

Doha Film Institute Announces 45 Recipients of 2025 Spring Grants Cycle

- *Diverse projects by Arab and international filmmakers from over 35 countries.*
- *Five projects from Qatari and Qatar-based talent, along with 16 projects from women filmmakers and 12 returning filmmakers.*
- *Over 950 films from 75 countries have been supported to date through the region's longest-serving film development initiative.*

Doha-Qatar; 24 June 2025: Doha Film Institute announced the recipients of its 2025 Spring Grants cycle representing independent voices from over 35 countries. 45 diverse projects from the Arab world and international will benefit from the Middle East's long-standing film development initiative, that has supported over 950 projects to date from more than 75 countries.

DFI Grants programme, awarded biannually in Spring and Fall, stands as the most established film support system in the region, dedicated to identifying and nurturing first and second-time filmmakers. It champions feature and short narratives, documentaries, experimental and essay films as well as TV and web series.

The Spring Grant 2025 recipients include 16 projects by women filmmakers, 12 returning filmmakers, and five projects by Qatari and Qatar-based talent, highlighting the Institute's dedication to the development of independent cinema from the region and beyond. This round sees the return of Yemen and Sudan through women's voices, and Gulf representation across Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar.

Alongside Qatar, the selected films represent France, Iraq, Canada, UK, Jordan, Tunisia, Italy, Egypt, Lebanon, the USA, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Switzerland, Belgium, Libya, Japan, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, Mozambique, Palestine, Portugal, Russia, the Netherlands, Iran, India, Norway, Denmark, Morocco, Syria, Rwanda, Yemen, Uzbekistan, and Bahrain.

Fatma Hassan Alremaihi, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha Film Institute, stated: "Our Grants programme was founded to offer tangible support for original stories and important voices from around the world. These 45 films reflect the bold, diverse, and deeply human stories that challenge convention and are shaping the future of cinema. In a time marked by conflict, displacement and uncertainty, these stories offer urgently needed perspectives and affirm the role of film as a witness, a bridge and a call to empathy."

The 2025 Spring Grants recipients are:

MENA - Feature Narrative - Development

- ***The Arab Apocalypse*** (Morocco, France, Qatar) by Samy Sidali. In Mohammedia, Simo, a young fisherman, sees the moon crack in two. From now on, the world is split in two—between those who are asleep and can't wake up, and those who are watching over them.

MENA - Feature Narrative - Production

- ***Madness and Honey Days*** (Iraq, Canada, UK, Jordan, France, Qatar) by Ahmed Yassin Al-Daradji. Facing execution for accidentally cursing President Saddam Hussein on stage, actor Salem pretends to be insane. In a Baghdad hospital, his greatest performance begins: staying mad enough to live.
- ***Speak*** (Tunisia, Italy, France, Qatar) by Nejib Kthiri follows a Black Tunisian boy with progressive mutism who strives to reclaim his voice in a society that would deny him one. In 2023 Tunisia, amid a migrant crisis and rising xenophobia, twelve-year-old Walid finds solace in magic as he struggles with identity and discrimination.
- ***Sari & Amira*** (Qatar) by A.J. Al-Thani. In the unforgiving sands of Wadi Sakheema, an outlaw Bedouin bandit couple stumble upon a mythical relic that holds the key to their survival but also awakens forces that could destroy them and their world.

MENA - Feature Narrative - Post-Production

- ***Round 13*** (Tunisia, Cyprus, Qatar) by Mohamed Ali Nahdi. Kamel is a former boxing champion, happily married to Samia and deeply devoted to their only son, Sabri. Their lives are upended when Sabri is diagnosed with a malignant tumour.
- ***A Sad and Beautiful World*** (Lebanon, USA, Germany, KSA, Qatar) by Cyril Aris. In this romance set in Beirut over three decades, two star-crossed lovers must decide whether to build a family and a path to happiness, despite the tragedies ravaging contemporary Lebanon.
- ***Behind the Palm Trees*** (Morocco, France, Belgium, Qatar) by Meryem Benm'Barek. In Tangier, Mehdi's relationship with Selma is shaken when he meets Marie, a wealthy French girl. Drawn to her glamorous lifestyle, he neglects Selma, pretending not to see that his choices will catch up with him.
- ***The Arab*** (Algeria, France, Switzerland, KSA, Belgium, Qatar) by Malek Bensmaïl. Haroun is an old man who lives in Oran, Algeria. He has an incredible secret—he claims to be the brother of 'the Arab', a fictional character killed in Camus' world-renowned French book, *The Stranger*.

- **SAFE EXIT** (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Qatar) by Mohammed Hammad. A young man suffers from severe PTSD due to witnessing his father's murder as a child. Ten years later, he finds himself forced to hide a wanted killer.
- **Once Upon a Time in Gaza** (Palestine, France, Germany, Portugal, Jordan, Qatar) by Arab Nasser and Tarzan Nasser. A young student and charismatic drug dealer find themselves in a messy game of life, death, and revenge when a corrupt cop takes an interest in their operation.
- **People of Solitude** (Algeria, France, Qatar) by Tariq Tegua. In the Sahara, a smuggler, a paleoanthropologist, and a man on a rescue mission cross paths. Under the eye of the drone, they will go into the heart of the desert, where good and bad geniuses meet.
- **Who Wants the Rain Must Accept the Mud** (Lebanon, France, Qatar) by Danielle Arbid. Suzanne, a widow in her sixties, meets Osmane, a young undocumented migrant worker, one evening in Beirut. They instantly fall in love.
- **Sa3oud Wainah?** (Qatar) by Mohammed Al Ibrahim. A magic trick goes horribly wrong when two brothers attempt to replicate it years after learning it from their father.

Non-MENA - Feature Narrative - Post-Production

- **Renoir** (Japan, France, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, Qatar) by Chie Hayakawa. An entrancing poetic journey about resilience, the healing power of the imagination, and a traumatized family struggling for connection.
- **Variations on a Theme** (South Africa, Qatar) by Jason Jacobs and Devon Delmar. An elderly goat herder falls victim to a scam promising financial reparations for her father, who was never paid for his service in WWII. As she waits for money that will never arrive, her family disrupts her routines on her 80th birthday and threatens to strip away the last of her independence.
- **The Prophet** (Mozambique, South Africa, Qatar) by Ique Langa. A kind-hearted pastor struggles with his faith as he fails to grow his congregation. In secret, he seeks a solution; things seem to go well until they don't.

MENA - Feature Documentary - Development

- **Akal** (Morocco, Qatar) by Basma Rkioui. In the Moroccan Atlas Mountains, shepherds and skiers face the harsh realities of climate change. A former skier-turned-director captures the stark contrast of a snowless ski resort, revealing the impact on the land and its people.
- **Unsettled** (Palestine, Belgium, UK, Qatar) by Sami Odeh. After October 7th, an online movement redefined the Israeli-Palestinian narrative, using social media to challenge corporate and political interests' intent on suppressing the truth.

MENA - Feature Documentary - Production

- **Pure Madness** (Tunisia, France, Qatar) by Inès Arsi. A filmmaker embarks on a personal journey to uncover the hidden story of her great-uncle, who disappeared in the 1970s in France and was found in a psychiatric hospital.
- **Choreography of a Tyrant** (Syria, France, Qatar). From 1970 to 2000, Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria with an iron grip before passing power to his son, Bashar. The film examines how the regime meticulously crafted its image through controlled media, exposing the propaganda mechanisms that sustained its rule.
- **Spiritual Diaries** (Morocco, Qatar) by Rim Mejdí follows the coming of age of a young girl while documenting the influence of a spiritual movement on Moroccan society.
- **The Salt of the South** (Tunisia, France, Belgium) by Rami Jarbouí. In Gabès, a coastal oasis suffocated by a chemical complex, a fishing family is torn between survival and escape. As land and sea collapse, a mother and her son resist in their own ways, holding on to the fading traces of home, memory, and love.

MENA - Feature Documentary - Post-Production

- **Do You Love Me** (Lebanon, France, Qatar) by Lana Daher is an archival journey through Beirut, weaving together Lebanese cinema from the 1950s to the present day, and exploring the country's psyche and its current state.
- **With Hasan in Gaza** (Palestine, Germany, Switzerland, France, Qatar) by Kamal Aljafari. Three MiniDV tapes of life in Gaza from 2001 are rediscovered, standing as a testament to a place and time that no longer exists. What began as a search for a former prison mate from 1989 led to an unexpected road trip from the north to the south of Gaza, accompanied by Hasan, a local guide whose fate remains unknown.
- **Bardi** (Morocco, France, Qatar) by Tala Hadid. Horses and men, dust and earth, saints and sinners. Between real and fiction, between the sacred and the profane, *Bardi* follows an itinerant brotherhood of horsemen across central Morocco.

NON-MENA - Feature Documentary - Post-Production

- **Memory** (Russia, France, the Netherlands, Qatar) by Vladlena Sandu. The filmmaker, a survivor of the war in Chechnya, studies her traumatic memories in order to transcend and transform them via cinema.
- **Whisper of the Wind** (Iran, Qatar) by Mohammad Sadeq Esmaeili. Jamileh, an 8-year-old Afghan girl, races with her family to see their father one last time before his execution in Iran on drug smuggling charges.
- **Catching Them Young** (India, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Qatar) by Pankaj Johar and Sunaina Kapoor. As India becomes increasingly right-wing, a school in one of its holiest cities starts preaching extreme idealism to impressionable young minds. While 11-year-old Satyarth chooses a liberal form of his religion, 12-year-old Hari starts believing and embracing Islamophobia.

MENA - TV Series - Development

- ***Like a Feather in the Breeze*** (Egypt, Qatar) by Sherif Elbendary. Despite crossing paths several times and even though each of them is looking for a soulmate, Tarek and Laila never meet. Salwa, the narrator, decides to interfere and starts a series of comic attempts to set them up.
- ***Al-Michelin*** (USA, Jordan, Qatar) by Abdul-Rahman Sakr. A rising star chef, ever closer to achieving his dream of becoming the best chef in the world, decides to restart his career in Amman, Jordan, when he finds out his father is ill.
- ***How The East Was Won*** (KSA, UK, USA, Morocco, Jordan, Qatar) by Hannah Khalil. In 1966 Dubai, as oil wealth transforms the city, a British expat and a young local woman are entangled in ambition and betrayal. While one pursues love and belonging, the other struggles against tradition, both risking everything as cultural clashes and dangerous enemies threaten to destroy them.

MENA - Web Series - Production

- ***Captain Shedeed*** (Egypt, Qatar) by Ramy El Gabry. A humble vegetable seller becomes a superhero while rescuing his daughter from a deadly tomato virus that targets children. He sets out on a risky journey to take down the organisation behind the outbreak.
- ***Legacy of Light: Echoes from the House of Wisdom*** (Qatar) by Maha Al-Naemi. An Al-animated docudrama series brings to life the Golden Age of Arab science, tracing groundbreaking innovations from the House of Wisdom along the Silk Road, highlighting Islamic civilisation's profound contributions to global knowledge.

MENA - Shorts - Narrative - Development

- ***The Maker: A Journey of Bisht*** (Qatar) by Abdulrahman Al-Mana. In the remote Qatari region of Ras Abrouq, a 25-year-old American travels to master the traditional Arab Bisht, but as he delves into the craft with the help of two passionate young locals, he discovers that preserving culture means embracing more than just tradition; it means becoming part of a living legacy.
- ***Inside the White Canvas*** (Qatar) by Amna Al-Binali. A young woman confined in her own home must defy two opposing forces that suppress her identity to reclaim her sense of self.

MENA - Shorts - Narrative - Production

- ***Goodbye Habibi*** (Palestine, USA, Qatar) by Mike Elsherif. After a vandal spray-paints a threatening message on his family's restaurant, a Palestinian-American boy begins to transform in order to protect the restaurant and his mother.

- ***The Girl Who Cried: Bulldozer!*** (Palestine, Qatar) by Rami Alayan. Seven-year-old Zeina roams the hills that surround her village on a rusty bike. She is determined to stop the bulldozers that are coming to tear down her home.
- ***I Fly Away From You All*** (Egypt, Qatar) by Sameh Alaa. On a dark Cairo night, all Nadia wants is a place to sleep—but the city has other plans.
- ***Ghafleh*** (Lebanon, Qatar) by Tony El Ghazal. In a world driven by the relentless rhythm of time, a precise watchmaker races against the clock to craft the perfect watch for his only daughter.
- ***Santa Khan*** (Bahrain, Qatar) by Maryam Mir. When a Pakistani Santa's bike breaks down on Christmas day, he is forced to take a detour through the surreal Bahraini desert, racing against time to make his festive shift at the local hypermarket.
- ***The Last Laugh*** (KSA, Qatar) by Nour Al Khadra. In a society where emotions are controlled, a dying factory worker discovers a place untouched by surveillance, confronting not just the system, but the deeper cost of feeling, freedom, and being human.

MENA - Shorts - Documentary - Production

- ***Hidden Journey*** (Sudan, Rwanda, Qatar) by Noura Adil Suliman. Against the backdrop of the December Revolution and a civil war in Sudan, two sisters set off on a displacement journey turned adventure, through rural Sudan to East Africa. A journey that connects them back to themselves and their deceased parents.

MENA - Shorts - Experimental/Essay - Development

- ***Threads of Support*** (Qatar, Uzbekistan) by Fahad Al Attiyah. A poetic essay exploring the artistry and resilience of Uzbek craftswomen, weaving silk by hand while preserving history, memory, and meaning in the heart of the Fergana Valley.

MENA - Shorts - Experimental/Essay - Production

- ***Imagine Me Like a Country of Love*** (Yemen, the Netherlands, Qatar) by Thana Farooq. A poetic experimental meditation on memory, belonging, and identity, capturing the fragmented experience of returning to a homeland transformed by time, conflict, and the weight of remembering.
- ***Do It*** (Egypt, Qatar) by Yumna Al-Arashi is an experimental short film that ruminates on the importance of fantasy as a direct action to counter an anxiety-ridden world.

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About Doha Film Institute

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry

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Doha Film Institute

knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; and specialised film events. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

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