

Media release

The 7th Arab Film Festival Zurich will begin on 2 April, and for the first time, this biennial event will take place at two different venues: at the traditional festival location, the Filmpodium, and now, at the same time, in two screening rooms at the Frame cinema.

The Competition

The programme once again includes a competition for 12 feature-length films – six documentaries and six fiction films –, two of which will be honoured with prizes for Best Film and Best Director on 6 April. The jury consists of Tunisian actor-director Afef Ben Mahmoud, Swiss director Nicolas Wadimoff and American film critic and festival director Jay Weissberg.

The spectrum of films in the competition is broad and ranges from a report about Egyptian women who have survived acid attacks (*Samar... Before the Final Picture*) to a feminist science-fiction parable (*Animalia*), from a study of inconspicuous places in Lebanon that bear witness to unpunished violence (*The Soil and the Sea*) to a docudrama about Frantz Fanon's beginnings as a psychiatrist and critic of colonialism in Algeria (*Chroniques fidèles survenues au siècle dernier à l'hôpital psychiatrique Blida-Joinville, au temps où le Docteur Frantz Fanon était chef de la cinquième division entre 1953 et 1956*), from a biography of the pioneering Syrian archaeologist and artist Wahbi Al-Hariri-Rifai (*Chanting of the Dunes*) to a darkly humorous anthology film about the chaos in Lebanon (*Disorder*), from a Palestinian documentary about a family that left the country during the second Intifada (*Three Promises*) to a subtle portrait of a Palestinian family threatened by internal conflicts away from the war (*Happy Holidays*), from the autobiographical memory of the 'Years of Lead' in Morocco with the help of a miniature set peopled by dolls (*The Mother of All Lies*) to the allegorical story of inhumanity among refugees (*To a Land Unknown*), from the story of a family forced to flee from Iraq to the Netherlands (*My Father, Nour and I*) to the self-reinvention fable of a young woman who was presumed dead after an accident (*Aïcha*).

Thematic focusses

Out of competition, the festival will present around 30 short films as well as another 12 full-length films, six of which belong to sections focussing on filmmaking in Sudan and Saudi Arabia; each of these two countries will also be the subject of panel discussions with experts and filmmakers. Other discussions will focus on Arab filmmaking in general and on the special challenges of producing animated films in Arab countries, including in comparison to Switzerland. At the Animation Lab, an industry event, a jury consisting of Qatari producer and festival programme director Maryam Essa Al-Khulaifi, Fantoche director Ivana Kvesic and HSLU lecturer and animator Kat Woodtli, will judge Arabic and Swiss animation projects in the production stage.

Introducing: the Audience Award

A festival is not only made up of films, but also and especially relies on its audience. It is therefore only logical that the Arab Film Festival Zurich is introducing an audience award. The most popular feature-length film in the entire programme will be honoured, and voters will have the chance to win a dinner at the Lebanese restaurant Sama Beirut.

A total of around 20 filmmakers from the Arab world and about 10 other guests from Switzerland and other countries are expected at the festival, so there will be plenty of opportunities for personal exchange about the films and beyond.

The complete programme will be published on 16 March, when advance ticket sales will also begin on the website www.iaffz.com. Admission is free for refugees and undocumented migrants. Media professionals who would like to view films and/or arrange interviews with attending filmmakers in the run-up to the festival should contact michel@iaffz.com.