

Red Sea International Film Festival reveals details of its first edition

- *The Festival, set to kick off on March 12, announces its main and short competitions, with 16 Films announced in-competition*
- *Opening of new cinema complex with 1200 seat cinema and 4 additional screens*
- *New Saudi / New Cinema section to launch with 7 local works*
- *"When Fellini Dreamt of Picasso" exhibition will take place at Majlis Al-Baladi*
- *Special Screening of Spike Lee's Malcolm X*
- *Transmissions - Series of Panels announced*
- *Box office opens on the 23 of February*

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; February 17, 2020 - Red Sea International Film Festival announced today the program details, competition lineup and industry initiatives of its first edition at a press conference held in Al-Balad Historic Jeddah, Bait Qabil.

Set to take place March 12-21 at the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Festival will shed light on local talent as well as bringing a diverse selection of films to Saudi Arabia.

Festival Director Mahmoud Sabbagh and Artistic Director Hussain Currimbhoy announced a total of 107 features and shorts that will screen in the Festival.

The selection contains 16 films in-competition, 7 out-of-competition titles, 15 Retrospectives + Classic works, three Generation titles, five Immersive/VR experiences, 11 pictures in New Saudi/New Cinema, 13 titles in the shorts competition, 23 Best of the Year films, 17 Tajreeb titles, which is a collection of experimental films and 'Untitled Omnibus Feature', an anthology comprised of 5 short films.

The Competition selection this year opens a window to the world we live in with all of its current challenges. Prevalent themes are the advancement of women's rights with an intense look at the scourge of domestic violence, as well as immigration, in particular, concerning marginalised individuals.

The Head of the Competition jury will be American three-time Academy Award winner Oliver Stone.

Participating countries in this year's competition include Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Columbia, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mongolia, Nigeria, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Spain and United States.

"It's pleasing that we are bringing these great quality films discussing social issues of the day, said Sabbagh, Festival Director. "We have a strong desire to push diversity, particularly in women's position in public spaces, and for a more open society. The films present a strong look at what makes society function and the relationship between the individual to patriarchy and hegemony."

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Under the theme of "Transmissions", a masterclass series will be led by Arab and International cinema icons, who will pass on their knowledge, inspiration and experience to young, aspiring filmmakers. Among those presenting sessions are Spike Lee, William Friedkin, Abel Ferrara, Khairy Beshara and Yousry Nasrallah.

The pulse of next-generation talent can be seen in a carefully curated selection of short films produced or directed by the most exciting up and coming Arab contemporary voices. With a focus on diversity and innovation, the shorts competition offers a place to discover something new and to connect with the creators.

The announcement also highlighted the lineup of 'New Saudi/New Cinema', a programme developed to introduce new, vital filmmakers and artists. The dynamic selection showcases the new voices shaping the Saudi cinema scene, all primed for launch on to the international circuit.

Another title from the New Saudi/New Cinema program is the 'Untitled Omnibus Feature', developed in partnership with Jeddah-based production house Cinepoetics Pictures. A platform for Saudi women in the film industry, the five female filmmakers helming the films are Hind Alfahhad, Jowaher Alamri, Noor Alameer, Sara Mesfer, and Fatima Al-Banawi. Award-winning Palestinian filmmaker Suha Arraf is screenwriting supervisor on the portmanteau film.

Furthermore, Festival attendees will get a chance to encounter site-specific installations at Red Sea's 'Immersive Cinema'. Commissions by dynamic digital artists will embrace Jeddah Old Town in this wholly unique program shaped by new takes on narrative form and technology – including powerful sound installations, holographic experiences, and 2-channel experiments.

Inaugurating the first edition of the Festival is the newly built Coral Theater with a 1200 seat capacity. Also at the newly built festival complex are four more theaters, one at 240 seater capacity, and the remaining three with 120 seats. A special masterclass on virtual reality and immersive art, 'On Site, On Mind' will be led by Vishal Dar, Joan Ross, Nic Koller and Weston Rio Morgan.

Furthermore, the Festival will be exhibiting "When Fellini Dreamt of Picasso" in collaboration with Cinémathèque Française, celebrating 100 years since the birth of the great Italian filmmaker. The exhibition sheds light on the story of how many of Fellini's films were inspired by Picasso's paintings, though the two great artists had never met.

With scenes shot in Mecca, the Festival will host a very special screening of Spike Lee's 'Malcolm X', on March 13th. 'The Choice', one of Youssef Chahine's iconic films has been restored by the Red Sea Film Foundation.

A series of industry panels titled "Perspectives" will bring together filmmakers from around the world to explore trends, ideas and issues shaping the industry today. These discussions will touch upon the animation industry, the new Saudi independent film scene, Arab international cinema, exploring European/Saudi co-productions and finally, the future for Arab film production.

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Festival Director Sabbagh added: "We worked hard to ensure that the films being presented showcase Saudi Arabia's emerging film industry, and encourage a more open cultural exchange. This isn't just about exporting our stories; we are bringing different perspectives, new conversations into Saudi Arabia too."

At this year's Festival, there will be cash awards totalling \$250K for films in competition. The Golden Yusr Trophy for Best Feature carries a \$100K cash prize and the Silver Yusr Trophy for Best Director comes with a \$50K award. In addition, a Silver Yusr Trophy will be awarded for Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Cinematic Contribution. A prize of \$50K will go to the winner of the Audience Award. An additional Golden Yusr Trophy will be presented to the Best Short Film, which also brings a \$50,000 investment for a future project plus a five-month creative residency in Jeddah's Old Town.

For more information, please contact: media@redseafilmfest.com

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About Red Sea International Film Festival

The inaugural Red Sea International Film Festival takes place 12-21 March in Al-Balad Historic Jeddah, under the theme "Changing the Script". A platform for expression and discovery through film, the Festival and its year-round initiatives aim to support and help grow Saudi Arabia's emerging film industry, inspire new audiences across the country, and contribute to a richer experience for Saudi Arabia's changing society by encouraging more open cultural exchange. For more information, or to buy tickets, please visit www.redseafilmfest.com

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