

2017 SYRIA FILM FESTIVAL TORONTO

PROGRAMMING NOTE

As the war in Syria continues, over half the population—12 million people—have been uprooted from their country. Since its roots in the 2011 uprising against president Bashar Al-Asad, new players have entered the conflict and today Syrians are besieged from various sides. Given the increasing complexity and suffering of the Syrian people, the Syria Film Festival returns for a third year with challenging films organized under the theme of “Lives under Siege.”

We take this theme at times literally, as in our opening night film “City of Ghosts,” about citizen journalists from the infamous journalist organization Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, fighting the direct takeover of their country, one news story at a time. The short film “Last Day in Aleppo” presents another take on this theme: an observational documentary about Syrians living through the siege of their city.

Other films in the program speak to our theme in more interpretative ways, including our closing night film “Lost in Lebanon,” a documentary about four different characters whose lives have been shattered by the war. Each works diligently to put the pieces back together, while struggling with memories of home and the hard reality of their present life.

As a team, we dream of a future edition of the festival that will celebrate the works of filmmakers focusing on a truly free, democratic Syria. Until then, we work to share with Toronto audiences the struggles of those living and fighting for that day.

Aisha Jamal
Head of Programming

OPENING NIGHT



LINA (short)

Part of this year’s filmmaker spotlight, Zeina Erheim’s short portrait of Lina highlights a young citizen journalist who takes to Twitter to get the word out about what she calls the worst day of her life, namely the siege of Aleppo.



CITY OF GHOSTS

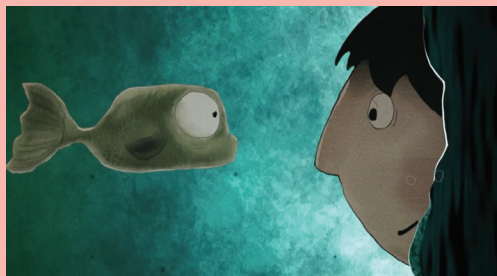
What would you do if your homeland was seized by the most infamous and nefarious terror groups? City of Ghosts opens a window into the world of Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently; a band of citizen journalists, political activists and freedom fighters, bent on bringing their nation’s story to the world’s stage. On the most intimate of levels and with unequivocal access, world-renowned documentarian Matthew Heineman chronicles the day to day lives of these citizen journalists, as they brandish unparalleled bravery in the face of unimaginable obstacles.

SECOND NIGHT



MONA (short)

Part of this year’s filmmaker spotlight, Zeina Erheim’s short portrait of Mona presents an activist from Raqqa, who faces physical abuse and the criminal charge of working with the opposition in response to her work to support the uprising in Syria.



THE BOY AND THE SEA (short)

Through an animated lens, The Boy and the Sea tells the story of a young refugee that dives to the bottom of the sea, hoping to reclaim his life and save himself from the injustices of his reality.



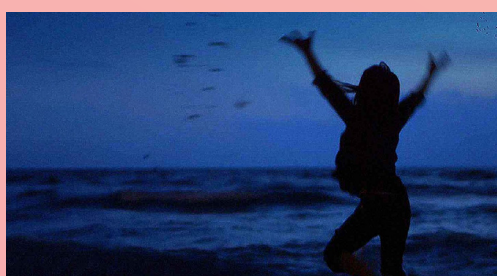
THE ISLAND OF ALL TOGETHER (short)

Once a thriving European vacation hub, the shores of Lesbos have become a landing site for thousands upon thousands of refugees. The Island of All Together links tourists and refugees in an effort to find common ground through sharing their stories.



WAR IN PEACE (short)

Visually captivating, director Luise Omar uses animation to reflect on her personal existence in a state of tension between the war in Syria and her life of peace in Germany.



WATANI (medium length)

This Academy Award nominated documentary pulls us into the lives of Abu Ali, a Free Syrian Army Commander, and his family as they struggle to survive on the front lines of the war in Syria. When Abu Ali is captured by ISIS, the family flees to Germany in order to survive.

CLOSING NIGHT



LUBNA (short)

Part of this year’s filmmaker spotlight, Zeina Erheim’s short portrait of Lubna presents a portrait of an activist from Misraba, who shares the details of what it is like to be a woman during the challenges and suffering that come with war.



ONE DAY IN ALEPPO (short)

Living in Aleppo during the siege, the citizen’s of the city try to maintain a sense of normalcy while war and terror rages all around them.



LOST IN LEBANON (feature)

Lebanon hosts the largest refugee population per capita in the world, a majority of them recent Syrian arrivals. Tracing the lives of four displaced Syrians in Lebanon, the film explores their struggles while living in exile. Among them Sheikh Abdo, who has established his own community but cannot find peace among routine arrests and police harassment. His story is not unique as others speak of the struggle to courageously rebuild their shattered lives in a sometimes welcoming, sometimes hostile environment. In a constant state of worry about safety, can these refugees find the peace to re-establish themselves in a new country?