

2012 Arab Documentary Film

Project - ADFP Workshop

February 22-24, 2013

Beirut, at AltCity



Introduction

For each cycle of the Arab Documentary Film Program (ADFP), AFAC holds a workshop that aims at providing its documentary projects with professional support in areas where it is needed. In addition to providing financial support, AFAC works closely with individual grantees and involves a number of seasoned film professionals to act as advisors, particularly for less experienced filmmakers, the majority for this edition of the ADFP.

Over the last three ADFP cycles and its five workshops, AFAC has continued to provide a structured support system to its filmmaker grantees. Workshops curriculums are designed early after the selection process is over and in consultation with the jurors committee. Additionally, AFAC's regular communication with the grantees and staying abreast of all developments pertaining to their projects, listening to and learning from their needs and the challenges help design specially-tailored programs for best impact.

Between February 22 and 24, a development workshop for the 2012 ADFP projects took place in Beirut, with the support of a team of advisors, coming from different cinematic and geographical backgrounds. Seven documentary projects took part in Beirut's workshop, most still in development phase, one that has finished shooting while two others still in production for various reasons: Dahna Abourahme's *A folktale of Palestine* (Lebanon), Selim Mrad's *Counterbalance* (Lebanon), Rachid Biyi's *Bread and Angels* (Morocco), Nadine Salib's *Mother of the Unborn* (Egypt), Mariam Mekiwi's *Hinter Tausend Staeben Keine Welt* (Egypt), Ramez Mikhael's *The Craft* (Egypt), and ElKheyzer Zidane's *Deadly Business* (Algeria).

A top-notch team of advisors was assembled to give the filmmakers in-depth feedback in addition to an insight into the market, additional sources for funding, and possible solutions to the restrictions they are facing. The advisors committee comprised Danish documentary consultant and critic Tue Steen Muller, American producer Joslyn Barnes, Syrian producer and festival director Orwa Nyrabia, and Lebanese filmmaker and Commissioning Editor Mohamad Soueid. The workshop kicked off in Beirut on February 21st with a welcome dinner where the filmmakers and advisors got to know each other informally.

Program

One month before the workshop, all participating projects' files (synopses, treatments, existing visual material, and filmmakers' previous works) were sent to both advisors and participants. One-on-one meetings constituted the bulk of the program being the most beneficial component of previous workshops. Participating filmmakers rotated among the four advisors, spending an hour and a half with each one. Additionally, the participants gave a brief presentation of their projects at the workshop opening. Later on, meetings were conducted between the participants themselves in groups of two or three. These meetings allowed for further exchange and sharing of information and common challenges while catering for participants to bond, learn from each other's experience and give feedback from a perspective different to the advisors'. Feedback sessions with advisors and participants allowed for an immediate assessment allowed for slight adjustments to the schedule,

and most importantly, a case study and a theatrical screening were screened for all. On the last day, another group meeting and group discussion concluded the workshop.

Day 1

Participants presented their projects and shared some visual material (trailer or rushes), giving the advisors an insight into their visual and artistic approach to their topics, and raising questions and comments by fellow filmmakers and advisors. The aim of this exercise was not only to acquaint the participants with each other's projects, but also to train them to pitch their projects and explore ways of how to best represent their works. The one-on-one meetings followed and occupied the entire afternoon. Each participant met with one or two advisors for an hour and a half. Side meetings between other participants proved to have a big impact on the filmmakers and their projects as reported by them later on.

That day during dinner, filmmakers started to mingle more and passionate questions were debated intensely in the group setting the tone for the next day's extensive one-on-one sessions.

Day 2

From 9:30 am to the late afternoon, the filmmakers finished a complete round with all four advisors. Discussions had spanned a wide range of topics related to structure, storytelling, technicalities, creative and visual approaches, weaknesses and strengths, etc. The group departed to Metropolis, the one art house cinema in Beirut, for a special screening of Mohamad Soueid's *Nightfall* (2000). Chosen by Soueid himself for the purpose of presenting it to the workshop group, the film is about the Palestine Liberation Movement's (Fat'h) remarkable faction known as the Student Brigade –to which Soueid was affiliated in the 1970s and that was disbanded after the PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982. Soueid has filmed its surviving members, meditating on both their return to civilian life and their dismantled dreams after the dust of battle has settled and revolution has lapsed. The film is the second part in a beautifully knit trilogy, preceded by *Tango of Yearning* (1998), and followed by *Civil War* (2002), in which the filmmaker traced the unwritten history and broken narratives of that generation of insurgents. It offered a lesson in how a filmmaker can retain his full freedom, work with minimal resources and still conceive a film that continues to resonate after 13 years.

Day 3

The third day opened with Tue Steen Muller who presented a collection of scenes, trailers, and visual excerpts from documentary works as a case study. The lively discussion that followed pointed out a diversity of approaches and bold choices taken by filmmakers around the world to communicate their stories in singular voices. The session concluded with the screening of the 38-minute inspiring documentary *Anything Can Happen* by Polish documentarian Marcel Lozinski. The 1995 film is essentially a story of life and death, featuring Lozinski's six-year-old son Tomaszek and elderly people spending time on the benches of a Warsaw park. Riding his scooter, Tomaszek asks the elderly difficult, though basic questions. The boy's ideas of future and life are confronted with those of men at the end of their lives. The choice was very peculiar as the film touched on elements that haunt the

filmmakers. The documentary was very personal, merging the lines between documentary and narrative, incredibly aesthetic, meditative, and deeply humane.

The exceptional summer-feel of that day required an urgent schedule modification. Advisors and participants left the closed workshop premises to a coffee shop by the sea where the group meeting was held in a refreshing atmosphere. Participants reflected on the meetings, advisors' feedback, discussions, as well as their initial expectations versus the actual output of the workshop. Each presented a detailed assessment of the expected challenges and the work to be done in the coming months in light of the discussions they had with the advisors. Advisors voiced general observations based on the two-day meetings and raised additional issues, questions and advices in relation to each project.

The afternoon was split among two events: a group discussion and additional one-on-one meetings upon participants' requests. "Positioning your Project in the Market" was the title of the group discussion that was joined by producers Jana Wehbe and Jinane Dagher from *Counterbalance* and *A folktale of Palestine*. The discussion tackled two separate yet related burning issues: where to go for additional funding and how to find audiences for the projects. The latter aligns with AFAC's recent efforts to launch a discussion about building a film audience in the Arab region. The filmmakers started by loosely defining a preferred or intended audience for their projects. Their visions were mostly restricted to festival audiences as theatrical releases or television broadcasting seemed to them farfetched. The advisors, while stressing the point that most of the projects are not yet ready to apply for production funds, gave specific examples of funds and distribution outlets suitable for each project. Without shutting the door totally on the ability of some projects to attract broadcasters, and without losing the optimistic edge, they recommended that some projects should refrain from approaching televisions for coproduction given their artistic and free nature. Other suggestions were for some projects to benefit from a cross-media platform or opt for crowd-funding. The general advice to all filmmakers was to hold on to their visions and artistic freedoms in face of compromises that might threaten the final output.

An additional one-on-one session concluded the three-day workshop, and a final feedback session was conducted with the advisors to evaluate the workshop itself. A common observation cited editing as the most challenging endeavor for all, recommending future professional support extended by AFAC to help with this through the provision of consultant editors.

Participating Projects

Project Title: A folktale of Palestine

Director: Dahna Abourahme

Producer: Jinane Dagher

Country: Lebanon

'A folktale of Palestine' depicts epic love stories set against the tumultuous changes of early 20th century Palestine. Travelers, revolutionaries, farmers, musicians, teachers and writers take us on a journey in search of love, justice and belonging.

Project Title: Counterbalance

Director: Selim Mourad

Producer: Jana Wehbe

Country: Lebanon

What is left when one lets go of all the prewritten fights? What traces matter to be left in the world after one's gone? This film is an attempt from the filmmaker to answer those questions by reflecting upon his family and personal stories. Inhabited by the desire to become a father one day but aware of the difficulty of achieving this within his society that doesn't welcome same-sex affection warmly, he starts looking in his obscure family tree for some forgotten relative who would assure the continuity of the family and take this weight off his chest. On another level, he starts dreaming of a virtual child and an eventual mother, thus crafting the future of his family as he pleases. Fantasy and reality intertwine closely as a major event is happening in his parents' life and his: the demolition of the family house and moving out separately to different homes.

Project Title: Mother of the Unborn

Director: Nadine Michael Salib

Producer: Maartje Alders

Country: Egypt

'How much do we determine our own destiny?' This is the question with which a young Egyptian filmmaker starts her journey to the south of her country, often referred to as the forgotten region, in search of infertile women labeled with the name 'Mother of the Unborn' or 'Um Al-Ghayeb'. These women are usually stigmatized, treated as a bad omen and forced to perform old fertility rituals rooted in their culture. Although arriving as an outsider, she finds unique access and intimacy through her position as a woman who in essence is confronted with the same questions about being a woman and motherhood as the people she meets and does not shy away from sharing her own perspective. Thus structured as a dialogue, a record of different encounters and worldviews, the journey becomes a collective search.

In a poetic meditation upon the notions of death and the creation of life, she lingers further and further into the maze of surprising characters, untold stories and fabulous beliefs contrasted with the tough but also humorous and modern realities of every day life of some people, somewhere in the world....

Project Title: Bread and Angels

Director: Rachid Biyi

Country: Morocco

In June 1981, a revolt for bread was declared all over Morocco. Military were sent around Casablanca and began shooting the crowds. Hassan and Said, likewise other victims, were shot dead by the military, which hid their corpses for more than 20 years. The film will follow Najat and Aziza, the victims' sisters, who are gradually coming out of the silence imposed by the state, and are fighting for compensation and recognition of the state's crimes.

Project Title: Hinter Tausend Staeben Keine Welt

Director: Mariam Mekiwi

Producer: Dalia Soleiman

Country: Egypt

A young woman comes across her old diaries written during her childhood years in the nineties which she spent in Alexandria where she went to school. Within the pages of her diaries lies a world filled with characters she had forgotten about and things of which she vaguely has any recollection. The finding of her diary and what lies within it grips her with such an intensity that she is driven with great momentum to uncover the truth behind that world written about by a child that was somewhat trying to say something. And so she resolves to embark upon a journey where she revisits the places where she spent most of her childhood mainly in a German Catholic school (Deutsche Schule der Borromoerinnen) and an elderly home (Pelizaeusheim), and the people who might have or have not lived there. And did they even ever exist?

Project Title: The Craft

Director: Ramez Youssef

Producer: Mohamad Rashad

Country: Egypt

The film weaves the stories of three belly dancers who work in street weddings (a local wedding) in Alexandria, Egypt, and their struggle to survive in very hard and tough circumstances.

Project Title: Deadly Business

Director: Zidani El-Khair

Country: Algeria

Deadly Business rather than deadly unemployment is the choice made by youth in Tkoot, Batna, a province at the edge of the Algerian desert, where rampant poverty and unemployment are ignored by the national government. Here stones are cut and polished by the hands of the poor to build beautiful and fancy houses for the rich. After only two years of cutting stones, the deadly disease of silicosis invades these young men's lungs.

Advisors' Profiles



Mohamed Soueid: Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Mohamed Soueid began his academic life very distant from the world of film and video. In 1977, he enrolled to study Chemistry at the Lebanese University. Yet, his passion for films took the best out of him. Where immediately after he completed his studies he began a career in film criticism where he wrote weekly columns for Al-Safir daily newspaper, as well as for the weekly cultural supplement (Al-Mulhak) of An-Nahar daily newspaper. While continuing with his career in film criticism, he worked as an assistant director for a number of Lebanese filmmakers. After he directed his first film “Absence” in 1990, Soueid went on to make his own documentaries and TV works, where he was notably known for his autobiographical documentary trilogy: “Tango of Yearning” (1998), “Nightfall” (2000) and “Civil War” (2002). His “Tango of Yearning” won the Best Documentary Director Prize at Beirut International Film Festival in Beirut 2000. Apart from his documentary independent works, Mohamed Soueid directed the TV miniseries drama “Women in Love”, a free remake of a classical work produced by Télé Liban in the 70s and then directed by Samir Nasri. For several years, he was Film Professor at St. Joseph University – Beirut. He also developed a number of screenplays, where he co-wrote with the Egyptian director Yousry Nasrallah the feature length film “Bab’l Shams” – “Gate to the Sun”(France – Egypt 2004), and also adapted the Lebanese dialogues for “Terra Incognita” and “Le Dernier Homme”, both directed by Ghassan Salhab (France-Lebanon 2001 and 2006). In addition to his film and TV work, Mohamed Soueid published two books on Lebanese cinema and old movie theatres: “Postponed Cinema – The Lebanese Civil War Films” (published by “Arab Research Foundation”, Beirut, 1986) and “Ya Fouadi – A Chronicle of Beirut’s Late Movie Theatres” (published by “Dar An-Nahar”, Beirut, 1996). In 2004, his first novel “Cabaret Souad” was released by the Lebanese publishing house Dar Al-Adab. He is currently a commissioning editor and senior producer at Al-Arabiya News Channel for which he had directed a number of documentaries including: *My Heart Beats Only For Her* (2009) and *How Bitter My Sweet* (2010).



Tue Steen Müller: Worked with short and documentary films for more than 20 years at the Danish Film Board – as press secretary, head of distribution and information and as a commissioning editor. He has contributed with articles for national and international

newspapers and magazines. He's the co-founder of Balticum Film- and TV-Festival, Filmkontakt Nord and Documentary of the EU. Travelled to European short and documentary festivals often to be seated as a jury member, and has given documentary courses and seminars in more than 30 countries. In 2004, he was awarded the Danish Roos Prize for his contribution to the Danish and European documentary culture. In 2005 awarded a prize at the DOCLisboa for his contribution to the international development and promotion of Portuguese documentaries. Since 1996 when it started, director of EDN (European Documentary Network). Given the EDN Life Achievement Award 2005. From 2006 free lance consultant and teacher in Danish and European documentary matters. Selector and consultant for the festivals DOCSBarcelona, Magnificent7 in Belgrade and Leipzig. Head of Studies at the European training programme Ex Oriente. Tutor at other training programmes like Archidoc, EAVE, ZagrebDOXPro and Discovery Campus. Has his own website – together with Danish Allan Berg – where he posts documentary film news and reviews documentaries.

www.filmkommentaren.dk



Joslyn Barnes: Joslyn Barnes is a writer and Emmy® nominated producer. She is the author of numerous screenplays for feature films including the upcoming Indian feature THE COSMIC FOREST and the award-winning film BÀTTU, directed by Cheikh Oumar Sissoko (Mali), which she associate produced. Among the films Barnes has executive produced or produced since co-founding Louverture Films are the César-nominated BAMAÑO, Sundance Grand Jury

Prize winner and Oscar® and Emmy® nominated TROUBLE THE WATER, Oscar® shortlisted SOUNDTRACK FOR A REVOLUTION, Bollywood thriller DUM MAARO DUM, the award-winning BLACK POWER MIXTAPE 1967-1975, this year's Oscar® shortlisted, Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner THE HOUSE I LIVE IN, and the Nepali feature HIGHWAY. She associate produced Elia Suleiman's THE TIME THAT REMAINS, and the 2010 Cannes Palme d'Or winner UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Barnes also wrote and directed the short film PRANA for CinéTévé France as part of an internationally distributed series of 30 short films to promote awareness of environmental issues. Prior to co-founding Louverture, Barnes served as a programme officer and expert consultant at the United Nations. She has lived and traveled widely in Africa and Asia, and has written numerous articles covering trade and social development issues, as well as contributing to books on the establishment of electronic communications in developing countries, food security in Africa, and strategic advocacy for the inclusion of gender perspectives on the international development agenda.



Orwa Nyrabia: Orwa graduated from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus 1999 and worked as a columnist at Assafeer Newspaper for 4 years before he started in film where he worked as Assistant Director in high-profile fiction films such as *Sacrifices* by Oussama Mohammad (*Certain Regard – Cannes 2002*) and played as lead actor in “*La Porte du soleil*” of Yousri Nassrallah (*Selection Officielle – Cannes 2004*). Since he co-founded PROACTION FILM, Orwa worked in a number of

documentary and fiction films before he started producing. A graduate of AFIC (INA-Sorbonne 2006), his main start was in the international co-production doc “*Dolls – A Woman from Damascus*” by Diana El Jeiroudi (*Silver Wolf Competition – IDFA 2007*). Today Orwa continues to produce and co-produce documentary and fiction films and is working on two in-development projects.

As a filmmaker, Orwa made one short documentary, co-directing a fiction short and finishing his feature-length doc “*Queen of Hearts*”. Orwa is a co-founder and organizer of DOX BOX International Documentary Film Festival in Syria, he is head of programming. Orwa has been seated many times at international festivals as a juror.