

Arabian Sights

FILM FESTIVAL

October 18-27, 2019



Contemporary Arab Cinema
FILMFESTDC.ORG



Arabian FILM FESTIVAL

Presented by



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
WASHINGTON, DC

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The Center for Contemporary
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EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO
WASHINGTON, DC

Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at
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Thank You

Shirin Ghareeb, *Arabian Sights Festival Director and Programmer, and Deputy Director of the Washington, DC International Film Festival.*

Special thanks to **Muna Abdulkader**, *Coordinating Assistant, Short Cuts;*
Mary Pettigrew, *ampersand graphic design;* **Tuan Tran**, *Webmaster;*
and all **Theater Managers, Assistants, and Volunteers.**

The **Washington, DC International Film Festival** is the parent organization
of the **Arabian Sights Film Festival.**

Sights

October 18-27

V A L

Contemporary Arab Cinema

The Arabian Sights Film Festival

returns for its 24th year with an exciting selection of groundbreaking films. This year's opening event will feature Elia Suleiman's new award-winning film **It Must Be Heaven**. Elia Suleiman is one of the leading and most accomplished Palestinian filmmakers.

An *Audience Award* for favorite film will be presented. We are pleased to welcome our new sponsor, the El Gouna Film Festival in Egypt. Thanks to them, a prize of \$5,000 will be presented to the director of the winning film of the *Arabian Sights Jury Award*.



Select directors will accompany their films to conduct post-screening audience discussions. **Please visit filmfestdc.org for updates on films, guests and events.** All films are screened with English subtitles.

Ticket Information

\$14.00 per person for each screening, unless otherwise noted. Opening Night event (film and party) is \$20.00 per person.

Advance Sales

Purchase tickets at filmfestdc.org/arabiansights
Online sales are available until noon on the day of show. Advance sales are subject to a convenience fee.

Day-of-Sales

Tickets can be purchased at the theatre starting one hour before the first show.

Festival Pass

A special package of 10 tickets is available online and at the theater for a discounted price of \$100. Advance sales are subject to a convenience fee. This package does not include the Opening Night event.

Student Discount

1 ticket for \$10 on day-of-showing at door only. Valid with proper student ID. Discount does not include the Opening Night event.

Location

All film screenings will take place at:

AMC Mazza Gallerie Theatre
5300 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20015

Reduced-rate parking available in garage with validation.

Festival Schedule

Friday, October 18

Opening Night

6:30 pm

It Must Be Heaven

Followed by a Reception, \$20.00

8:30 pm

Escape from Raqqa

Saturday, October 19

3:15 pm

Diamond Dust

6:15 pm

Baghdad in My Shadow

8:30 pm

New Biz in the Hood!

Sunday, October 20

3:00 pm

Short Cuts

5:15 pm

Adam

8:00 pm

What Have We Done to Deserve This?

Friday, October 25

6:30 pm

Adam

8:30 pm

Baghdad in My Shadow

Saturday, October 26

2:00 - 8:00 pm *Home After War (virtual reality film)*

2:00 pm

The Guest

4:15 pm

Rashid & Rajab

6:30 pm

*What Have We Done
to Deserve This?*

8:30 pm

Arab Blues

Sunday, October 27

2:00 pm

New Biz in the Hood!

4:00 pm

Advocate

6:15 pm

Escape from Raqqa

8:15 pm

Arab Blues

*For more
information*

Filmfestdc.org
202-234-FILM

Opening Night



— OSCAR SUBMISSION —

It Must Be Heaven

Friday, October 18, at 6:30 pm

Followed by a Reception, \$20.00

In his fifth feature, which garnered a Jury Special Prize at this year's Cannes Film Festival, Elia Suleiman explores the world with his trademark, wide-eyed wonder. In a series of comic vignettes shot in international locales, famed Palestinian director Elia Suleiman investigates the meanings of nationalism, normality, identity and exile. A church in Nazareth with a door that won't open. A deserted Paris. A New York supermarket with as many guns as fresh produce. Suleiman embellishes small details in each vignette, his style edging ever closer to the surreal, in an attempt to capture the experience of a perpetual outsider, and to suggest that normality is highly circumstantial, and often absurd. With a screen presence that has been compared to Buster Keaton's, Suleiman lends a detached bemusement to the oddities of daily life — which, when reflected on, reveal so much more than most would like to admit. — *Toronto International Film Festival*

*France/Qatar/Germany/Canada/Palestine/Turkey,
Directed by Elia Suleiman, 2019, 97 minutes.
In English, French, and Arabic with English subtitles.*

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— OSCAR SUBMISSION —
Arabian Nights Jury Award

Adam

Sunday, October 20, at 5:15 pm

Friday, October 25, at 6:30 pm

Actresses Lubna Azabal and Nisrin Erradi turn a simple story about an unwed Moroccan girl who is pregnant into gold in Maryam Touzani's directing debut. Premiering in competition in this year's Cannes Film Festival, *Adam* opens with Samia, pregnant and living on the street, going door-to-door begging for work. She encounters Abla (Azabal), a single mother deeply traumatized by her husband's recent death. Abla supports herself and her daughter by running a small bakery connected to their house. Though at first she shoos Samia away, practically slamming the door in her face, Abla has second thoughts when she finds the girl is still sitting on the street late at night. Samia ends up spending the night on the couch, on the understanding she'll leave in the morning. Directed with remarkable intimacy, *Adam's*

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lasting power rests in the way the film patiently crescendos without clichés to create a portrait of familial love and support between women. — *Various sources*

*Morocco/France, Directed by Maryam Touzani, 2019, 98 minutes.
In Arabic with English subtitles.*

Arabian Sights Jury Award

Arab Blues

Saturday, October 26, at 8:30 pm

Sunday, October 27, at 8:15 pm

Winner of the Audience Award at the Venice Film Festival. After 10 years of living in Paris, Selma has returned to Tunis in an incisive comedy about coming home, breaking taboos, and building community. Back home, Selma's younger cousin can't figure out why she'd leave the French capital, her aunt is overbearing, and her uncle is only giving her a matter of weeks to crash in the apartment above their house. Selma, nonetheless, is steadfast in her resolve: she wants to open up a psychotherapy practice. As she tries to settle in, she's faced with increasing complications that she — or her guiding patron Sigmund Freud — couldn't have predicted. There isn't just the matter of finding interested psychotherapy patients in a locale that's not keen on the talking cure, but she also needs to navigate a confusing bureaucratic circus in order to get the right papers to run her practice. *Arab Blues* develops with an irresistible charm while not sidestepping bigger questions about both a country and a woman at a crossroads. — *Toronto International Film Festival*

France, Directed by Manele Labidi, 2019, 88 minutes. In French and Arabic with English subtitles.





Arabian Sights Jury Award

★ AMERICAN PREMIERE ★

Baghdad in My Shadow

Saturday, October 19, at 6:15 pm

Friday, October 25, at 8:30 pm

In his latest thriller-drama, award-winning filmmaker Samir's ambitious feature elevates discussions surrounding women's rights, the plague of extremism ensnaring young lost Muslim men in Europe and other controversial issues. The ensemble film revolves around a group of Iraqi immigrants and once idealistic socialists who regularly meet and work at London's Café Abu Nawas. This group of alienated expats includes Amal, an Iraqi woman trying to start a new life in London; young gay IT specialist Muhannad, who is trying but failing to keep his romance a secret and; Taufiq, an aging poet haunted by his past. When Taufiq's nephew Nasseer, a radicalized adolescent, attacks his uncle's friends, he sets into motion a course of events that will turn everyone's lives upside down. *Baghdad in My Shadow* is an explosive mix, staged with empathy and authenticity. —*Various sources*

Switzerland/Germany/UK/Iraq, Directed by Samir, 2019, 105 minutes. In Arabic and English with English subtitles.

Advocate

Sun., Oct. 27, at 4:00 pm

Lea Tsemel calls herself a losing lawyer, because every case she has taken was lost. She has spent nearly 50 years representing Palestinians in an increasingly conservative Israel, earning the sobriquet “the devil’s advocate” in her native Israel for her decades of work championing Palestinians accused of resisting the occupation. We meet Tsemel and the team as they prepare for their youngest defendant yet – Ahmad, a 13-year-old boy implicated in a knife attack on the streets of Jerusalem. Together, they must counter legal and public opposition and prepare Ahmad who, like other Palestinians charged with serious crimes, will face a difficult trial in a country in which the government, court system and media are stacked against him. To many, Tsemel is a traitor who defends the indefensible. For others, she’s more than an attorney – she’s a true ally. —*Various sources*

Israel/Canada/Switzerland, Directed by Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche, 2019, 108 minutes. In Hebrew, Arabic, and English with English subtitles.



Diamond Dust

Sat., Oct. 19, 3:15 pm

A web of corruption emerges in the multilayered revenge thriller by prominent Egyptian director Marwan Hamed (*The Yacoubian Building*, Filmfest DC '07, *The Originals*, *Arabian Sights '17*). Loosely based on one of Egypt’s best-selling novels by Ahmed Mourad,

this Cairo-set vigilante story follows Taha, a pharmacist who leads a dreary life with his wheelchair-bound father. When he returns home one day, he finds his father dead on the ground. After reading his father's diary, he discovers a dark past of racism, corruption, political oppression and abuse of power. He also discovers that his father has left him a unique poison, diamond dust, with which he is to exact vengeance. The information he learns through his father's memoirs leads him to make crucial decisions about forgiveness and revenge. A certified box office hit adorned with an A-list cast, *Diamond Dust* sets a new precedent for Arab noir. —*Various sources*

Egypt, Directed by Marwan Hamed, 2018, 154 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.





Escape from Raqqa

Friday, October 18, at 8:30 pm

Sunday, October 27, at 6:15 pm

A gripping contemporary thriller set partially inside the Islamic State, *Escape from Raqqa* is based on the true story of a French woman who voluntarily took her child to Syria and wound up a prisoner in the titular ISIS stronghold. Unbeknownst to her husband Sylvain, Faustine leaves Paris with her five-year-old son to join ISIS in Syria. But when she realizes she has been made false promises and is watched like a caged bird, she becomes disillusioned and reaches out for help. Sylvain quickly understands that the French authorities are powerless and hardly empathetic with his wife's sudden change of heart. This leads him to enlist the help of a few friends to plan a high-risk exfiltration operation to save his wife and son. — *Various sources*

France, Directed by Emmanuel Hamon, 2019, 102 minutes. In French, English, and Arabic with English subtitles.

A VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE

Home After War

Saturday, October 26

Home After War will play every half hour from 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm, FREE

Home After War is an interactive virtual reality (VR) experience that takes you to Fallujah, Iraq, a city that was, until recently, under Islamic State (IS) control. The war against IS has ended but the city is still unsafe. There's one looming fear for returning refugees – booby trapped homes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the neighborhoods. Since the end of the war, thousands of civilians have died or been injured by IEDs. Ahmaied Hamad Khalaf and his family returned home after the fighting subsided. In the virtual reality experience, you find yourself in Ahmaied's home, which still shows signs of the damage from the war. Explore Ahmaied's home by either walking physically or teleporting in the space as he tells you his story about returning to a home that might be booby-trapped. Hear Ahmaied speak of his loss and his hopes for his family, country and the world. Learn about what it's like to fear the home you once loved. — *Various sources*

Iraq/Germany/USA, Directed by Gayatri Parameswaran, 2018, 20 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.

Admission is FREE, but you must make a reservation. To make a reservation, please visit the Home After War film page at filmfestdc.org/arabiansights





Arabian Sights Jury Award

The Guest

Saturday, October 26, at 2:00 pm

Today, there are only a few films where plot twists can truly surprise the seasoned viewer. This one, however, has several. Dr. Yehia Al Tigany is a writer and thinker who lives a stable family life with his wife and daughter. His views against religious extremism and his ambitious ideas to renew religious discourse bring him accusations of blasphemy and make him a target for contempt by radicals. Amidst his troubles and facing a trial, he welcomes his daughter's suitor Osama into his home to get to know him better. Their heated dialogues focus on religion, inter-faith marriages, women's role and the hijab. Guess who's coming to dinner in Hadi El Bagoury's award-winning intellectual drama and examine its masterful evolution into a true thriller. — *Various sources*

Egypt, Directed by Hadi El Bagoury, 2018, 99 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.



Rashid & Rajab

Saturday, October 26, at 4:15 pm

This witty and engaging farce puts a fresh spin on the body swap comedy formula as Rashid, a high-powered Emirati business executive, and Rajab, an easygoing Egyptian deliveryman, find themselves learning to walk in each other's shoes (literally) following a freak accident. After swapping bodies, nice-but-dim Rajab gets a much nicer house out of the deal, but struggles to cope in Rashid's high-flying career, while also trying to avoid

the advances of his vampish wife. Rashid, meanwhile, has to slum it with Rajab's far less glamorous better half and dine on her less-than-appetizing-sounding Egyptian snacks. A nonstop stream of slapstick gags as well as sly observations on the differences between Emirati and Egyptian culture. — *Various sources*

UAE, Directed by Mohammed Saeed Harib, 2019, 105 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.

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★ NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE ★

New Biz in the Hood!

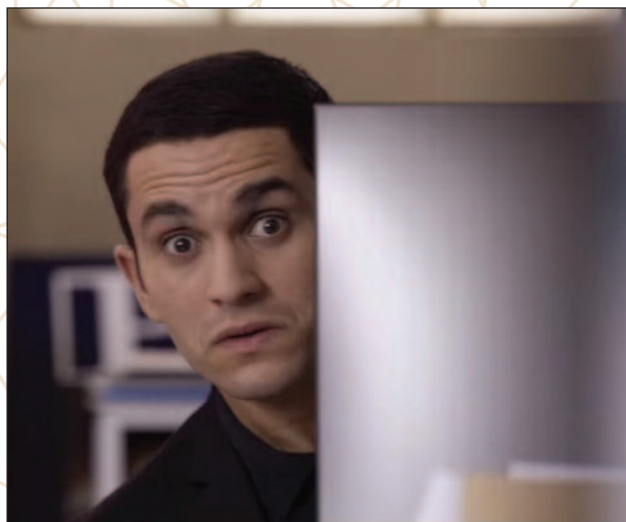
Saturday, October 19, at 8:30 pm

Sunday, October 27, at 2:00 pm

New Biz in the Hood! follows the shenanigans of a high-strung, smooth-talking, 40-something Parisian marketing exec who runs a small business. Things seem to be going fairly well for Frederic ever since he landed a big new client for his company. The hitch is that French authorities have caught on to a tax scheme he ran for years, and after a heated audit, Frederic is given an ultimatum: pay off a \$2 million debt or transfer his company to the rough suburb of La Courneuve, an impoverished community in dire need of employment. He relocates his company to the suburb overnight. Frederic and his team befriend a mild-mannered Algerian security guard looking for work who helps them navigate their new habitat as they cross paths with drug dealers and pint-sized thugs. Thus ensues a fish-out-of-water comedy, with Frederic and his workers introduced to life on the other side of the beltway separating Paris from its suburbs.

— *Various sources*

France, Directed by Mohamed Hamidi, 2019, 90 minutes. In French with English subtitles.





What Have We Done to Deserve This?

Sunday, October 20, at 8:00 pm

Saturday, October 26, at 6:30 pm

Humorous and filled with quirky dialogue, director Eva Spreitzhofer and her brilliant ensemble cast manage to pull off a magnificently biting comedy about tolerance and the limits thereof. For Vienna resident Wanda, an adamant atheist and feminist, her worst nightmare has come true when her teenage daughter Nina converts to Islam, asks to be addressed as Fatima and announces her desire to wear a veil. To top it all off, her ex-husband has to pick this very moment to become a father again. Wanda's wonderful know-it-all world is turned upside-down and she longs for the days when her only problems were her daughter skipping school and smoking pot. What ensues is an amusing look in the mirror for a presumably enlightened, liberal patchwork family.

— *Various sources*

Austria, Directed by Eva Spreitzhofer, 2018, 92 minutes. In German with English subtitles.



Ambience

Short Cuts

Sunday, October 20, at 3:00 pm, FREE

Total running time: 90 minutes

★ NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE ★

What Remains

Farid, an Iraqi Uber driver is about to finish his last ride for the night when a desperate war veteran hijacks his car at gunpoint.

USA, Directed by Areej Mahmoud, 2019, 16 minutes. In Arabic and English with English subtitles.

Aziza

Ayman teaches his wife how to drive his car. The lesson takes a turn into madness and nostalgia for these Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Lebanon/Syria, Directed by Soudade Kaadan, 2019, 13 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.

The President's Visit

When a small coastal town learns about the secret visit of the President to its local soap shop, they embark on a struggle to clean up and maintain the perfect image of their town.

Lebanon/USA/Qatar, Directed by Cyril Aris, 2017, 19 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.



The President's Visit

Ambience

Two Palestinians try to record a demo for a music competition inside a noisy refugee camp.

Palestine, Directed by Wisam Al Jafari, 2018, 15 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.



Dunya's Day

Dunya's Day

Abandoned by her domestic help, Dunya fights to throw the perfect graduation soirée.

Saudi Arabia/USA, Directed by Raed Alsemari, 2018, 14 minutes. In Arabic with English subtitles.

Are You Volleyball?!

Asylum seekers conflict with border guards until a deaf-mute boy initiates better communication between the two groups.

Iran, Directed by Mohammad Bakshi, 2018, 15 minutes. In Arabic and English with English subtitles.

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