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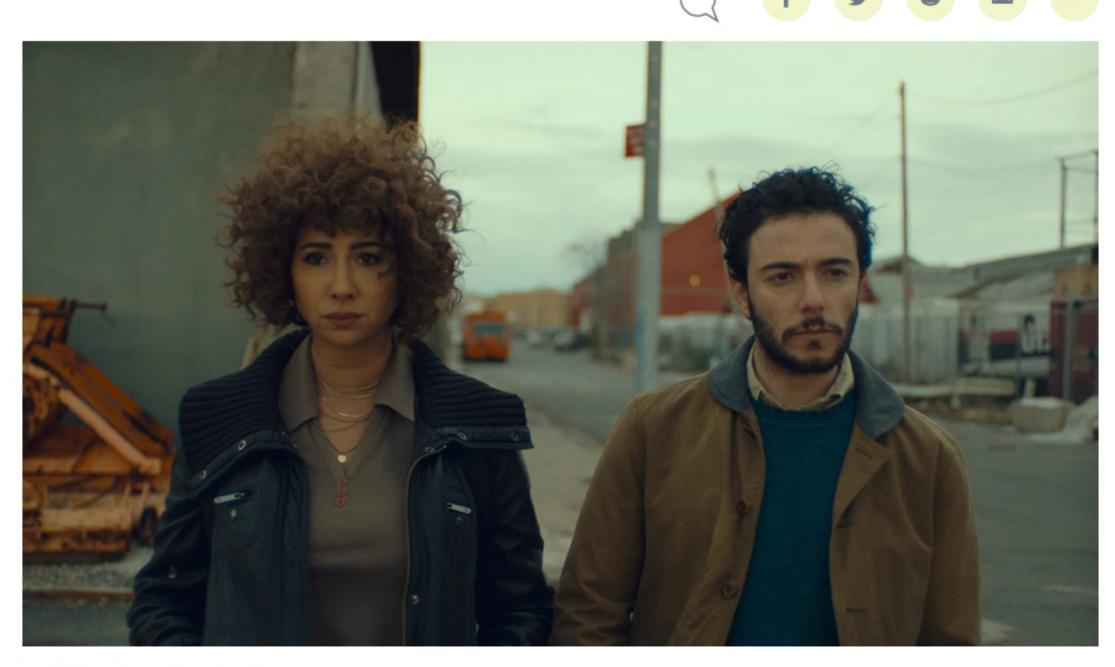
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NewFilmmakers L.A. Launches Online Short-Film Fest Mid-December

By Malina Saval ∨



NewFilmmakers Los Angeles

Running from Dec. 11 through Dec. 12, NewFilmmakers (NFMLA) is partnering with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to present an online film festival showcasing the latest work from Middle Eastern, Arab and Dutch filmmakers. Other presenting partners include Dutch Culture USA (Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in New York) and the Arab Film and Media Institute (AFMI).

Comprising three short film programs and a slate of up and coming talent, the weekend-long event will include virtual screenings, industry panels and q & a's with artists from countries such as Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, France, the Netherlands and the United States. Among the featured films are "So I Stay," from Dutch director Marieke de Zwaan, Arab director Suha Araj's "Rosa" and Rami Kodeih's Oscar-qualifying short "Alina."

"In all three of these programs we are seeing a lot of stories that reflect on freedom and integrity, on an individual, communal, societal and global level," says NFMLA Programming Director Bojana Sandic.

Industry delegates on hand to meet festival filmmakers and participate in panels include Allison Wasserman, director, original programming at HBO; UTA agent Mikey Schwartz-Wright; Brian Harvey, development exec at Amazon Studios; Effie T. Brown, producer and CEO of Gamechanger Films (Dear White People); and filmmaker Robert Coppola Schwartzman ("The Argument," "The Unicorn").

"This is our third consecutive year of showcasing Middle Eastern, Arab and Dutch Cinema in partnership with the Academy, Dutch Culture USA and the Arab Film and Media Institute," says NFMLA Executive Director and Co-Founder Larry Laboe. "It's exhilarating to see these communities and organizations continually banding together to share global stories and exchange ideas between diverse artists. We appreciate the Academy's commitment to inclusion and it's always such a pleasure to work with their amazing team."

De Zwaan, whose short revolves around a woman stranded at a gas station who dips into her "passion for movies" to pass the time, notes that it's "the interaction between real life and the representation of real life" that provided the inspiration for the project.

"I notice people around me looking for authentic experiences while at the same time being hyper self-conscious – actors in their own life," De Zwaan says. "Creating authenticity is a paradox that formed the foundation of my film.."

Araj's "Rosa" focuses on issues of immigration, a topic she points out is particularly au courant this year.

"This film began from such a personal place, from a question of where is an immigrant buried," says Araj. "What if they can't go home and want to? Most of the cast and crew come from immigrant families so they were able to relate on a visceral level. It made for a very special experience in bringing Rosa to life. I was hoping to give a glimpse into lives that are often unseen. Releasing the film during a very historic year has been quite a unique experience as well. At a time when there is so much suffering and loss globally, perhaps we are able to connect to one another's humanity in ways we didn't before."

While clocking in at a 26-minute run time, "Alina," which stars Alia Shawkat and Edin Gali, recounts the vast and harrowing nightmares of Nazism, specifically that of a group of women in the Warsaw Ghetto attempting to smuggle a three-month baby to freedom. It's these stories, writ large on the screen, that mark NFMLA's festival as one committed to spotlighting crucially important societal issues.

"We're so honored to be able to share our Oscar-qualifying short film 'Alina,' which tells the story of real-life women taking extraordinary action in the face of fascism and persecution," says Kodeih. "It's an especially timely and personal story, so we're very excited to have the support of the Academy

behind the film and thank NFMLA for programming it."



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