

Seven Films Supported by Doha Film Institute Selected at the 72nd Cannes Film Festival

- DFI announces co-financing partnership of Palestinian auteur Elia Suleiman's new feature **"It Must Be Heaven"**
- Six DFI Grants recipients selected to screen in *Un Certain Regard* and *Parallel Sections of Critics' Week (Semaine de la Critique)* and *Director's Fortnight (Quinzaine des Realisateurs)*
- Six short films by Qatari and Qatar based talents will be showcased at the Cannes Short Film Corner

Doha, Qatar; 1 May 2019: The Doha Film Institute (DFI) has set another first in the Arab region for a film organisation, with its latest co-financed project selected to the *Official Selection, Competition* once again at the 72nd Cannes Film Festival, which takes place from 14 to 25 May 2019.

This nomination makes DFI the only cultural organisation in the MENA region to have had four co-financed films in the *Official Selection, Competition* to date. Previous nominees include Asghar Farhadi's *"The Salesman"* in 2016, and Nadine Labaki's *"Caphernaum"* and *"The Wild Pear Tree"* by Nuri Bilge Ceylan in 2018. A further six films supported by DFI through its Grants programme and six short films from Qatar will screen to global audiences in key sections of the prestigious Festival.

Palestinian director Elia Suleiman's new film **"It Must Be Heaven"**, co-financed by DFI, is included in the competition along with 19 global entries. Winner of the Festival's Jury Prize in 2002 for *"Divine Intervention"*, Elia Suleiman also served as a jury member of the Cannes Film Festival in 2006 and his feature *"The Time That Remains"* premiered at the Festival in 2009.

Grant recipients **"Adam"** by Maryam Touzani and **"Papicha"**, a Qumra 2019 project, by Mounia Meddour will world premiere in the *Un Certain Regard* segment of the Official Selection.

Selections in the parallel sections include the world premieres of Qumra 2019 projects, **"Abou Leila"** by Amin Sidi-Boumédiène and **"The Unknown Saint"** by Alaa Eddine Aljem, in *Critics' Week (Semaine de la Critique)*; and two new Spring 2019 Grants recipients **"To Live to Sing"** by Johnny Ma and **"The Orphanage"** by Shahrbanoo Sadat make their global debut at *Directors' Fortnight (Quinzaine des Realisateurs)*. A further six short films made in Qatar will be screened at the Cannes Short Film Corner under the theme 'Shortcuts to Qatar'.

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha Film Institute, said: "To have films supported by the Doha Film Institute repeatedly selected at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival is an exceptional honour for us and a strong testament to the high quality of projects we nurture

through our funding and mentoring initiatives. We are delighted that the works of talented filmmakers from the region and beyond have once again made the cut at the premiere film event, competing with some of the most anticipated films in international cinema. The selection underlines the focus of DFI and Qatar to support compelling voices and powerful stories that have the potential to shape world cinema.

“I am especially proud of master filmmaker Elia Suleiman and his bedrock credentials as a greatly admired director. Elia’s particular worldview, his keen sense of the absurd and his unbounded passion for storytelling are creatively represented in **“It Must Be Heaven”**, an important and timely film of the Palestinian experience that will resonate with all”, she commented.

Co-financed by DFI, **“It Must Be Heaven”** (France, Qatar, Germany, Canada, Turkey) is an autobiographical account of Elia’s experience of leaving Palestine to find an alternative homeland. The promise of a new life turns into a comedy of errors; however far he travels, from Paris to New York, something always reminds him of home. The comic saga explores identity, nationality, and belonging.

“Adam” (Morocco, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Moroccan director Maryam Touzani tells the story of Abla, a struggling widow and mother to a 10-year-old daughter. Closed-off from life, leading an existence devoid of happiness and taking refuge in work, Abla has a chance encounter that will change her forever; **“Papicha”** (Algeria, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Algerian director Mounia Meddour is set in 1990s Algeria and follows the life of a free-spirited young student as she refuses to allow the tragic events of the Algerian Civil War keep her from experiencing a normal young woman’s life.

Algerian director Amin Sidi-Boumédiène’s first feature narrative **“Abou Leila”** (Algeria, France, Qatar), set in 1994 Algeria, follows two childhood friends, who cross the desert in search of Abou Leila, a dangerous terrorist; **“The Unknown Saint”** (Morocco, France, Germany, Lebanon, Qatar) the first feature by Moroccan director Alaa Eddine Aljem, tells the story of a thief who, moments before his capture by the police, digs a grave to hide a large sum of money he stole. Upon his release years later, he returns to retrieve the bag, only to find that a shrine of an unknown saint was built directly over his loot.

“To Live to Sing” (China, France, Qatar) by Johnny Ma features a hot-tempered Sichuan opera troupe manager faced with the demolition of her theatre, who must find a new home for her troupe, before the family falls apart; and **“The Orphanage”** by Shahrbanoo Sadat (Afghanistan, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Qatar), set in the late 1980’s, is about 15-year-old Qodrat, who lives in the streets of Kabul and sells cinema tickets on the black market. A big Bollywood fan who daydreams himself into some of his favorite movie scenes, his life changes when he is brought to a Soviet orphanage.

Shorts from Qatar include **“Domestic Acoustics”** (Qatar/2018) by Majid Al-Remaihi; **“Where Are You Right Meow?”** (Qatar/2018) by Maysam Al-Ani; **“Voyager”** (Qatar/2018) by Khalifa Al-Marri;

“I Am Not My Father” (Qatar/2018) by Naif Al-Malki; *“Nasser Goes to Space”* (Qatar/2018) by Mohammed Al-Mahmeed and *“The Bleaching Syndrome”* (Sudan, Qatar/2018) by Eiman Mirghani. The screening will take place on 22 May at 1:30 PM.

“Domestic Acoustics” explores the overlap of domestic and creative spaces by filming portraits by Qatari artist Fatma Al-Remaihi as they are removed from storage and discussed with members of her family, showing the subtle relationship between artistic practise and its life in the home. Also exploring family life is *“I Am Not My Father”*, which looks at the relationship between fathers and sons and the impact of strict parenting on generations to come.

Family-friendly animations *“Where Are You Right Meow”* and *“Nasser Goes to Space”* both look at the importance of family. The former is a charming animation about the difference between a house and a home as young artist Ayako’s beloved cat Beru goes missing, while the latter focuses on a highly-creative young boy who uses an imaginary world to cope with his parents’ impending divorce.

Looking reflectively at humans and their place in society, *“Voyager”* is a captivating human story about emotions, psychology, and personal challenge as it follows a world traveller who embarks on a motorcycle journey across Europe. Also exploring identity is *“The Bleaching Syndrome”* – a documentary made by an Afro-Arab filmmaker living in Qatar who looks at the phenomenon of Sudanese women bleaching their skin and addresses her own lifelong feeling of unworthiness and underrepresentation.

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About Doha Film Institute

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute’s platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar’s 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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