



Toronto, April 28, 2021
PRESS RELEASE

The **Toronto Arab Film Festival (TAF)** is pleased to announce the dates and programme for the 2nd annual film festival, including films from Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Qatar, United States, Belgium, France, Egypt and five films from Canada.

The Festival will take place virtually **May 27 to May 30, 2021**.

Egyptian critic Joseph Fahim writes **"A couple of years ago, I aired my frustrations about the narrow scope of Middle Eastern films to a European critic. His reply? "But what else is there to the Middle East than this?" Well, there's much more to the Middle East than war, poverty, immigration, terrorism and the subjugation of women and refugees."** This is precisely what we hope to highlight through TAF.

Our second festival comes during a very strange, challenging and weary time. Despite that, as we journey into our upcoming festival, the films submitted provide such an interesting diversity that emulates - and feeds into - the diversity of Toronto, the city of film lovers. Journey with us from a cotton farm in Sudan, to the suburbs of Saudi Arabia, from the beaches of Morocco to storm ridden Montreal.

Among the feature films presented, is Amin Sidi-Boumediene's debut feature, *Abou Leila*, a genre-bending ruminative thriller set during the Algerian civil war, which premiered during Cannes Critics' Week. The short films screened feature strong female presence behind and in front of the camera, including *Aziza*, a short film from award-winning Syrian filmmaker Soudade Kaadan.

Among the Q&As scheduled, we are particularly excited to present a Q&A with Moroccan filmmaker Alaa Eddine Aljem and Sudanese filmmaker Eltayib Mahdi as they talk about their films, *The Unknown Saint* and *The Tomb* respectively, made more than 40 years apart, yet exploring similar themes.

There will be three awards presented during this Festival - **the Jury Award for Most Promising Filmmaker**, the **Award for Best Canadian Short Film** and the **Audience Choice Award**.

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About Toronto Arab Film

Toronto Arab Film (TAF) is a non-for profit organization dedicated to bringing films from, and about the Arab world, to Toronto audiences. TAF began because of a need to fill a void that exists in film programming in Toronto, specifically a lack of films from the Arab regions, and a desire to diversify the visual representation of the Arab peoples in the arts. Through our first initiative, **Layali El Cinema**, we programme year-round film screenings in Toronto. Through **Mahrajan**, our annual festival, we showcase Arab films from around the world. We also recognize the need to encourage interconnectedness between Arab filmmakers in Toronto and foster filmmakers, which we endeavour to do through the **Shabaka** initiative, where we support emerging talents through hosting networking events and filmmaking workshops throughout the year.

TAF separates itself from other Arab film festivals in the city by focusing on the pan-Arab identity and the nuances of the overlapping and intersecting identities of millions of people that are culturally nomadic and exist all across the world. We aim to increase the awareness of local media, audiences and academics to new Arab cinema, which in turn, we hope will be reflected in their journalism, curriculums and general dialogue surrounding Arabs. The festival's mission is to present stories that reflect the diversities of the Arab peoples and the myriad of histories, cultures and religions that exist within the Arab world and beyond.

Social Media:

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For any press related questions, contact: rolla@arabfilm.ca

The Festival is made possible this year by the generous support of the **Toronto Arts Council** and in-kind support from the following community partners: **Images Film Festival**, the **Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto** and **Trinity Square Video**.



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