

Selected Festivals & Awards

of director Ahmad Abdalla

- **Dubai International Film Festival - 2017** -Jury member for the Official Competition.
- Among the best 100 Arabic films in History, chosen by Arab and cultural figures at **Dubai Film Festival 10th anniversary** - Microphone 2010.
- **BFI - London Film Festival 2014** - Jury member for the Official Competition.
- **BFI- London Film Festival 2014** - Film"DECOR" Official Selection out of Competition.
- **São Paulo Int Film Festival** - 2014 - Film "DECOR" Official Selection.
- **Toronto International Film Festival 2013** - Film "Rags and Tatters" - Official Selection.
- **BFI- London Film Festival- 2013** - Film "Rags and Tatters" - Official Competition.
- **25th Singapore International Film Festival 2014** - Ahmad Abdlla: Director in Focus.
- **Cinemed International Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier** - 2013 - Film "Rags and Tatters"- Won the Golden award.
- **Cannes Film Festival** - Official Selection - 2011-Film "18 DAYS" (Co-Director).
- **Toronto International Film Festival** - Official Selection -2011 Film "TAHRIR - 2011" (Participant Director).
- **Toronto international Film Festival** - Official Selection- 2011 - Film "MICROPHONE".
- **Istanbul International Film Festival** - 2011 Film "MICROPHONE"-Won The Golden Tulip award.
- **El Festival de Cine Africano de Tarifa** - Film "MICROPHONE" 2011 Won The Best Film.
- **Journées cinématographiques de Carthage** —2011- Film "MICROPHONE"-Won Tanit d'Or
- **le 9e FESTIVAL des CINÉMAS d'AFRIQUE du PAYS d'Apt** 2011- Film "MICROPHONE"- Won: Best Film.
- **Cairo International Film Festival** -2011- Film "MICROPHONE"- Won: Best Arabic-language film Award
- Director Ahmad Abdalla won over 20 awards in Egyptian, Middle Eastern, and International film festivals. including **Cairo International Film Festival**, **Apt Film Festival** (France). **Festival Cinema Africano in Verona** (Italy), another list of awards is available in this short IMDB link: goo.gl/2yikX0 .

Film Review: 'Decor'

Egyptian director Ahmad Abdalla's fifth feature is a sophisticated reinvention of the classic 'women's picture.'

By [Guy Lodge](#)



With: Horeya Farghaly, Khaled Abol Naga, Maged El Kedwany. (Arabic dialogue)

Official Site: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3394564/>

The classic “women’s picture,” demoted without due consideration in Hollywood filmmaking, gets a complex, vibrant reassessment in “Decor,” Egyptian director [Ahmad Abdalla’s](#) conceptually sophisticated fifth feature. Reflecting on a diverse swath of film history while painting a distinctly contemporary portrait of fractured female identity, this blithely self-reflexive melodrama centers on a put-upon production designer finding an alternative identity — or perhaps her original one — in the sudsy movie romance she’s reluctantly constructing. Though it pays extensive homage to the dramatic and stylistic conventions of vintage Egyptian cinema, “Decor” is far from esoteric: Shades of Sirk, Cassavetes, Bergman and even Woody Allen can all be detected on the film’s glistening monochrome surface. Slight overlength should not keep adventurous arthouse distribs from this sleek London festival premiere.

With its playful, literate screenplay by Sherin Diab and Mohamed Diab (the latter a writer-director celebrated for his 2010 festival hit, “Cairo 678”), “Decor” is Abdalla’s first feature that he hasn’t penned himself. Yet it still has the purposeful singularity of an auteur work, and a revealing one at that: Even if it’s not as reflective of its maker’s personal politics as last year’s agitated post-Revolution study “Rags and Tatters,” a rich array of

<https://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/film-review-decor-1201343283/>

cinematic reference points suggest Abdalla's own education and stimulus as a filmmaker. His most formally stylized and refined effort to date, "Decor" proves his elasticity of technique and emotional empathy, even as its structural acrobatics only narrowly dodge self-congratulation in the final act.

It's certainly the kind of thoughtful film that our protagonist Maha (Horeya Farghaly) would prefer to be involved with, as opposed to the nondescript soaper for which she's being handsomely paid to create nondescript interiors. A childless-by-choice career woman working alongside her laidback husband, fellow designer Sherif (Khaled Abol Naga), perfectionist Maha allows herself to get overly invested in the project despite her personal distaste for it. In the process, she spars with its vain, obstinate leading lady and indifferent director — a man who unapologetically prioritizes workaday product over "difficult festival-route films that no one understands."

That most winkingly delivered of lines threatens a shift into mega-meta satirical territory, but "Decor" has more intimate imitations of life on its mind. In a swift, elegantly executed temporal shift, Maha suddenly finds herself not dressing a set but living in it, having somehow become the fictional protagonist of the film-within-a-film — an unhappy art teacher whose genial, homely husband, Mostafa (Maged El Kedwany), and young daughter notice nothing amiss about the stranger in their midst. Just as she's beginning to get her head around this uncanny transformation, however, Maha finds herself abruptly back in her old life.

From this point forward, she flips between these alternate realities with unceremonious frequency and fluidity, as each existence reveals its own sparring pros and cons. Any concerns that "Decor" may be spinning a conservative cautionary tale for women opting out of motherhood are allayed as the script evenhandedly probes the crevices of both Mahas' marriages. The B-movie narrative is fleshed out with such plausible texture and conflict, meanwhile, that the film's initial existential gambit is turned neatly on its head: What if the production designer's comparatively glamorous life is the illusion, the fantasy product of an overwhelmed young mother wishing away her life choices?

All possibilities are kept in play, as Abdalla handles this quasi-"Pleasantville" premise with the cool quizzicality of latter-day Kiarostami. The question of whether Maha's split identity is a genuine twilight-zone occurrence or merely the psychological fallout of a nervous breakdown may or may not be answered, but it certainly doesn't need to be. Both manifestations of Maha's character, subtly differentiated and occasionally aligned with considerable dexterity in Farghaly's splendid star turn, paper over each other to form a layered, nuanced model of femininity as it is perceived (and still frequently challenged) in modern-day Egypt.

Abdalla cleverly plays realism against the accepted affectations of romantic filmmaking — particularly those of his native cinema, most evidently via substantial interpolation of existing music scores — to alternately separate and blur Maha's lives, each of which is portrayed in a variably heightened register from scene to scene. This carousel of cinematic artifice is consistently stimulating; over nearly two hours, though, not every one of its dimensional fillips feels essential, particularly in a fake-out finale that wryly recalibrates the audience's position in the whole enterprise.

Whether or not the grass is greener on either side of the reality divide, d.p. Tarek Hefny ensures that all Maha's colliding worlds are treated with equally lustrous care: The tone and depth of the film's black-and-white imagery are deftly varied to evoke a range of cinematic grades and styles, from lurid B-movie contrast to more televisual flatness. All the film's own decor is intelligently motivated, as befits a narrative that finally puts the production designer center stage in the filmmaking process.

Film Review: 'Decor'

Reviewed at London Film Festival (Love), Oct. 12, 2014. Running time: 116 MIN.

PRODUCTION: (Egypt) A New Century Prods. production. (International sales: New Century, Cairo.) Produced by Zein Kurdi. Executive producer, Ahmed Badawy.

CREW: Directed by Ahmad Abdalla. Screenplay, Sherin Diab, Mohamed Diab. Camera (B&W/color), Tarek Hefny; editor, Sara Abdallah; music, Khaled Al Kammar; music supervisor, Hani Adel; production designers, Nihal Farouk, Asem Ali; costume designer, Selma Samy; sound (Dolby Digital), Kostas Varibopiotas; supervising sound editor, Ahmed Mostafa Saleh; line producer, Ahmed Farghalli; assistant director, Omar Zohairy.

WITH: Horeya Farghaly, Khaled Abol Naga, Maged El Kedwany. (Arabic dialogue)

ahramonline

Ahmad Abdalla: Filmmaker-in-Focus at Singapore Film Fest

Ahram Online, Tuesday 25 Nov 2014

Upcoming Singapore International Film Festival selects Egypt's Ahmad Abdalla as its Filmmaker-in-Focus



Celebrating its silver anniversary, the 25th Singapore International Film Festival, scheduled to take place between 4 and 14 December 2014, gears up for the special edition.

The festival will include a number of sections including classics, cinema today, Asian Cinema among others.

Ahmad Abdalla, an Egyptian young filmmaker, will be featured in this year's Filmmaker-in-Focus, one of the regular sections at the festival, each year shedding light on a chosen figure from the international cinema scene.

Abdalla is one of the most prominent young filmmakers who over the past few years made a number of important cinematic works that attracted local and international audiences.

Four films by Abdalla will be screened during the Singapore International Film Festival: Heliopolis, Microphone, Rags and Tatters, and Decor.

His documentary Heliopolis (2008) was his debut feature, which he wrote and directed, and brought him Best First screenplay Award of Sawiris Foundation and a Special Mention at the 2009 Cairo International Film Festival. His following film Microphone (2010), considered to be his artistic prophecy, won a Golden Tulip at the Istanbul International Film Festival, Tanit d'or from Journées cinématographiques de Carthage, Best Editing Award from the Dubai International Film Festival among numerous other awards.

Rags and Tatters (2013), a film that follows a fugitive who escapes during the prison breaks that took place at the onset of the 2011 uprising, received positive reviews from international critics. The film has been praised as capturing the sense of disillusionment that has gripped post-revolutionary Egypt.

Abdalla's latest movie, *Decor* (2014), is about a woman struggling to know what she wants, and struggling to make her own choices in life. *Decor* is the first time for Abdalla to work with a big budget. The film made its Middle East Premier during this year's Cairo International Film Festival.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/116360.aspx>



Reviews Box Office Heat Vision Roundtables

James McAvoy, Producer Jeremy Thomas to Sit on London Film Festival Main Jury

4:29 AM PDT 9/23/2014 by Alex Ritman



James McAvoy

Luc Roeg, Sally Hawkins, Finola Dwyer and Ahmad Abdalla are also tapped for jury duty

Veteran producer [Jeremy Thomas](#) has been named head of the official competition jury for the [upcoming BFI London Film Festival](#).

In an announcement made Tuesday, the appointment of the prolific producer behind titles such as *The Last Emperor*, *Crash*, *Naked Lunch* and *Only Lovers Left Alive* — and a former BFI chair — was

revealed alongside **Luc Roeg**, **Sophie Fiennes** and **Finola Dwyer**, who are set to preside over the first feature, documentary and best British newcomer competition juries, respectively.

Read more [Edward Snowden Doc to Get U.K. Premiere at London Film Festival](#)

On the official competition jury, Thomas will be joined by rising Egyptian director and last year's best film award nominee **Ahmad Abdalla** (who also has his film *Decor* in the program), Golden Globe winner and Oscar nominee **Sally Hawkins**, producer **Lorna Tee**, *X-Men* star **James McAvoy** and *Variety* chief film critic **Scott Foundas**.

The festival also announced that *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby* would be joining its lineup of screenings. The U.K. premiere of the McAvoy and **Jessica Chastain**-starring drama is set to take place on Oct. 17 at the Odeon West End in London's Leicester Square, with McAvoy and director **Ned Benson** set to attend.

Last year, **Pawel Pawlikowski's** *Ida* — Poland's foreign-language entry for the 2015 Academy Awards — picked up the BFI London Film Festival's Best Film gong. Previous winners include *Rust & Bone*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *A Prophet*.

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SCREENDAILY

Décor

BY FIONNUALA HALLIGAN | 12 OCTOBER 2014

Dir: Ahmad Abdalla. Egypt. 2014. 119mins



Ahmad Abdalla (*Heliopolis*, 2013's *Rags And Tatters*) crafts a black-and-white homage to his home cinema in *Décor*, an engrossing, Egyptian take on the Hollywood “woman’s film” which should cement Abdalla’s reputation at home with its core issues of choice – between the past and the present, career, love, duty and family.

Décor is shot in lustrous black and white, however, with more accent on the soft, bleached whites in what is clearly a well-financed, classically-mounted film.

The international marketplace may be more limited for this handsome, *Sliding Doors*-style story written by *Cairo 6, 7, 8*'s Sherin and Mohamed Diab. Best suited to festival play, its almost two-hour running time could prove a deterrent to all but the most devoted of Golden Age cineastes (although *The Artist*'s audience may be tempted into small arthouse play).

With images from old Egyptian films constantly flickering in the background, *Décor* tells the story of Maha (Horeya Farghaly), an art director who has been hired, with her husband Sherif (Khaled Abol Naga), to work on a commercial B-movie in Cairo. The production in question – “a film nobody cares about,” according to Sherif - is an attempt by a “festival director” to broaden his appeal, and Maha is being forced to compromise her high standards, much to her dismay.

She's working day and night on constructing the set – an apartment interior – and is frustrated by the film's leading actress who insists on wearing luridly coloured clothes to portray a dowdy schoolteacher.

Décor is shot in lustrous black and white, however, with more accent on the soft, bleached whites in what is clearly a well-financed, classically-mounted film. The director of the film-within-a-film may not care about what he is shooting, but Ahmad Abdalla cares a great deal, and *Décor* is beautiful to look at.

This are many layers to *Décor's* plot, and soon Maha is imagining herself into the B-movie's lead role. But is it imagination or her real life? Her reality shifts and she begins to crumble under the pressure, jolted between her lives as a child-less career woman and wife to the handsome Sherif, and much-loved wife to the portly Mostafa (Maged El Kedwany)and mother of a little girl. Her stature in Sherif's world, in which which starts out as a confident senior member of the production, becomes diminished as her power as a wife and mother grows in her new second life.

Reality becomes blurred, and the only person to connect the two worlds is Maha's psychiatrist who urges her to make the right decision and commit to her life. In both worlds, she's a "movie maniac" who is obsessed by cinema, but she is urged to stop living in the world of black-and-white movies and face reality, even though her story is clearly a classic film construct.

Maha is a woman trying to find her way in today's Egypt – it's no coincidence that in the world where she is a teacher and a mother as well as a loving daughter, there is a curfew that restricts her movements. With Sherif, she has had to kill off any idea of a family in order to survive as a career woman. Maha faces a dilemma lived by many screen heroines from the Golden Age through to now, but will the screenwriters make a choice for her? Maha is told "just play along and everything will be alright," but the writers have written themselves into an interesting corner here.

At 119 minutes, Abdalla tests the audience for a black-and-white domestic drama with a score derived from scratchy scores of Egyptian films that have little if no resonance overseas. But he has drawn warm performances from his three leads, in particular Horeya Farghaly in a classic role they simply don't write anymore. Also assisting the endeavor are Tarek Hefny's beautiful images of a slightly bleached, bright Cairo and Alexandria, which take on a silky, old-fashioned feel while capturing an utterly modern landscape

Production company: New Century Production/Dollar Film

International sales: New Century Production, info@newcenturyproduction.com

Producer: Zein Kurdi



Reviews Box Office Heat Vision Roundtables

'Decor': London Review

5:29 PM PST 11/3/2014 by Stephen Dalton



Courtesy of New Century Productions

THE BOTTOM LINE

Purple prose in Cairo

A young woman's life blurs into cinematic fiction in this magic-realist melodrama, which blends topical social comment with warm tributes to classic Egyptian movies

Shot in luminous high-gloss monochrome, *Decor* is a stylistically bold mix of self-referential love letter to vintage Arab cinema and bittersweet social commentary on post-revolutionary Egypt. For the first time, director **Ahmad Abdalla**—renowned for his award-winning verite dramas focused on the Arab Spring and its aftermath, notably *Microphone* and *Rags & Tatters*—has not scripted his film. It should attract interest overseas as a timely and sympathetic portrait of a female protagonist, and an entire nation, torn between two imperfect futures. Following its world premiere at the London Film Festival last month, Abdalla's movie, his fifth, next screens in Singapore in December.

Intense, striking, raven-haired J.Lo look-alike **Horeya Farghaly** stars as Maha, a film set designer who is working with her hunky husband, Sherif (**Khaled Abol Naga**), on a soapy commercial feature that both find distasteful. Maha is a modern Arab career woman, pragmatic and childless, every inch the liberated equal of her male colleagues. But as her anxiety about the cash-strapped production and its diva-like female star escalates, Maha suddenly finds herself magically transported inside the fictional universe of the movie she is shooting.

In this parallel narrative, Maha is a young mother with an older, more traditional husband, Mostafa (**Maged El Kedwany**), and an unsatisfactory job as an art teacher. But on the positive side, her elderly mother is still alive in this alternative story. Initially fearing that her sanity could be compromised and this version of reality may be the concrete one, Maha slowly learns to role-play her new self. Then one day, she suddenly wakes up in her old life again, assailed by fresh anxieties about whether the grass truly is greener on the other side.

Past the midway point, Maha's flip-flopping between parallel plots becomes more frequent and disorienting. In a witty touch, both Sherif and Mostafa take her to see a psychiatrist, played by the same actor in each universe. The playfully porous script by **Sherin Diab** and **Mohamed Diab** keep all possible readings fluid, never falling into the easy trap of endorsing Sherif's Western lifestyle over Mostafa's conservative values, or vice versa. Both husbands and both realities have positives and negatives for Maha. To quote one of the more knowing lines, "Life is not black and white."

Fans of vintage Egyptian cinema will recognize thematic and aesthetic echoes of some homegrown classics from the 1950s and 1960s here, most notably *River of Love* and *The Last Night* starring **Faten Hamama**. Once the Arab world's most revered movie heroine, Hamama appears throughout *Decor* in background TV clips, at one point with her former husband and co-star **Omar Sharif**. But no culturally specific research is required to enjoy this magical-realist conceit, which has equal echoes of classic **Bergman**, **Truffaut** and **Woody Allen**.

Decor is partly a snapshot of one woman at a crucial crossroads, partly a wary appraisal of Egypt's unfinished revolution and partly a navel-gazing meditation on the eternal tension between creativity

and commerce: "art never pays the bills." Sadly, this sophisticated balancing act wobbles a little in the overlong final act with an arson subplot, a mental breakdown and a pointedly artificial-looking train accident. Abdalla and his writers are clearly highlighting the gulf between subtle drama and B-movie melodrama here, but their message feels muddled and overcooked.

Happily, they pull it back in time for an elegant coda set in a cinema, where the film-within-a-film framework acquires a further meta-textual layer, and cinematographer **Tarek Hefny** makes a witty split-second shift from luminous monochrome to brash color. Beyond a few minor flaws, *Decor* is a stylish, smart and original addition to the canon of post-Arab Spring cinema, with a lush score by **Khaled Al Kammar** that only enhances its ravishing retro luster.

Production company: New Century Productions

Cast: Horeya Farghaly, Khaled Abol Naga, Maged El Kedwany

Director: Ahmad Abdalla

Screenwriters: Sherin Diab, Mohamed Diab

Producer: Zein Kurdi

Cinematographer: Tarek Hefny

Editor: Sara Adballah

Music: Khaled Al Kammar

Production designers: Nihal Farouk, Asem Ali

Sales company: New Century, Cairo

No rating, 114 minutes

SHOW COMMENTS



THE BLOG 09/10/2013 10:24 am ET | Updated Dec 06, 2017

Best of Toronto 2013: Ahmed Abdallah's Rags and Tatters



By E. Nina Rothe



I judge a film by the punch it packs and whether it has the sentiments to reach and a message to teach. Egyptian filmmaker Ahmed Abdallah's *Rags and Tatters* possesses it all. But it delivers this wallop in a very meditative, introspected way.

Of course, I look at cinema as a form of activism and the average audience member can't expect to go to *Rags and Tatters* and come out exhilarated and aimlessly entertained. The film's languid rhythm creates a wave, one that takes hours, perhaps days to turn into the ocean of ideas that could potentially change our views. And, one viewer at a time, change the world.

The film is produced by [Film Clinic](#), one of the leading production companies in the MENA region, with a mission to create unique feature films and documentaries that tell unprecedented stories of people, places and philosophies. The company is managed by renowned filmmaker Mohamed Hefzy. And just before TIFF, a [deal was announced with Rotana Studios](#) for multi-platform distribution of *Rags and Tatters* throughout the Middle East. In my world, that's wonderful news.



Best of Toronto 2013: Ahmed Abdallah's Rags a...

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In the film's press kit, there is no long or short synopsis, as is typical with feature narratives. What we find instead is an indication, written by the filmmaker, of his intention:

In all my previous works, I have always avoided being the filmmaker who abuses the inhabitants of a neighborhood where filming takes place. I have always been keen on building up friendships with the dwellers who receive us with hospitality. This can be a chance for those poor people to have a closer insight into this industry. The film is an attempt to delve into the deep; inside some worlds that surround us everywhere, but we consciously chose to ignore their existence.

This time, Cairo's Ezbet El Zabbaleen is the neighborhood that Abdallah has chosen for the follow up to his critically acclaimed 2010 feature [Microphone](#), which was seen by many as a foreteller of the revolutions to come in Egypt. Ezbet El Zabbaleen (garbage collector's settlement) is a rag pickers' settlement on the outskirts of Cairo, mostly Christian, and in March of 2011 was at the center of a clash between Muslims and Christians, where 14 people were killed and 140 injured. All of them those invisible, unheard individuals who occupy our minds for a split second when we hear the news — never to be remembered again.

And it is to those individuals that *Rags and Tatters* is dedicated. Taking place after the initial few days of exhilaration and victories of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the Cairo that Abdallah presents us with is less triumphant and more post-apocalyptic. His nameless, mostly silent lead character (brilliantly interpreted with grace and minimalism by Asser Yassin) is one of the prisoners mysteriously set free from the prisons surrounding Cairo, [which happened a lot](#) and caused ordinary citizens to reorganize into vigilante groups. All are never called by name in Abdallah's film, the shadow of Al Jazeera's bulletins on old televisions recounting their lives and struggles in "Breaking News" mode, but behind them is an entire complex history of politics, religion and the games these institutions play with people's lives.

The brilliance of Abdallah's film lies in its delivery, which feels a lot like watching someone go through real life: slow and unaffected, complicatedly easy and full of wrong choices to be made at every turn. His light touch when it comes to politics and religion is only countered by the film's message, which is far from light. Perhaps, just maybe, we can learn something from *Rags and Tatters* and choose a different path, the next time around. But then, those who should really watch these wonderful films, full of truths, life lessons and wisdom, do not.

Yet the beauty of hope exists inside all filmmakers, and I'm convinced they *will* eventually change the world, one viewer at a time.



[Rags and Tatters screens through September 13th](#), in the Contemporary World Cinema section at this year's Toronto International Film Festival.



Image courtesy of MAD Solutions, used with permission

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Best of Toronto 2013: Ahmed Abdallah's Rags a...

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The Guardian

Rags and Tatters – London film festival review

The anger and confusion on the peripheries of Egypt's Tahrir Square protests form the background of this nuanced drama ●●



'Normality under intolerable stress' ... Rags and Tatters by Ahmad Abdalla.

Peter Bradshaw

Thu 17 Oct 2013 10.47 BST

Egyptian film-maker Ahmad Abdalla has given us a complex, nuanced, humane drama about the Tahrir Square protests. Having seen this movie so soon after Ibrahim el-Batout's superb but very different film on the same topic, *Winter of Discontent*, it came home to me that contemporary Egyptian cinema may be giving us more information about the Egyptian uprising than we'll ever get from the TV news.

Rags and Tatters refuses the easy answers - actually, it refuses the difficult answers, or any answers, in favour of a more open and questioning approach, which borders on a distinctive kind of mystery. The movie haunts the peripheries, away from the central action, intuiting the ambient rage and confusion and anxiety swirling around Cairo, and

draws on the aesthetics and the rhetoric of YouTube and the mobile-phone videoclip, famously of course the medium in which people in a sense consumed and made sense of these events as they happened.

The film centres on one man, played by Asser Yassin, a prisoner who along with dozens of others in jail or temporary police custody finds that events have suddenly given him his freedom. Jail warders have fled and cops and soldiers have deserted their posts or been reassigned duties in the chaos. Yassin now wanders free, witnessing the city's uprising like a judicial ghost, unsure if at any moment he might get taken back inside, or if in the new feverish atmosphere of violence, he might be suddenly beaten up. He stays briefly with his family - but it is too dangerous to linger, so Yassin roams among friends and contacts, witnessing scenes and vignettes from all over the city, among Christian and Sufi communities.

Cairo itself is like a De Chirico landscape of trauma and violence; the people themselves are in an invisible pressure cooker as they attempt to live daily lives as best they can, and although not actively participating in the protests or appearing to take a view on them, these events have put the fabric of their normality under intolerable stress. A man harangues others on a street corner about the police brutality he has witnessed, but his words become inaudible under the revving of a motorbike: we can see but not hear his rage, and he becomes like a figure in a lucid dream. Two figures calmly witness two columns of smoke rising distantly from the city centre and this tableau reminded me of Thomas Hoepker's famous, controversial 9/11 photo of people apparently chatting amiably in a Brooklyn park, while across the river a plume of dust and flame arises from the devastated World Trade Centre towers.

The periodically unreal or surreal sensation of an entire order being questioned and upended is a little like the work of Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof - but there is something else, there, too, something oddly apolitical. Rags and Tatters almost has something of Jean Vigo: an *À Propos de Cairo* - a collage of moods and scenes and moments that perhaps could not be captured in this way were it not for a seismic event which is breaking everything up. Rags and Tatters is a difficult film which does not render up its meaning easily, but it is a serious and absorbing piece of work.

London film festival 2013

- The London film festival's opening week - in pictures
- More from LFF 2013



Rags and Tatters (Farsh Wa Ghata): Toronto Review

10:20 AM PDT 9/12/2013 by Deborah Young



TIFF

THE BOTTOM LINE

A weak, sometimes unclear narrative is off-set by issues laid out with the immediacy of newsreel footage in this must-see for Middle East followers. [🐦](#)



The exhilaration of victory gives way to violence, chaos and uncertainty in Ahmad Abdalla's semi-documentary story set in today's Cairo.

One of just two Egyptians films playing in Toronto (the other is **Jehane Noujaim's** *The Square*), *Rags and Tatters* is primarily of interest because of its enormous topicality, and secondarily for its bold, not always convincing experiment in mixing fiction and documentary, a staple of writer-director **Ahmad Abdalla's** work. Though the powerful impact the film strives for eludes it until the final sequence, which is a whopper, it successfully strings together bits and pieces of the reigning chaos to give viewers a sense of the violent revolution now in progress in Egypt. The weakness of the narrative is compounded by the lack of clear roadsigns to help Western viewers navigate what is going on. Yet for those already following the Egyptian situation, this is a must-see update.

The film is practically wordless, almost a silent movie, yet we feel little need for chatter because the images tell so much of the story. The photography is dark and bleak, the characters uncertain about their role in the great historical events going on around them. Gone is the initial flush of excitement and victory following the overthrow of President **Hosni Mubarak** in the 2011 revolution. The Army is in control now, though it's not clear how firm its grip is. Just before Mubarak stepped down, security forces disappeared and a number of prisons were opened; by whom no one knows. This is all background the viewer had better bring to the film, because it's all backstory here.

The film begins with a nameless fugitive (**Asser Yassin**, *Messages from the Sea*) on the run with another man, dodging gunfire as they try to disappear into the desert. His friend is shot in the stomach, and he has a foot injury. They reach the shelter of an abandoned shack and the protagonist reluctantly leaves the seriously injured man behind. But he takes the fellow's address and his cell phone, on which he has filmed, like tens of thousands of other Egyptians, what he has seen, so no one will forget "what really happened."

The key to *Rags and Tatters* lies in this will to document historical events that risk escaping in the



uncensored news agencies broadcasting these shaky homemade videos full of beatings, killing and death.

With the Army still spraying bullets at random, the convict (whose crime is never mentioned, and might range from no more than getting on the wrong side of a policeman to murder; we are never told) limps towards Cairo and home. He briefly sees his family, including a wife and child, but he's a wanted man and has to keep moving. He finds uneasy refuge in a mosque, and then a cemetery, Cairo's infamous City of the Dead, where the poor live without running water or electricity. But it is a haven of peace from the frightening events taking place in downtown Cairo, the massacres in Tahrir Square and the inter-ethnic violence, the burning of churches and persecution of Christian Copts and Sufis. In one shot of strange beauty, across a peaceful river, behind the calm Cairo skyline, two plumes of smoke rise up to the heavens.

The director's documentary instincts blend uneasily into this story, taking it off on tangents that are certainly of interest, but always pull the viewer away from involvement with the main character, played mysteriously but intensely by Yassin. In the cemetery, for instance, the action stops so the camera can follow the haunting songs and lyrics of some Sufi musicians. And in the all-important scene when the former prisoner delivers his friend's cellphone to his family, the emotion gets short-circuited as Abdalla explores the warren of dirty streets of the quarter called Ezbet El Zabbaleen, where the city's garbage pickers -- almost exclusively Christians and outcasts of society -- live amid mounds of dangerous garbage.

The film takes its title from a cassette of Sufi music being sold on the street, sounds of peaceful beauty longing for another world.

Venue: Toronto Film Festival (Contemporary World Cinema), Sept. 11, 2013

Production companies: Film Clinic, Independent Filmmakers Initiative

Cast: Asser Yassin, Amr Abed, Yara Gobran, Mohamed Mamdouh, Atef Yousef, Maryam El-Quesny, Latifa Fahmy

Director: Ahmad Abdalla

Screenwriter: Ahmad Abdalla

Producer: Mohamed Hefzy

Co-producer: Omar Shama

Executive producer: Hani Saqr

Director of photography: Tarek Hefny

Production designer: Nihal Farouk

Toronto Film Review: 'Rags & Tatters'

Ahmad Abdalla's follow-up to 'Microphone' is a nihilistic look at the poorest strata of Egyptian society in the throes of the 2011 Revolution.

By [Jay Weissberg](#).



With:

Asser Yassin, Amr Abed, Yara Gobran, Mohamed Mamdouh, Atef Yousef, Maryam El-Quesny, Latifa Fahmy, Mohamed Farouk, Sondos Shabayek, Hamdy El-Tounsy, Mona El-Shimy, Seif El-Aswany, Michael Mamdouh.

“Rags & Tatters” will likely become a touchstone of post-revolutionary Egyptian cinema, though it may take time before critical attention gives the film its due. Ahmad Abdalla’s follow-up to “Microphone” is a nihilistic look at the poorest strata of Egyptian society in the throes of the 2011 Revolution, offering a sobering counterpoint to the inevitable air of triumphalism that first held sway following Hosni Mubarak’s fall. Boasting minimal dialogue and little exposition as the nameless protag wanders Cairo’s outlying districts seeking succor, “Rags” will be most effective with locals and audiences familiar with Egypt’s impasse, though fests should boost viewership.

Abdalla was deeply involved with a collective that gathered video documentation throughout the Revolution and its aftermath, providing the kind of footage major news sources cite as “unverified,” though these raw records of victories and atrocities have created a seismic shift in the way the 21st century views the truth behind current events. Considerably more formal and attractive than such rough images, “Rags” nevertheless traces its inspiration to these democratic encounters with reportage, acknowledging the importance of cell-phone video in recording events that would otherwise be suppressed by those seeking to control the message.

In the days leading up to Mubarak's fall, security forces largely vanished and several jails were inexplicably opened. A man (Asser Yassin, "Messages From the Sea") leaves prison at night and enters a nightmarish world where random shootings are almost commonplace and men manning makeshift street barricades, in the name of protecting neighborhoods, are just as likely as marauding thugs to beat up passersby.

The fugitive finds temporary refuge with edgy family and friends, but he's drawn out to the streets again and again, witnessing the city's uneasy tension firsthand and via overheard news reports. His spaces are the forgotten corners of Cairo, places like Ezbet El Zabbaleen, home to thousands of garbage pickers who live adjacent to the rubbish hills of Muqattam, and the vast cemetery area known as the City of the Dead, where some of the poorest reside. Here, removed from the empowering protests in Tahrir, the inhabitants become targets of sectarian aggression, attacked for being Christian or Sufi.

In contrast with recent Egyptian pics including "Winter of Discontent" and Abdalla's beautiful entry in the portmanteau film "18 Days," the Revolution here is a background element whose impact is anarchy rather than catharsis. As such, it's one of the very few that won't feel dated in a few months or years. Abdalla doesn't hide his melancholy, which suffuses his latest work in a different way than it did in "Heliopolis," with its reverie on a might-have-been-present ignoring the best of the past; now the sadness comes from the sobering realization that the social fabric has been picked apart for far too long, and the brave ones working to get the message out are fighting an uphill battle.

Limiting verbal interchange to the bare minimum — hardly any conversation lasts more than two sentences, and most scenes have no dialogue — is an especially bold move, and risks alienating viewers unversed in Cairo's complex religious and class interplay, not to mention current events. However, the payoff comes in the combination of neorealist sensibilities with an almost phantasmagoric sense of a locale living in a vacuum. Joyous Sufi songs fall on increasingly deaf ears and could incur the wrath of disapproving Salafists, while Copts live in fear of attack from both Islamists and the military (crucially, Abdalla doesn't buy into the popular yet hollow slogan, "the people and the army are one hand").

Lead thesp Yassin has frequently put his large expressive eyes to good use, conveying the sense of soulful innocence disillusioned by the world, making him the perfect embodiment of Abdalla's hard-earned pessimism. Casting must have been especially difficult given dialogue restrictions, but the actor masters the meaningful glance while allowing space for auds to guess at what lies beneath. Smaller roles are equally well handled.

In "Microphone," Abdalla and d.p. Tarek Hefny designed informal visuals influenced by indie stylings, making an ideal pairing with the story of youth presciently on the verge of Revolution. With "Rags" the two craft a more sober look, partly docu-inspired, that's paired with the nervous agitation of amateur news footage. Music is subtly inserted and refreshingly underplayed.

Toronto Film Review: 'Rags & Tatters'

Reviewed online, Rome, Sept. 11, 2013. (In Toronto Film Festival — Contemporary World Cinema; London Film Festival — competing.) Running time: **87 MIN**. Original title: "Farsh w' Ghata"

PRODUCTION:

(Egypt) A Film Clinic, Mashroua production. (International sales: Visit Film, Brooklyn.) Produced by Mohamed Hefzy. Coproducer, Omar Shama. Executive producer, Hany Saqr.

CREW:

Directed, written by Ahmad Abdalla. Camera (color, HD), Tarek Hefny; editor, Hisham Saqr; music, Mahmoud Hamdy; production designer, Nihal Farouk; sound (Dolby Digital 5.1), Ahmed Mostafa Saleh, Kostas Varibopiotis; assistant director, Omar Zohairy.

WITH:

Asser Yassin, Amr Abed, Yara Gobran, Mohamed Mamdouh, Atef Yousef, Maryam El-Quesny, Latifa Fahmy, Mohamed Farouk, Sondos Shabayek, Hamdy El-Tounsy, Mona El-Shimy, Seif El-Aswany, Michael Mamdouh.

Print

From the tattered rags of revolution



© Sep. 10, 2013 | 12:05 AM

Jim Quilty | The Daily Star

TORONTO: It is a vista fraught with darkness and confusion. Seemingly captured on low-resolution mobile telephone video, the scene jerks and shakes as it follows the vague forms of panicked, gasping men, fleeing gunshots. Several fall dead. The camera momentarily falls on one man, grazed in the foot. Staggering up, he pulls a second, larger, man to his feet and the pair limp into a makeshift shed. The second man slumps to the ground, clutching his bleeding stomach.

"Mobile," the wounded man says and the first man retrieves his phone for him. It contains a video of another chaotic scene of burning streets and policemen murdering detained demonstrators. As the video captures the scene, the wounded man's recorded voice can be heard saying, "I'm photographing this so that people know what really happened here."

At daybreak, the first man prepares to leave. The second man presses the mobile into his hand. He accepts it, promising the dying stranger, "I'll come back for you."

Egypt's January 2011 uprising was a tumult of innumerable episodes, most of which have yet to be told properly. One of these involved some thousands of common prisoners who escaped, as Mubarak's police force collapsed around itself.

At first, those parts of the security apparatus that still functioned simply shot the escaped prisoners on sight. Whether out of fear or darker motives, vigilantes did the same. In the melee, few paused to ask how many of those who escaped Mubarak's prisons were guilty of any crimes.

"Rags and Tatters," the new film by writer-director Ahmad Abdalla, tells the story of one such prisoner. It had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival Monday evening, where it's screening in the Contemporary World Cinema program.

At the center of the story is an unnamed man (Asser Yassin), the escaped prisoner carrying a dying man's video testimony of his state's criminality. The film follows him as he first tries to get back to the poor Cairo neighborhood where his family lives. Then, in the chaos of disorder that characterized the margins of Egypt's revolution,

Abdalla's camera – expertly wielded by cinematographer Tarek Hefny – follows him as he tries to keep a promise to a man he doesn't know.

"Rags and Tatters" is an intriguing hybrid of fiction and documentary, one of the forms that has captured the imaginations of younger filmmakers committed to guerrilla approaches to cinema.

In this, Abdalla's third feature marks an intriguing follow-up to his critically lauded, award-winning "Microphone" (2010).

That work began life as a documentary on the thriving alternative art scene in Alexandria, but evolved into a fast-paced fiction driven largely by non-professional actors. Though the subject matter is serious – a youth culture restive beneath the twin weights of a corrupt political system and conservative social norms – its action and soundtrack are both laced with contemporary popular music, which brings a strangely joyous buoyancy to the proceedings.

The joy is necessarily more muted in "Rags and Tatters" and the characters at the center of this story aren't Western-oriented urban youth but Cairo's underclasses.

Moving about the fringes of urban society, they reside in graveyards and garbage dumps, literally the detritus of the city which is sometimes also their source of livelihood.

There is music and joy here too, but it is expressed in the Arabic maqamaat that accompany Sufi musicians' popular improvised performances of poetic chant (dthikr).

The film takes its title from that of a cassette tape the protagonist finds, a recording of such a Sufi performance.

This nameless protagonist, the silent guide to these relatively obscure corners of the city, is an echo of two characters in Abdalla's previous work.

"Heliopolis" (2009), his first film, included in its ensemble cast a young policeman stationed in a guard box outside a church in the once-upscale neighborhood of Heliopolis. The camera looks in on the young man from time to time – as he shares his modest supper with a stray puppy, or when he is shaken to attention at the sound of the beautifully alien choral music arising from the church during a Christmas Mass. He's never heard to utter a word during the film.

In "Microphone," silence is clad in the figure of an impoverished street peddler of popular music CDs, who's forever wary of the corrupt plainclothes cops who habitually thrash him whenever they find him – presumably because he doesn't have enough money to pay their extortion fees. When he accidentally gouges the eye out of a political poster of the neighborhood's MP, he uses a felt-tip marker to improvise a pair of shades for him. For a brief interlude, the silent young man sets up shop beneath the MP's slightly cooler poster.

In "Rags and Tatters," Yassin's escaped prisoner is the more-fully developed successor to these two figures. Through the course of the film this silent character can occasionally be seen in conversation beyond the range of the microphone. The only word he can be heard to speak – when one of his benefactors offers him a ride to help the dying man he left at the start of the film – is "Thanks."

As the protagonist wends his way through Cairo, mending busted electrical circuitry as he does – it seems he was an electrician in a previous life – he encounters a range of common folk. At first he looks on as an older lady shares her woes with a young woman recording her on a mobile phone. Later, he converses with people himself. As he is so taciturn, these conversations take the form of testimonials.

One interlocutor is a gent whose ramshackle carnival rides are used during popular religious festivals (or moulids, where Sufi perform their dthikr), who's frustrated by Salafi Muslims' aggressive forbidding of amusements like this.

Another describes the bleak prospects for children in Cairo's destitute quarters. In Al-Zarayeb neighborhood – or Ezbet al-Zabbaleen (the, mostly Christian, garbage collectors' settlement) – he talks to one of the young garbage collectors about how other Egyptians abuse them because of their work.

These documentary-inflected sequences depict the daily concerns of poor Egyptians, and do so without a trace of the maudlin melodrama that has characterized commercial cinema's efforts to appropriate poverty. Far from provoking tears from a safe distance, these sequences provide uncharacteristic insight into Egyptian society, and how the lives of the country's poor have been affected – for better and worse – since January 2011.

These insights do come at some cost. After the narrative tension that marks the film's opening sequences (and bursts forth again to end the story), a notable slackening of dramatic tension accompanies the protagonist's journey.

The subject matter of "Rags and Tatters" doesn't embrace the tastes of Western and urban elite audiences as readily as "Microphone," but it is a powerful example of the possibilities of some forms of documentary-fiction hybrid. Cinema is allowed to speak to the brain as well as the heart, and truth should trump joy.

The Toronto International Film Festival continues until Sept. 15. For more information see tiff.net

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10/09/2013

ahramonline

Egyptian film wins at Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier: TRAILER

Ahram Online, Sunday 3 Nov 2013

'Rags and Tatters', an Egyptian film by Ahmad Abdallah, wins Golden Antigone at 35th International Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier



The 35th International Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier has awarded its highest prize - the Golden Antigone - to Egyptian film Farsh w Ghata (Rags and Tatters), by filmmaker Ahmad Abdalla.

The film follows a nameless fugitive, who escaped from prison in the aftermath of 25 January 2011, as he wanders through a city he barely recognises, looking for warmth, shelter and a safe place to stay.

Farsh w Ghata has already been screened to positive reviews at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival, and was part of the London Film Festival's official competition and the Narrative Competition at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. It will also be screening at the 'A State of the World and Cinema' Film Festival in Paris, running 8-17 November, along with a selection of other Egyptian films.

The film competed in the feature film competition at Montpellier with eleven other titles from countries including Spain, Croatia, Ukraine, Italy and Israel - as well as three films from other Arab countries: Girafada (Rani Massalah, Palestine), They Are the Dogs (Hicham Lasri, Morocco) and Ladder to Damascus (Mohamed Malas, Syria).

The last Egyptian film to win Montpellier's Golden Antigone was Atef Hetata's Al Abwab Al Moghlaqa (Closed Doors) in 1999.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/85451.aspx>

HUFFINGTON POST 11/22/2013 02:09 pm ET | Updated Dec 06, 2017

Egyptian Film Explores What Other Movies Overlook: Complexities Outside Of Tahrir Square



By Sophia Jones



AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

CAIRO — When Egyptian director Ahmad Abdalla decided to make [“Rags and Tatters”](#) (or “Farsh w’ Ghata” in Arabic), a film about the 2011 revolution, he chose to take the audience on an uncomfortable journey.

There are no scenes of surging protests. No contagious revolutionary fervor. Instead, the audience travels to Cairo’s poorest neighborhoods, alongside a nameless convict who, like more than [20,000 other prisoners](#) during the revolution, was set free. Through long scenes, many without dialogue, the film shows a different side of the uprising in gritty, often confusing detail. In fact, the film isn’t about the revolution at all, but rather, the narrative of one man navigating his country in the midst of upheaval.

“What we see is a story — a simple story,” Abdalla said in an interview with The Huffington Post. The slow pace of the scenes nearly void of words indeed creates a simple, but incredibly complex



“The film takes you on a journey,” Abdalla continued. “In every place, you have to stop and spend time with these people.”

And that is exactly what I did on Thursday night. In a movie theater in Cairo, surrounded by teenage Egyptian boys and aging couples alike, I sat for an hour and a half watching “Rags and Tatters.” During every scene, I was taken into the character’s private moments: at his family home, a Coptic funeral, a mosque, sectarian clashes. Like it or not, Abdalla’s film forces you to think — and to feel.

As the main character in the film makes the dangerous journey back home to his family in Cairo, he comes bearing a cell phone video of the prison outbreak. “I made this video for people to know what happened,” he said, narrating the rough footage. This sentence is replayed throughout his journey, as if a mantra for the film itself.

After the revolution, Abdalla was filled with questions and uncertainty. He said the only way for him to address these questions was through “Rags and Tatters.” But the standard account of the Jan. 25 uprising is not told. The big picture isn’t addressed at all. Instead, the underbelly of the story is brought to life.

“I wanted to have everything related to the revolution in the background,” Abdalla said. “The main issue is the current situation, the right here and right now for these people.”

The lack of attention on the events in Tahrir Square effectively puts the focus on the more palpable issues that fueled the demonstrations — government corruption, a crumbling infrastructure and a stark lack of economic opportunities for the majority of Egypt’s people.

While the story alone was tough to capture on screen, the film crew also ran into trouble getting government permission to film in places like mosques. Many films have scenes set in mosques, Abdalla said, but the government delayed production for five months before eventually denying him official permission.

Premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, the film has made its way through a handful of other festivals around the world, and it will soon come to the United States.

While it has done quite well internationally, Egyptian film critics have accused the film of insulting the armed forces and tarnishing Egypt’s reputation, while singling out the film’s lack of dialogue as a fatal flaw. On Thursday,



The “Raas and Tatters” poster at the



detailing what Josheph Fahim, an Egyptian film critic, calls a “stagnant state of Egyptian film criticism” producing “shallow and rigid reviews.”

Earlier this week, Fahim [tweeted](#): “Wanna examine how pitiful the state of Egyptian film criticism is? Read Egyptian reviews for [@ahmada2](#)’s ‘Rags & Tatters.’” Defending the film, Fahim [described](#) it as “beautiful, deeply compassionate, incredibly sad and aesthetically audacious.”

According to Abdalla, many of the Egyptian critics who have slammed his film don’t agree with its politics. “They don’t like portraying Egypt in this way,” he said. “This is not Egypt for them.”

But the mixed reviews don’t bother him. He made a film to raise questions and shock the audience. “I hope to make a change in Egypt,” he said. “At all levels: artistic, political and social.”



Sophia Jones

Middle East correspondent, The WorldPost

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Print

Ahmad Abdalla's 'Microphone' bags Tanit d'Or



🕒 Nov. 02, 2010 | 12:00 AM

👤 The Daily Star | Agence France Presse

TUNIS: "Microphone," a film about young hip-hop and graffiti artists in Egypt's second city Alexandria, scooped the top award of Tunisia's Carthage Film Festival Sunday.

Directed by Egyptian Ahmad Abdalla, the film impressed Carthage's jurors for its audacity and youth, announced the jury president, Haitian director Raoul Peck.

Abdalla drew critical attention last year for his 2009 debut feature "Heliopolis," a sweet-natured ensemble-cast film that tells multiple stories of marginalization and loneliness in Cairo's once-grand, multi-cultural garden suburb of Heliopolis.

"The Golden Tanit," he said, "is awarded to this film for its boldness, its youth, the reach of its music, the richness of its characters in a society [that] refuses to grant young musicians the place that they claim."

The Silver Tanit went to Algerian writer-director Abdelkarim Bahloul for his 2009 feature "Voyage a Alger," his sixth, about the precarious position of a widowed mother and her young family, squatting a house in the final years of French occupation and the early years of independence.

Moroccan writer-director Daoud Aoulad-Syad won the bronze Tanit for "La Mosquee." The film is Aoulad-Syad's sequel to his 2007 "Waiting for Pasolini," which won the award for best film in the Arab cinema competition of the Cairo International Film Festival – and which is itself a near-verbatim copy of "Ouarzazate Movie," Ali Essafi's 2001 documentary about the town whose entire economy has become geared to the international film industry.

A showcase for African and Arab cinema founded in 1966, the Carthage Film Festival is held every two years for films with a director of African or Arab origin. Twenty-four long and short films from 11 African and Arab countries were in competition this edition.

The Tanit award is named after the chief goddess worshipped at ancient Carthage.

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02/11/2010



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Newsletter

LA DERNIÈRE**« Microphone », de l'Égyptien Ahmad Abdalla, Tanit d'or à Carthage****FESTIVAL DU FILM****OLJ**

02/11/2010

Le long-métrage *Microphone*, de l'Égyptien Ahmad Abdalla, a remporté le Tanit d'or, récompense suprême des Journées cinématographiques de Carthage (JCC), dont la 23e édition a été clôturée dimanche soir à Tunis.

Microphone relate l'histoire du jeune Khaled qui retourne à Alexandrie après des années d'absence et qui croise par hasard dans cette ville égyptienne des chanteurs de hip-hop sur les trottoirs, des musiciens de rock sur les toits d'anciens bâtiments et des jeunes qui peignent des panneaux de graffitis sur les murs la nuit. Le film dépeint la vie artistique de jeunes vivant en marge et qui cherchent à être reconnus.

Le Tanit d'argent a été décerné à *Voyage à Alger*, du réalisateur algérien Abdelkarim Bahloul, qui a remporté également le prix du public, tandis que le Marocain Daoud Aoulad-Syad a reçu le Tanit de bronze sur son film *La mosquée*. Chaque jour est une fête, de la réalisatrice libanaise Dima el-Horra, a obtenu le prix spécial du jury.

Le prix de la meilleure interprétation masculine est revenu à Asser Yacine (Égypte) pour son rôle dans le film *Messages de la mer*. Denise Newman était sacrée meilleure actrice pour son rôle dans *Shirley Adams*, du Sud-africain Olivier Hermanus.

En compétition internationale, le cinéma tunisien a remporté le Tanit d'or de la compétition des courts-métrages pour *Linge sale* de Malik Amara, et le prix du jury enfants pour le long-métrage de Abdellatif ben Ammar, *Les palmiers blessés*. Le prix de l'Organisation de la femme arabe, une première de cette 23e session des JCC récompensant le meilleur film traitant des causes de la femme arabe, a été décerné au court-métrage *Rouge pâle* de l'Égyptien Mohammad Hamed.

Les JCC, la plus ancienne manifestation du cinéma au Sud, créées depuis 1966, mettaient en compétition cette semaine 24 longs et courts-métrages en provenance de 11 pays arabes et africains.

6 articles restants

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Egypt's Microphone wins Golden Tulip in Istanbul

BY MIKE GOODRIDGE | 17 APRIL 2011

Other prize winners include *Our Grand Despair*, *A Useful Life*, and *Hair*.

Egyptian director Ahmad Abdalla's *Microphone* won the Golden Tulip award for best film in international competition on Saturday night at the 30th Istanbul Film Festival.

Abdalla's second feature, *Microphone* is a low-budget drama set in the world of underground art and music in Alexandria.

The special jury prize was shared by Seyfi Teoman's *Our Grand Despair* from Turkey and Federico Veiroj's *A Useful Life* from Uruguay.

The prizes, given by a jury headed by Claire Denis, come with a €25,000 award from the Eczacıbaşı Group. €10,000 goes to the director of the Golden Tulip winner while the Turkish distributor of the film receives €10,000 and the remaining €5,000 goes to the special jury prize winner.

Joining Denis on the jury were Italian actress Anna Bonaiuto, Toronto Film Festival chief Piers Handling, Turkish writer Perihan Magden, US producer Jim Stark, Canadian film-maker Jacob Tierney and former Istanbul festival head Hulya Ucansu.

In the national competition section, the prize for best Turkish film of the year went to Tayfan Pirselimoglu's *Hair*, a drama set in a wig shop in Istanbul.

The best director award also went to Pirselimoglu, while Sedat Yilmaz's *Press* won the special jury prize.

Nazan Kesal was named best actress for her performance in *Hair* and Ahmet Mekin best actor for *Unseen*. Belma Bas won the screenplay prize for *Zephyr*, *Our Grand Despair*'s Birgit Gudjonsdottir won the cinematography award and Ahmet Kenan Bilgic won the music award for *Merry-Go-Round*.

The national jury was headed by director Reha Erdem and included actress Tulin Ozen, writer and critic Fatih Ozguven, Karlovy Vary artistic director Karel Och and film critic Jay Weissberg.

The FIPRESCI awards went to Tran Anh Hung's *Norwegian Wood* in international competition and to *Press* in the national competition.

On Friday, the Meetings On The Bridge industry platform concluded; The Film Development workshop gave awards to the projects *Yozgat Blues* by Mahmut Fazil Coskun, *Toz Ruh* by Nesimi Yetik, and *Mavi Dalga* (Blue Wave) by Zeynep Dadak and Merve Kayan.

Yozgat Blues also won the Republic Of Turkey Ministry Of Tourism And Culture Support award of \$10,000 as well as an audio post-production support award of TL25,000 from Melodika.

Yetik received a €10,000 support award presented by the French Cinema Centre for his project *Toz Rohu*.

And *Blue Wave* was awarded the Binger Lab Script Consultancy scholarship of €2,500 given for the first time this year.

The seven projects to be supported by the Turkish-German co-production fund were announced late last week.

Home » Entertainment » Film

Microphone gives voice to the Egyptian underground

Ahmad Abdalla shot feature with a Canon EOS 7D on the streets of Alexandria

John Goodman / North Shore News

NOVEMBER 1, 2013 08:46 AM



Director Ahmad Abdalla focuses on the DIY ethic of the underground arts scene in Alexandria, Egypt in his film *Microphone* screening at Pacific Cinémathèque on Nov. 6 as part of The New Wave in African Cinema series.

Photo SUPPLIED

Microphone (Egypt, 2010) Director: Ahmad Abdalla. Screening at Pacific Cinémathèque on Wednesday, Nov. 6 at 8:15 p.m. as part of The New Wave in African Cinema series running Nov. 1-3, 5-7. For more information visit thecinematheque.ca/the-new-wave-in-african-cinema.

Ahmad Abdalla documents real situations in his works of fiction.

Like Jean-Luc Godard and Iran's Mohsen Makhmalbaf the Egyptian filmmaker plays with the notion of a cinematic reality separate from but equal to other levels of perception. He brings the concept front and centre in *Microphone* and opens his film with a question, "What's the difference between documentary and fiction films?" The response is another question: "Excuse me?"

Abdalla's latest feature focuses on the underground music scene in Alexandria, Egypt, which has its own unique cultural flavour distinct from Cairo. Inspired by the DIY ethic of the artists the filmmaker documented musicians performing in their community and interspersed it with a constructed story about Khaled, a young man returning to Alexandria after spending seven years away from home.

The music in the film varies from band to band with all of them cut off to some extent from their Arabic and Western sources. Bands with names like Massa Egbari and A Voice in the Crowd create their own vernacular versions of hip-hop, rock, folk and other less familiar genres. One ensemble

brilliantly marries ecstatic Arabic vocals with a postrock groove to create something like what Youssou N'Dour might sound like if he sang with P.J. Harvey's band. No translation is needed.

Microphone was shot with a Canon EOS 7D, (originally intended as a still photography camera) in Full HD 1080p at 24 frames per second. Abdalla has used the camera on smaller projects before but this may be the first time the camera has ever been used anywhere to shoot an entire feature. The production used an eight-man crew and two cameras to document the action.

Filming was completed in the summer of 2010 just in time for Microphone to receive its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

While in town for the Vancouver International Film Festival in Sept. 2010 Abdalla spoke about his work with the North Shore News.

North Shore News: Your first feature, Heliopolis, was shot in Cairo but you go for something completely different with Microphone. Ahmad Abdalla: I was fascinated with the underground arts scene in Alexandria — people are making music on the streets and on the rooftops. The filmmaking community is growing and it was very inspiring to see young people doing such things. I started to develop a story about their lives and my own life and that's how we made the film.

North Shore News: You use a lot of location shooting.

Ahmad Abdalla: Well, I tried as much as we could to stick to what really happened and go to the places where they play music. I think we had close to 55 locations and something similar indoor.

North Shore News: When did you make the film?

Ahmad Abdalla: We finished the film a month ago in time for the Toronto International Film Festival. Vancouver is the second screening ever.

North Shore News: How much of your film is scripted as opposed to improvised?

Ahmad Abdalla: Most of the actors were nonprofessionals. We wanted to develop situations in front of the camera so I never wrote specific lines or dialogue for the actors. I just wanted them to be themselves and to speak their minds freely. My name is on the film as scriptwriter but I didn't write the film, it was created more like a workshop by all of us.

North Shore News: What type of equipment did you use in the film?

Ahmad Abdalla: We shot the film using the Canon 7D. It's very new for filmmaking and as far as I know this is probably the first feature film ever made entirely using this camera. I've never heard of another feature film using this camera. It was originally made to shoot still images but the amazing technology enables you to use it for films. We used two cameras and it was very handy to use them on location with nonprofessional actors. I didn't want them to feel nervous or uncomfortable with film equipment around. The camera allows me to shoot in daylight or even nightlight without having any artificial lighting around. It is very small so nobody really notices that you have a camera. It doesn't get in the way.

North Shore News: Have you used the camera on anything else before?

Ahmad Abdalla: Yes we've used it on short films, advertising and music clips. This camera was put on the market less than a year ago and nobody was really sure what it could do. We wanted to

take the risk on this independent project. We used an eight-man crew. Eight of us attended the Toronto film festival and that was the whole crew. There was nobody else.

North Shore News: What is the alternative music scene like in Alexandria?

Ahmad Abdalla: I didn't know anything about it a year ago and then I was visiting Alexandria and I heard about this 19-year-old artist who was making advertising for a band using graffiti art. I approached her and she introduced me to the band. All four members are girls and it's a heavy metal band. This would be very uncommon in Cairo. Young girls in Alexandria are more into music and they want to have their own voice. That's why I called the film Microphone because it's a chance for everyone to have their own voice. We have heavy metal bands, rock bands, hip-hop artists. I picked nine bands for the film but there are many more in Alexandria.

North Shore News: Where do they perform?

Ahmad Abdalla: You can tell a band is doing well if they play in a club but most of them don't have places to play. They look for audiences everywhere and they are growing very slowly as far as getting bigger audiences.

North Shore News: Is this scene unique to Alexandria?

Ahmad Abdalla: For sure there is more but I just highlighted Alexandria. It took me nine months to make the film but if anybody had the time to research the underground scene in Egypt they would be able to find other bands in other cities.

North Shore News: The music is Western influenced.

Ahmad Abdalla: In my film I tried to have as many bands as I could. There are five or six different genres but actually Oriental music is very popular in Egypt. In my film I concentrated on the bands in Alexandria and what they were playing and of course rock and hip-hop are Western influenced. That wasn't an issue for me, that's just the way it was.

North Shore News: You studied music didn't you?

Ahmad Abdalla: Yes I played the viola but unfortunately I've forgotten everything I studied. During my music studies I started working as a film editor and I edited something like 10 feature commercial films in Egypt. I was far away from the music scene.

North Shore News: Did you study filmmaking?

Ahmad Abdalla: No, producers were looking for editors. I taught myself how to cut short films and commercials and that's how I came into the field. I cut commercial films until I decided to make my own films — very low budget. It was a hard choice to make but I wanted to make films I really believe in.

North Shore News: Who do you make your films for? Who is your audience?

Ahmad Abdalla: I don't know. All I try to do is be as sincere as I can. We will see. Hopefully this film will have some commercial potential so Egyptian audiences will get to see the film.

North Shore News: What do Egyptian audiences watch? Hollywood, Bollywood, local films?

Ahmad Abdalla: Hollywood and local films. We used to have Bollywood but not anymore because they wanted space for more local productions. Mainly you will find a lot of commercial Arabic films in the theatres in Egypt. We have 400 theatres in Egypt and most of them are playing totally

commercial stuff. Independent films have to find four or five screens for a week or two weeks — this is the best we can do. Hopefully we can change that with this film because it is full of music. We are gambling this film will be more appealing. I learned from the young artists in Alexandria that we can make films without big stars or big budgets. We made a film with much less.

Microphone (Egypt, 2010) Director: Ahmad Abdalla. Cast: Khaled Abol Naga, Menna Shalabi, Yosra El Lozy, Hany Adel, Ahmad Magdy and Atef Yousef. Screening at Pacific Cinémathèque on Wednesday, Nov. 6 at 8:15 p.m. as part of The New Wave in African Cinema series running Nov. 1-3, 5-7. For more information visit thecinematheque.ca/the-new-wave-in-african-cinema.

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TIFF '09 | Ahmad Abdalla: "I wrote this film after a very hard phase of my life"

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dieWi Indiewire
Aug 31, 2009 4:15 am

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of a series of [interviews](#) indieWIRE will be running with the filmmakers screening in the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival's Discovery program.

Ahmad Abdalla's feature film debut "Heliopolis" follows the lives of a host of characters living in the Heliopolis district of Cairo. The movie, which screens as part of Toronto's Discovery section, "draws back the area's veil of faded grandeur to reveal characters that deepen and broaden any understanding of one of the world's great cities. If Egypt is complicated, Heliopolis is Exhibit A." indieWIRE contacted Abdalla via email to discuss his career and film and gave Abdalla and others a free-form style interview...

You...

I am originally a musician. My parents wanted me to follow their lead and study fine arts, but due to some circumstances I ended up learning to play the viola. Although I have now forgotten everything about the viola, I do not slightly regret the five years I spent tuning its four strings several times a day.

I am almost 31 now, living in Cairo, and I have made one short film and one feature film, both based loosely on my life.

Your Filmmaking Career and Process...

I started to approach the world of filmmaking 10 years ago, to find myself – a few years later – the youngest film editor in my country. I kept editing TV spots and commercial films, even music videos for a while, until I became unhappy with the kind of life I was leading. I kept thinking this was not what I left music for, then I decided to stay home and work on what I would enjoy the most, my personal project, "Heliopolis."

"Heliopolis"...

I wrote this film after a very hard phase of my life. After a sequence of unfortunate events I developed a predilection towards seclusion and spent most of my time writing. I wrote "Heliopolis" in less than a month. I decided to produce it independently, with a crew of volunteers or one that would collaborate for a minimum wage. Several well-known actors liked the script and they agreed to contribute without receiving any remuneration. We used HD cameras to shoot the film, and our locations were actual streets and apartments in the neighborhood of Heliopolis. Since I believed that anyone can make their own film, no matter how much money or facilities they possess, I kept



I believe my girlfriend has the greatest influence on me, not only because she is going to proof-read this pretty soon, but also because it's a fact!

But If you mean my influences in the world of films, I would say the young independent filmmakers that I had the chance to instruct and work with at several occasions in Cairo and Alexandria are my real role-models. Those talented young artists reinforced my conviction in the possibility of making a low budget film, which could tackle the most personal aspects of one's life, without having to submit to the demands of the market, the movie stars, or the distributors. It is my friends and the young artists in the independent filmmaking schools who have taught me how to be true to myself in my films. I learned that I only need a camera and a worthy story, a slice of our everyday experiences, to make a "film."

The Future...

Although I hope to keep making independent films, the way things are in Egypt, I am guessing that in 10 years, I could be one of three:

1. Another chubby TV director who makes soap operas for Ramadan (our hot TV season in Egypt).
2. Living abroad and making another cross-cultural film about an Egyptian illegal migrant somewhere in Europe and his yearning to return home.
3. A farmer (my favorite option).

My hopes about my film's reception in TIFF is simply to have a good screening, by that I mean a good theater with a large audience. The latter's reaction will surely vary, especially with such personal films as Heliopolis. That's why I am hoping to finalize -as much as I can- a good copy of the film for our upcoming screening on the 17th and 18th.

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Heliopolis

"Heliopolis" offers a sharp critique of Egyptian society.

By [Jay Weissberg](#).

With: Khaled Abol Naga, Hany Adel, Yousra El-Lozy, Hanan Motawe, Mahmoud El-Lozy, Somaya, Atef Yousef, Aya Soliman, Mohamad Brequa, Marwan Azab, Aida Abdel-Aziz, Ramadan Khater, Christine Solomon, Mahmoud Hamdy, Tamer El-Said. Voice: Hend Sabry.

A labor of love for all concerned, helmer Ahmad Abdalla's "Heliopolis" reps a respectable debut feature that focuses a sharp critique of Egyptian society matched by a nostalgia-drenched longing for life before the 1952 Revolution. Far more influenced by the Euro arthouse reflections of [Yousry Nasrallah](#) than the meller styling of popular Egyptian pics, Abdalla adheres to his roots as a film editor with nice montages and a generally skillful handling of the story's choral nature, affectingly exposing the malaise of Cairo's middle class. Home play may be hampered by censorship, but fests should take notice.

Indie producer Sherif Mandour ("Eye of the Sun") must have called in lots of favors, as name cast and crew reportedly provided their services gratis. For the most part, low-budget constraints don't show, and the pic's accessibility means Euro cable might come calling.

Grad student Ibrahim (Khaled Abol Naga) is researching Cairo's ethnic makeup around the time of the Revolution. He's come to the faded grandeur of the Heliopolis neighborhood to interview elderly Jewish resident Vera (celebrated stage star Aida Abdel-Aziz).

At the same time, Dr. Hany (indie musician Hany Adel) is looking to sell his apartment so that he can join his family in Canada. Maha (Aya Soliman) and Ali (Atef Yousef), newly engaged, make an appointment to see the place, but the impossibility of Cairo traffic (a handy metaphor for the nation's sense of political and existential gridlock) leads to yet another wasted day of frustration.

Hotel receptionist Engy (Hanan Motawe) stares with envy at the guests arriving with their Western clothes and physical ease, while interwoven throughout the film are largely wordless scenes involving a young policeman (Mohamad Brequa, of soulful eyes) and a stray puppy.

Heliopolis was built by Belgian architects as a haven for foreign nationals and the rich, and while it's still a middle-to-upper-class enclave, the years following the Revolution have witnessed not just the flight of European residents but stagnation. The housebound Vera is a typical older resident — she hides her Jewish faith from new neighbors and speaks longingly of the grand French and English restaurants and cafes that once lined the avenues.

Ibrahim's street interviews, in a quasi-docu style, reveal dissatisfaction on all social levels. Though he's part of a younger generation without first-hand memories of the Golden Years, the generally strong screenplay makes Ibrahim more than a mere conduit for these stories. Caught in emotional limbo (his ex-g.f., voiced by Hend Sabry, is heard on his answering machine in a wistful monologue), Ibrahim and the other characters appear paralyzed, as if contempo Egypt itself sits so heavily on its citizens that no one can move.

Local censors might let that through, though a friend of Ibrahim's (Tamer El-Said) finally calls a spade a spade when he remarks on how martial law was merely replaced by anti-terrorism law, "and they'll come up with something else."

While most perfs are solid — special nods go to Yousef, Soliman and Abol Naga — thesping styles aren't unified. Likewise, sections are not without a certain clumsiness, and though Abdalla's editing background comes to the fore, he occasionally cuts off shots sooner than warranted; the final scene however is especially strong. He's also good at capturing the physical sense of Heliopolis, with its turn-of-the-century splendor just about holding out against recent shoddy architecture.

Color and sound correction on the print viewed weren't completed, but restrained, melancholic music is well used.

"Heliopolis" should not be confused with Mohammed Khan's 2007 film "In the Heliopolis Flat," also starring Abol Naga.

Heliopolis

Egypt

PRODUCTION: A Film House Egypt production. Produced by Sherif Mandour. Directed, written, edited by Ahmad Abdalla.

CREW: Camera (color, HD), Mahmoud Lotfy, Martina Gruenewald; music, Amir Khalaf; production designer, Medhat Aziz; art director, Amgad Nagib; costume designer, Nermin Said; sound (Dolby Digital), Dirk Schoemer, Alaa Atef; assistant director, Aida El-Kashef. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (market), May 20, 2009. Running time: 101 MIN.

WITH: **With:** Khaled Abol Naga, Hany Adel, Yousra El-Lozy, Hanan Motawe, Mahmoud El-Lozy, Somaya, Atef Yousef, Aya Soliman, Mohamad Brequa, Marwan Azab, Aida Abdel-Aziz, Ramadan Khater, Christine Solomon, Mahmoud Hamdy, Tamer El-Said. Voice: Hend Sabry.



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