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Abu Dhabi Film Festival Teams Up with MoMA and ArteEast for New Annual Program on Masterpieces of the Arab Avant-Garde

The Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2010 has announced it will screen selections from the first of three installments of Mapping Subjectivity: Experimentation in Arab Cinema from the 1960s to Now, a new program produced in association with The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and ArteEast in New York.

Mapping Subjectivity is an in-depth initiative that maps the largely unknown heritage of personal, artistic and innovative cinema from the Arab world. In the 1960s, galvanized by a broader global vanguard of countercultural experimentation in the arts, filmmakers in the Arab countries began to craft a language and form that broke away from established conventions and commercial considerations, ultimately clearing the ground for boldly subjective cinematic expressions. Each annual exhibition will include screenings at MoMA, with a selection of the program traveling to the Abu Dhabi Film Festival, the Tate Modern in London and subsequently touring throughout the Middle East and internationally.

The fourth Abu Dhabi Film Festival, taking place from October 14 to 23, 2010, will feature the first international preview of this unique initiative and screen a selection of four films from the MoMA series: *The Mummy* (al-Mumiya) (Egypt, 1973) and *Al-Yazerli* (Syria, 1972), *Divine Intervention* (Palestine, 2002), *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (Palestine, 1996).

Qays al-Zubaidi's *Al-Yazerli* (Iraq/Syria, 1972), a film that explores a young boy's inner turmoil at the prospect of a destiny that seems bound to poverty and manual labor, was screened only once in Syria. Another rarely screened work is *The Mummy* (Night of Counting the Years) (Egypt, 1973), the most famous of Egyptian auteur movies, directed by Shadi Abdel Salam and restored by the World Cinema Foundation and Cineteca Bologna.

The selection also includes two films by acclaimed Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman. *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (Palestine/France/USA/Germany, 1996) is Suleiman's directorial debut, a series of witty vignettes about life in Nazareth and Jerusalem, some contemplative,

others laced with satirical humor, which has been widely compared with work by Jacques Tati. *Divine Intervention* (Palestine/France/Morocco, 2002) is the first ever Palestinian film to enter competition in Cannes and follows several interrelated characters in Nazareth, the West Bank, and Jerusalem as they struggle to maintain a veneer of normality.

“This important new project promises remarkable insights into the past, present and future of experimentation in Arab film and we are thrilled to present parts of it at the Festival. It offers audiences an opportunity to discover that, contrary to popular belief, radical and artistic films have been a part of Arab cinema for decades. That these films can be screened in Abu Dhabi is testament to the region’s increasing openness to and curiosity about such works,” says Peter Scarlet, Executive Director of the Abu Dhabi Film Festival.

“Unconventional, non-commercial films have long been neglected in this region, as the widespread lack of funding for production, archives and research proves. But in Abu Dhabi it is now seen as essential to preserve a broad range of seminal cultural goods for future generations, which is why we wanted to get involved in this exciting project,” commented Project Director at Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage Eissa Saif Rashed Al Mazrouei.

Mapping Subjectivity is a collaboration between The Museum of Modern Art and ArteEast, and is organized by Jytte Jensen, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and Rasha Salti, Curator and Artistic Director, ArteEast.

“Much of the daring and formally challenging filmmaking at work today in the Arab world has its roots—both acknowledged and not—in this pioneering drive to experiment with narrative, representation, and the production of images,” says Ms. Jensen. “Together, these films are sure to inspire new ways of thinking about and appreciating modernity in art and cinema from the Arab world.”

“Three years of research have gone into making this program possible,” says Rasha Salti, who is also a programmer at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. “It will not only instigate a re-writing of film history, but give contemporary and emerging filmmakers the strength to continue taking risks, artistically and politically.”

The Abu Dhabi Film Festival provided support and funding for two of the more recent films to be shown in New York. Maher Abi Samra's Sheoeyin Kenna (We Were Communists) (Lebanon, 2009) was screened by the Festival as a work in progress and Mina' al-Thakira (Port of Memory) (Palestine/Germany/France/UAE, 2009), written and directed by Kamal Aljafari, world premiered at the Festival last year. Both follow in the footsteps of their predecessors by pushing the boundaries of filmmaking.

Mapping Subjectivity will run at MoMA from October 28 to November 22, 2010.



ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The Abu Dhabi Film Festival (formerly the Middle East International Film Festival) was established in 2007, with the aim of helping to create a vibrant film culture throughout the region. The event, presented each October by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) under the patronage of its chairman H.E. Sheikh Sultan Bin Tahnoon Al Nahyan, is committed to curating exceptional programs to engage and educate the local community, inspire filmmakers and nurture the growth of the regional film industry.

With its commitment to presenting works by Arab filmmakers in competition alongside those by major talents of world cinema, the Festival offers Abu Dhabi's diverse and enthusiastic audiences a means of engaging with their own and others' cultures through the art of cinema. At the same time, a strong focus on the bold new voices of Arab cinema connects with Abu Dhabi's role as a burgeoning cultural capital in the region and marks the festival as a place for the world to discover and gauge the pulse of recent Arab filmmaking.

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