



POMEGRANATES AND MYRRH



THE NIGHT OF COUNTING THE YEARS



FLIRTATION OF GIRLS

Middle Eastern Film Festival

The focus for this year's Middle Eastern Film Festival is Egypt. Unfairly referred to as 'Hollywood on the Nile', because of its comparatively large output of melodramas and elaborate musicals, Egyptian cinema has consistently confounded its critics by producing films of international significance, often against the background of political censorship. Arguably the most significant Egyptian film was Kamal Selim's *Determination* (1939), which established the realist tradition that was to later become overtly politicised in the works of filmmakers such as Youssef Chahine (*Cairo Station*), Salah Abu Seif and Teufiq Salih. This politicisation spread to the works of commercial directors such as Henri Barakat (*The Nightingale's Prayer*), but increasing levels of state censorship ultimately drove these filmmakers to neighbouring countries. All the more remarkable then was Chadi Abdesaalam's *Al-mumma* (aka *The Night of Counting the Years*), undeniably a major masterpiece of Egyptian cinema, screening here in a fully restored version courtesy of the Bologna archive. The release in 1999 of Atef Hetata's powerful drama about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism during the first Gulf War, *The Closed Doors*, heralded a new wave in politically committed Egyptian cinema. The brief retrospective is brought up to date with a personal appearance by Ibrahim Batout, presenting his haunting drama *Eye of the Sun*.

Other films in the programme include three films on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a powerful drama on the impact of the Israeli occupation, *Pomegranates and Myrrh*; a lighter look at the impact of the occupation, *Laila's Birthday*, starring the wonderful Mohamed Bakri; and an inspiring documentary on a musical collaboration between cultures, *Knowledge is the Beginning*. There are also outings for the uplifting Iranian comedy *Song of the Sparrows*, and two exceptional documentaries which screened in the Edinburgh International Film Festival last June – from Lebanon, *The One Man Village* and, from Turkey, *On the Way to School*.

Organisers and Partners: The Middle East Festival, MESP, and Filmhouse, supported by the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies of the University of Edinburgh, the British Council, and Screen Academy Scotland. The 2010 Middle Eastern Film Festival has been supported by Scottish Screen, and some films will be toured to regional cinemas and film societies across Scotland with support from Regional Screen Scotland. This project is organised by Neill Walker (on behalf of MESP), and James McKenzie (on behalf of Filmhouse), and is managed by Neill Walker (on behalf of the EICSP).

Middle East Festival Website: www.mesp.org.uk

Pomegranates and Myrrh

Al-mor wa al rumman

Fri 12 Feb at 6.00pm

Najwa Najjar • Palestine 2008 • 1h35m • 35mm

Arabic, English and Hebrew with English subtitles • 12A

Cast: Yasmine Al Masri, Ashraf Farah, Ali Suliman, Samia Kuzmoz Bakri, Yusef Abu Warda.

Najwa Najjar's debut feature combines a stellar cast, a set of remarkable locations within the Palestinian territories, and a powerful story of love under pressure.

Kamar (Yasmine Al Masri) is a free-spirited dancer in Ramallah. Her new husband, Zaid (Ashraf Farah), is suddenly imprisoned for resisting Israeli confiscation of their land. Suddenly a prisoner's wife, Kamar finds herself isolated and alienated from everything she loves, including dance. Defying familial and societal taboos, she stops by her former dance studio, where handsome new dance instructor Kais (Ali Suliman) takes a special interest in her. Kamar struggles to balance her own desires with her moral obligations as a political prisoner's wife.

This absorbing drama candidly addresses the way a Palestinian woman might face the harsh realities of life in modern-day Palestine while refusing to be defined by them.

TICKET DEALS

See any three (or more) films in this season and get 15% off

See any six (or more) films in this season and get 25% off

See any nine (or more) films in this season and get 35% off

These packages are available online, in person and on the phone, on both full price and concession price tickets.

Tickets must all be bought at the same time.





YACOUBIAN BUILDING



THE SONG OF SPARROWS



THE ONE MAN VILLAGE

The Night of Counting the Years

Al-mummia

Sat 13 Feb at 1.00pm

Chadi Abdel Salam • Egypt 1969 • 1h42m • 35mm

Arabic with English subtitles • 12A

Cast: Ahmed Marei, Ahmad Hegazi, Zouzou Hamdy El-Hakim.

The Night of Counting the Years, which is commonly and rightfully acknowledged as one of the greatest Egyptian films ever made, is based on a true story: in 1881, precious objects from the Tanite dynasty started turning up for sale, and it was discovered that the Horabat tribe had been secretly raiding the tombs of the Pharaohs in Thebes. A rich theme, and an astonishing piece of cinema.

"*The Night of Counting the Years* has an extremely unusual tone – stately, poetic, with a powerful grasp of time and the sadness it carries. The carefully measured pace, the almost ceremonial movement of the camera, the desolate settings, the classical Arabic spoken on the soundtrack, the unsettling score by the great Italian composer Mario Nascimbene – they all work in perfect harmony and contribute to the feeling of fateful inevitability. Past and present, desecration and veneration, the urge to conquer death and the acceptance that we, and all we know, will turn to dust...a seemingly massive theme that the director, Shadi Abdel Salam, somehow manages to address, even embody with his images." – Martin Scorsese

The restoration of this film was funded by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation. Print courtesy of the Cineteca del Comune di Bologna.

Dr Bill Manley, Senior Curator at National Museums Scotland, will introduce the film and take part in a Q&A after the screening.

Flirtation of Girls Ghazal al-banat

Sat 13 Feb at 6.00pm

Anwar Wagdi • Egypt 1949 • 2h • 35mm

Arabic with English subtitles • PG

Cast: Naguib Al Rihani, Laila Mourad, Anwar Wagdi Mahmoud El-Meliguy, Suleiman Naguib.

An entertaining musical comedy starring Egypt's foremost comedic actor, Naguib Al Rihani. An elderly teacher, Hamam, gives private lessons to the young, wealthy and flirtatious Leila, with whom he falls in love. But Leila is attracted to many men – a nightclub owner, a famous musician, a newly discovered cousin. After many adventures, Hamam realises that the age gap and difference in social class make it impossible to envisage a future with Leila. Beautifully filmed, *Flirtation of Girls* is reminiscent of 1940s-era Hollywood classics, and features a rare scene with Egypt's legendary singer Mohammed Abdel Wahab.

Yacoubian Building Omaret yakobean

Sun 14 Feb at 4.30pm

Marwan Hamed • Egypt 2006 • 2h52m • 35mm

Arabic with English subtitles • 15 – Contains strong bloody violence

Cast: Adel Imam, Nour El-Sherif, Youssra, Hind Sabry, Essad Youniss.

Yacoubian Building is adapted from a novel of the same name by Alaa Al Aswany, which took the Arab world by storm upon release in 2002. Director Marwan Hamed is faithful to the original conceit, and we follow the diverse inhabitants of an art deco apartment building in downtown Cairo. All Egyptian life – from the richest to the poor, who huddle on its top floor – is here, and really, the building is a metaphor for the country. This absorbing film provides a rare window on life in this secular Islamic country, and the corruption and poverty that still blight it.

The Song of Sparrows

Avaze gonjeshk-ha

Mon 15 Feb at 6.00pm

Majid Majidi • Iran 2008 • 1h36m • 35mm

Persian with English subtitles • 12A

Cast: Reza Naji, Maryam Akbari, Kamran Dehghan, Hamed Aghazi, Shabnam Aklaghi.

This charming and beautifully crafted tale is the latest film from Iran's only Oscar-nominated director, Majid Majidi (*Children of Heaven*). Karim works at an ostrich farm outside Tehran. He leads a simple and contented life with his family in his small house, until one day one of the ostriches runs away, Karim is blamed for the loss and fired from the farm. Soon after, he travels to the city and finds himself mistaken for a motorcycle taxi driver. Thus begins his new profession: ferrying people and goods through heavy traffic. But the job starts to transform Karim's generous and honest nature, much to the distress of his wife and daughters. It is up to those closest to him to restore the values that he had once cherished...

SEASON CONTINUES OVERLEAF



ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL



EYE OF THE SUN



CAIRO STATION

The One Man Village Semaan Bil Day'ia

Tue 16 Feb at 6.00pm

Simon El Habre • Lebanon 2008 • 1h26m • DigiBeta
Arabic with English subtitles • 12A • Documentary

Simon El Habre's intimate portrait of his uncle, farmer Semaan El Habre, marks the arrival of a major new talent. Semaan is the only remaining resident of Ain El Hazaroun, the other villagers having fled during Lebanon's fifteen-year civil war, never to return. *The One Man Village* alludes to this hidden history of war between neighbours but keeps the charming, witty and earthy Semaan – and his shed of cows – centre stage, making for a remarkably assured and moving directorial debut.

On the Way to School Iki Dil Bir Bavul

Wed 17 Feb at 8.55pm

Orhan Eskiköy • Özgür Dogan • Turkey/Netherlands 2009
1h21m • DigiBeta • Turkish and Kurdish with English subtitles
12A • Documentary

Recently graduated primary teacher Emre has been sent to run a remote school in Turkish Kurdistan. He arrives to discover a village with no running water, a somewhat relaxed approach to school attendance and pupils who only speak Kurdish, a language fervently prohibited by the Turkish government. Filmed over one year, this is a beautiful, affectionate and gently humorous observation of Emre (never far from a phone call home to his mum) and his class, as they struggle to come to terms with one another's customs.

The Closed Doors Al abwab al Moghlaka

Thu 18 Feb at 8.45pm

Atef Hetata • Egypt/France 1999 • 1h47m • 35mm
Arabic with English subtitles • 15

Cast: Mahmoud Hemida, Sawsan Badr, Ahmed Azmi, Manal Afifi.

Directed by Youssef Chahine's longtime assistant Atef Hetata, *The Closed Doors* touches on several taboos in contemporary Egyptian society, examining their social and political implications. Set during the Gulf War, it tells the story of Mohamad, a highly impressionable young man who embraces fundamentalist ideas as a way of dealing with the confusion of adolescence and sexual awakening. This powerful first feature by one of Egypt's most promising young directors tackles complex themes like oppression, jealousy, virtue, love and violence in an uncompromising way.

Eye of the Sun Ein Shams

Fri 19 Feb at 6.00pm

Ibrahim El-Batout • Egypt/Morocco 2008 • 1h30m • DigiBeta
Arabic and Italian with English subtitles • 15

Cast: Hanan Youssef, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Ramadan Khater.

From once being the capital of Egypt during the Pharaonic era and a sacred location marked by the visit of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, Ein Shams has become one of the poorest and most neglected areas of Cairo. Through the eyes of Shams, a playful, inquisitive, 11-year-old girl inhabitant of this neighbourhood, the poignant and charming *Eye of the Sun* journeys through modern day Egypt, weaving a mosaic of images and sounds.

Director Ibrahim El-Batout will take part in a Q&A following this screening. With thanks to the British Council.

Cairo Station Bab el hadid

Sat 20 Feb at 6.00pm

Youssef Chahine • Egypt 1958 • 1h30m • 35mm
Arabic with English subtitles • PG

Cast: Youssef Chahine, Hind Rostom, Farid Shawqi, Hassan el Baroudi.

In and around the station, many people try to scrape a living and some loving. Kenawi, a limping, love-hungry newspaper seller, falls for Hanuma, a feisty, voluptuous siren. Hanuma is one of a group of unofficial female vendors who dodge the authorities to sell soft drinks to passengers. She is about to marry Abu Seri, a loud and heavy-handed porter who is trying to form a trade union. Meanwhile, newspapers report on a gruesome murder...

Youssef Chahine explores sexuality, repression, madness and violence among the marginalised in this film, regarded as one of his masterpieces.

The Nightingale's Prayer

Doa al karawan

Sun 21 Feb at 1.00pm

Henry Barakat • Egypt 1959 • 1h49m • DigiBeta
Arabic with English subtitles • 12A

Cast: Faten Hamama, Ahmed Mazhar, Amina Rizk, Zahrat El-Ola.

Based on the novel by the great Egyptian writer, Taha Hussein, *The Nightingale's Prayer* stars the first lady of the Arab silver screen, Faten Hamama. This compelling tale of love and betrayal, set in the Egyptian countryside, follows the story of Amna (Hamama) as she plots her revenge on the engineer (Ahmed Mazhar) who destroyed her family's honour. A gripping portrait of a courageous young woman's rebellion against tradition and poverty, this film is one of the unheralded masterworks of world cinema.



LAND OF FEAR



LAILA'S BIRTHDAY



KNOWLEDGE IS THE BEGINNING

Land of Fear Ard al-Khof

Sun 21 Feb at 3.30pm

Daoud Abdel Sayed • Egypt 1999 • 2h22m • 35mm
Arabic with English subtitles • 15

Cast: Ahmed Zaki, Farah, Hamdi Ghayth, Abdel Rahman Abou Zahra.

Land of Fear is a Kafkaesque tale of a policeman who stays undercover as a drug dealer for so long that he begins to lose his sense of identity. Daoud Abdel Sayed's 1999 feature is a fascinating and surreal yarn about the evolving Egyptian drug world and the Mafia dons who run it.

Laila's Birthday Eid milad Laila

Mon 22 Feb at 6.30pm

Rashid Masharawi • Palestine/Tunisia/Netherlands 2008 • 1h11m
35mm • Arabic with English subtitles • 12A

Cast: Mohammed Bakri, Areen Omari, Nour Zoubi.

Gaza-born director Rashid Masharawi captures the absurdity of the Palestinian situation in this comically deadpan, stop-and-start road trip through the land of checkpoints and barriers. A former judge, Abu Laila (stone-faced Mohammed Bakri, a Palestinian Buster Keaton), now drives a taxi to make ends meet. His customers are a motley cross-section of Ramallah's citizens: a young Romeo who hires the taxi to have a place 'alone' with his lover; a housewife who'll stop anywhere there's a free food giveaway; armed militia members. Our harried hero is also trying to regain his former position and, today at least, needs a birthday cake for his daughter. Using Abu Laila's travails as a window into contemporary Palestine, Masharawi reveals a situation both more complicated than one could image and one that is universally human. Most of all, he captures the surprising beauty of Ramallah and the unshakeable spirit of its people.

Knowledge is the Beginning

Wir können nur den Hass verringern

Mon 1 Mar at 5.45pm

Paul Smaczny • Denmark 2005 • 1h30m • DigiBeta
English, Arabic and Hebrew with English subtitles • PG
Documentary

World-renowned conductor Daniel Barenboim and the late Palestinian writer and activist Edward Said generated both controversy and admiration when they founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in 1999. Bringing young Arabs and Jews from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan and Syria together to perform and live side by side, it is a living expression of its aim to further peaceful co-existence in the Middle East. This Emmy-nominated documentary follows this unique musical collaboration from its inception.

This screening will be accompanied by an audience discussion led by members of the Global Citizen Corps youth project from across the Middle East, Scotland and the United States. Organised by MercyCorps in association with Take One Action Film Festivals and the Middle East Youth Festival.

EVENTS

Masterclass with Ibrahim El Batout

Venue: Screen Academy Scotland Production Centre,
2a Merchiston Avenue, Edinburgh, EH10 4NU.

Thursday 18 February, 2pm - 4pm

Egyptian filmmaker Ibrahim El Batout will explore his interest in human stories and how he weaves them into both his documentary and fiction work. His second feature film, *Eye of the Sun*, screens at Filmhouse the following day.

The masterclass is free but booking is essential.
Please go to www.essama.org to book your place.

Day Workshop: The History and Themes of Egyptian Cinema

Facilitator: Dr Walter Armbrust, Albert Hourani Fellow, St Antony's College, University of Oxford.

Venue: Sanctuary, Augustine United Church,
41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL.

Saturday 20 February, 10.00am - 4.30pm

This day workshop will cover the whole history of Egyptian cinema in roughly chronological order, though with many other themes worked into it. The workshop will be illustrated with film clips throughout.

Cost: £10 (free for students). For a registration form contact: Neill Walker, mesp2010@hotmail.co.uk, 0131 331 4469