

Filmtage Augsburg 2007

25. Kinderfilmfest
17. März – 25. März 2007

19. Tage des unabhängigen Films
20. März – 25. März 2007

14. Augsburger Kurzfilmwochenende
21. März – 25. März 2007

15. Cinema of Tomorrow Internationales Symposium
junger Filmemacher und Filmstudenten
19. März – 25. März 2007



Introduction: Focus on recent independent Arab Film-making

My task was to curate a large and attractive Arab focus for this festival. To present a programme that attracts German audiences. And it could be controversial. I started talking with people around me about the idea in order to find out what they would be attracted to, and I watched more TV than usual to see if the impression I had regarding the presentation of Arab or Muslim issues in German TV was right.

People find the subject hot, important and interesting. But what subject? What is so hot about Arabs? The subjects attributed here to Arabness or Islam are terror and violence, religion (and violence), women (and violence), and – when it comes to media in the wider sense – censorship. Would a programme that discusses these issues be interesting or controversial? Maybe. Would it be cinematic? Rather not.

I decided to go for a cinematic programme for the festival films and programmed reportages in the context of a conference on Arab News TV.

The film programme seems more interesting to me this way and – talking about being controversial – it does not otherize. Good films talk about the essential feelings of humankind and they are more or less identical: love, fear, hatred, hope, death, coming to age... This programme is talking much more about similarities between us than focusing on differences, without denying them.

I am happy that Ghasan Salhab, one of the most important independent film-makers of the Arab world is presenting his latest film, *THE LAST MAN*, in Augsburg. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige are known far behind the Arab World and present their much acclaimed and award winning *A PERFECT DAY*. Both films takes the audience into the atmosphere of Beirut and give a feeling of the pulse of the city at the beginning of the 21st century. Josef Fares, whom many of you might know through his *YALLA, YALLA* and *COPS* shows *ZOZO*, his first so-called serious film. This time a story that leads out of civil-war Beirut, into a new life to Sweden.

With Mohamad Mustaf's *LEISURE TIME* the programme shows the Egyptian art-house box-office surprise of summer 2006. And Samir Nasr asks in *SEEDS OF DOUBT* how deep suspiciousness towards Arabs in Germany goes after 9/11.

Hala Alabdallah's and Ammar Albeik's documentation *I AM THE ONE WHO BRINGS THE FLOWERS TO HER GRAVE* celebrated it's world premiere in Venice and was since then shown at many festival all over the world. It is one of the poetic documentary-road-movies that will be shown in Augsburg. In *FROM BEIRUT, WITH LOVE* Wael Nourredine returns to his hometown Beirut, where he finds one's list of options ranges from the army to religion, and from religion to the army and where fix of heroin costs five dollar. During the war in summer 2006 he returns to Beirut again and shows his subjective *JULY TRIP*. Bassem Fayad travels with three friends across Iraq and

shares his search for hope and images not shown by the media in ROAD BEYOND SUNSET. In I WANT TO TELL YOU... Dalila Ennadre crosses Morocco and gives the women a voice that is generally not heard.

Heba Bassem comes with her film-diary BAGHDAD DAYS, in which she reflects her day-to-day life in Baghdad during the year she graduates from film school. In the CINEMA OF TOMORROW section more works by students from the „Independent Film and Television School Baghdad“ (IFTVS) will be shown, Heba Bassem and Kasim Abid, co-director of the school, will present the film-school.

In IMPROVISATION, Raed Andoni portraits famous Joubran Trio from Palestine. Through the encounter with the charming Joubran brothers he opens an unusual view on crisis-ridden Palestinian society.

The short films take us to Syria, Switzerland, Norway, France, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. The programme covers genres from comedy to animated film and love stories.

Meyar al-Roumi, director of photography of acknowledged Syrian documentary film-maker Omar Amiralay, shows RABIA'S JOURNEY, the first journey that takes the young woman out of her village. TV producer and director Fouad Alaywan`s comedy SEE YOU LATER tells about a Lebanese family in Switzerland and Ula Tabari, assistant director of Samir and Elia Suleiman, deals in DIASPORA with the life in a foreign country. In ON MONDAY Tamer el- Said is nearly flirting with his audience.

With these and numerous other films, the festival invites you to discover the variety of Arab film-making - and live.

In the framework of the TV conference the programme presents works that are shown as documentary films at international film festivals, yet they are often productions for al-Jazeera or al-Arabiyya. Tamer al-Said's TAKE ME, for example, was awarded at numerous festivals and is a production of HOT SPOT in Dubai for the series „Once upon a Time“ broadcast by al-Jazeera. Eliane Raheb's SUICIDE, which is presented all over, is part of the „In and Around Iraq“ series, that Dubai based production house O3 produced for al-Arabiyya.

On the background that, in the West, we usually think of pictures of Bin Laden, kidnappees in Iraq or images from Lebanon in Summer 2006 – those images the two big News TV-stations al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya sell to Western stations – I was interested to show reportages that are produced for these stations in context of TV and not as independent documentaries.

Due to the reduction of the images mentioned above the perception is creeping in that images of Bin Laden and war are the only images Arabs watch. This perception also mingles with the associations of „Arabs“ and „Muslims“ dominant here: terror, war, violence. But this does not meet the reality of what Arabs watch.

At the conference POLITICS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS IN ARAB TV producers and directors will give insight to their work with and for the two News TV-stations al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya and explain some background of the productions. Who produces what, with whom, for whom? How can one producer work for different channels? How can one remain independent and earn one's income with assignments from both stations? How does production for the news channels work in practice?

Scientists will give introducing lectures about Arab TV that go far behind the news channels.

And, of course, numerous programmes can be watched: from politics, current affairs and culture. HOT SPOT shows two episodes from the series „Once Upon a Time“ with popular TV journalist Assaad Taha. O3 presents three episodes from the series „In and Around Iraq“. The series works with the concept of video letters, personal statements by directors from various Arab countries regarding the war in Iraq which were broadcast by al-Arabiyya in 2003. Dimitri Khodr, co-founder of film-cooperative Beirut DC and general manager of „New TV“ shows his independent TV-reportage CHILDREN OF THE CEDARS And Simon el-Habre, member of Beirut DC, editor and

director an episode of al-Jazeera-programme „The Arabic Lens“, a weekly 24-minute-programme which portraits Arab cinema and TV directors. The two directors see themselves as independent and will talk about their relation to Arab TV.

All programmes mentioned will be discussed with directors and/or producers in workshops during the conference.

Last but not least also the international student's meeting CINEMA OF TOMORROW is having part in the Arab Focus. Though the Arab world is often seen as diffuse entity the conditions in the different countries vary a lot. The possibilities of education often reflect the situation of film-making in a country. Film students and young film-makers from three countries give insight to the situation on site: from Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The situation in the three countries couldn't be more different. Yet there is creativity everywhere. From Iraq Kasim Abid, co-founder and co-director of INDEPENDENT FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL BAGHDAD and Heba Bassem present the school; from Jordan members of the AMMAN FILMMAKERS COOPERATIVE - the first place that offered film-education - will introduce their work, and from Lebanon students from different film-schools in Beirut give a picture of film-education there.

All presentations include screenings of short films.

You are cordially invited to join the events also if you are not a student!

I want to thank all those who helped this selection become possible, the directors, producers and distributors of the films, especially Simon el-Habre, Tamer el-Said and Viola Shafik who gave important ideas for the selection of the Arab focus and contributed their ideas for the TV-conference. Mohamad Soueid and Dimitri Khodr for taking their time and discussing the concept of the TV-conference, their feed-back was essential. Hania Mroué, Rabih El-Khoury, Aude Erenberk and Héloïse Carre for the support of med-screen.