature film coproductions.

Call open on December 4th

**DEADLINE TO APPLY:
FEBRUARY 8TH 2027,
3.00 PM CET**

