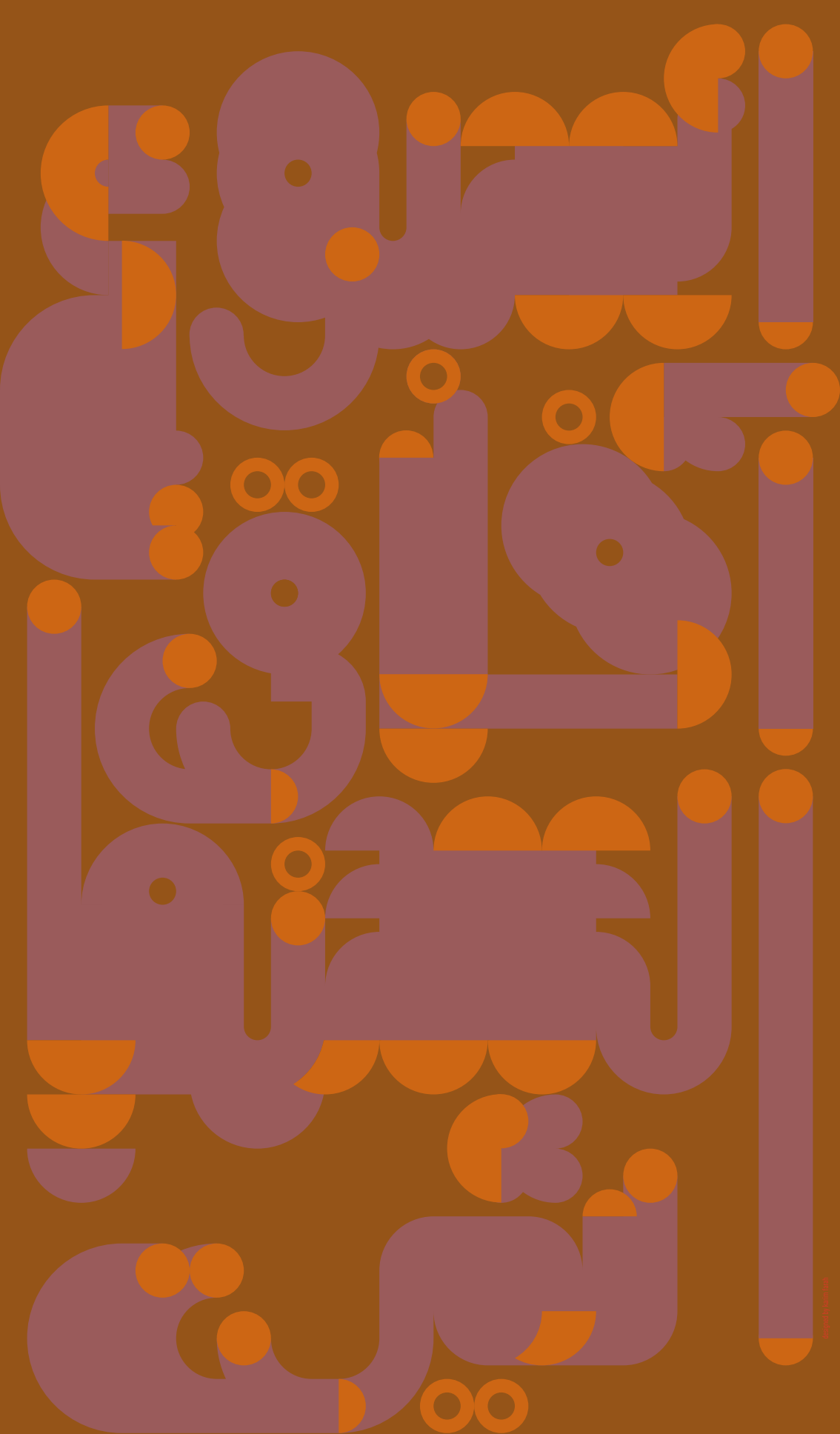




www.afacfilmweek.com

بين التحديق والتغليب
EXCAVATING BEYOND THE GAZE
أسبوع 6-13
AFAC — METROPOLIS
افاق CINEMA — 09.2026
السينمائي — سينما متروبوليس

AFAC FESTIVAL

Ali Hussein Al-Adawy · Curator

AFAC Film Week returns after years of hiatus. But it does not return to the same world, the same language, or the same conditions of vision it left behind. The event returns at a moment when familiarity itself has become a distant memory, and the ordinary has become a cliché that has lost its meaning. Yet Lebanon, it seems, has known for more than half a century that the familiar is nothing more than a fleeting exception, and that life here is measured, more often than not, by a succession of disruptions and the constant practice of bidding farewell to what once seemed familiar.

○ This edition comes in the wake of the Beirut port explosion and of the genocide that Zionist settler-colonialism continues to perpetrate against the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, whose reverberations continue to be felt in southern Lebanon since the Al-Aqsa Flood resistance uprising on October 7, 2023. It also comes after the colonial war in Sudan, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, and the end of Ba'athist rule following the genocidal war against the Syrian people, at a moment when Syria is still experiencing the turmoil of transition — between the collapse of an old world and open questions about a world that has yet to take shape. ○○ We, who stand outside Gaza, outside southern Lebanon, outside Sudan, and outside Syria, do not experience the genocide directly, but rather through images. Day after day, we have followed the ongoing nightmare and the resilience of those who endure it. We also witness through images the widening circles of solidarity on university campuses, in public squares, on the streets, in aid convoys, and on ships making their way across the sea toward those under siege. Yet this distance that the image creates between the event and its viewer does not absolve us of responsibility; rather, it makes that responsibility all the more urgent. ○ We—those of us working in film and photography, and researching the histories of resistance to colonialism and hegemony—are called upon today to ask: How can the image resist the normalization of genocide rather than become one of its tools? And how can we avoid confining our existence to the boundaries of catastrophe itself, so that genocide does not become our sole horizon, and looking at it does not become an end in itself? ○○

○ The images of genocide and resilience in Gaza have, with unprecedented force, shaken the discursive frameworks that have governed thinking about the image, just as they have shaken the moral economies upon which art and cultural institutions around the world have long been built. These images have, in a radically different way, reignited the question of representing the horrific as well as the question of representation more broadly. ○○○ The dilemma of representing the horrific lies in the fact that an image may, unwittingly, become an extension of the very violence it seeks to expose. The overrepresentation of pain and the excessive reproduction of scenes of destruction reduce the image to its surface, trapping it in its immediate impact.

○ As the endless flow of images circulates through major media networks—or through citizen journalists and anyone with a smartphone camera—these images quickly enter the economy of platforms, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, where they are endlessly recycled and absorbed into the logic of speed, repetition, and fragmentation. Between the swipe of a finger across a phone screen and the press of a remote-control button, faces are transformed into data, bodies into numbers, and victims into statistics, while human beings are stripped of their history, their relationships, their names, and their capacity to appear as whole selves. ○ This violence becomes even more brutal when it is directed at those who have been denied, from the outset, the means to produce their own images and narratives—as is the case with our people in Sudan, who have been pushed to the margins of visibility twice over: once by war, and once by the global image economy. Against this backdrop, the work of many Palestinian journalists emerges as a daily act of resistance to this logic—a resistance that strives, with determination and vigilance, to restore the humanity of the image rather than merely document the catastrophe. ○○

But the other side of the dilemma is no less complex. In the face of those who avert their eyes from the heart wrenching truth of Sudan, southern Lebanon, and Gaza, a call emerges urging us to stare at the horrific and to insist on looking at it until the very end. Yet this insistence, in turn, raises ethical and political questions that cannot be ignored in light of what we have learned from Syria since 2011: What happens when violated bodies become the constant object of the gaze? What happens when human beings are reduced to the image of the victim alone, erasing their will, their agency, and their capacity for action? Where does this staring lead us? Does it lead us, over time, to habituation, then to forgetting, and finally to indifference? Or does it lead us to shoulder the burden and responsibility of bearing witness, rather than merely witnessing, to resist forgetting and to build a memory that does not allow the violence of domination to have the final say? ○○○ This is where the festival begins:

with a proposal to move from gazing to excavation, rather than settling for gazing alone or calling for looking away. ○ Excavation is not the opposite of looking; rather, it is its deepening. It is a movement from the surface of the image to its layers, from the scene to what it conceals, from the immediate impact to the structures that produced it, from the event to its history, and from the victim to the world in which she lived before becoming one. It is an inquiry into what is absent rather than what is visible, and into what is hidden rather than what is revealed. ○ In this sense, the rubble ceases to be the end of vision and instead becomes its beginning. ○○○ In “Excavating Beyond the Gaze,” we seek to bridge the gap between research and writing, on the one hand, and cinema and filmic practice, on the other, within the physical and social space of the cinema hall, understood as a site of collective thought. Here, films meet texts, investigation meets imagination, and the archive meets memory—not to explain the catastrophe, but to excavate its layers and uncover what the forces of colonialism and authoritarianism have sought to bury, silence, or render invisible. ○ It is an excavation of images of resilience swallowed up by images of destruction; of the details of daily life erased by the language of numbers; and of tunnels and camps, lifebuoys, relations of production, and historical temporalities that continue, with determination and stubbornness, to resist the transformation of genocide into an eternal horizon and the transformation of the present into a time without history or future. ○ From this perspective, a closed-door meeting on current issues in Syrian cinema will be held alongside this edition, which is organized around two complementary tracks that converge at Metropolis Cinema in Beirut.

Film Program

Spirits and Ghosts

Through nine films from Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, we explore a range of cinematic worlds rooted in diverse geopolitical, historical, and production contexts across the Arab region, navigating between the harshness of an extreme reality—when it seems to offer no way out—and imagination as a tenacious practice of creating paths beyond it.

Public Program

Thinking Through the Rubble, Beneath the Surface

Encounters, readings, non-academic performances, and discussions explore—through both image and text—what remains alive beneath the rubble: the layers invisible at first glance; the history that continues to breathe beneath the surface of disaster; beneath the surface of images and their economies; and the possibilities that, despite everything, continue to resist the logic of annihilation and oblivion.

Ali Hussein AlAdawy is a curator of film and artistic research projects, as well as a critic and researcher whose work spans cinema, moving images, urban contemporary art practices, global critical theory, and modern and contemporary cultural history. His curatorial projects include the ongoing project Labor Images (since 2019), Serge Daney: A Homage and Retrospective (2017), and Harun Farocki: Dialectics of Images... Images that cover/uncover other images (2018).

He has also curated several exhibitions and public programs, including, with Paul Cata, The Art of Getting Lost in Cities: Barcelona & Alexandria (2017) and the seminar Benjamin and the City (2015). Beyond curatorial work, he has been active as a writer and editor, co-founding Tripod (2015–2017), an online magazine dedicated to film and moving image critique, and contributing to the editorial team of TarAlbahr (2015–2018), an online platform and publication focused on urban and artistic practices in Alexandria.

He holds an MA in the intersections of human rights and contemporary art from Bard College, New York, and continues to teach, write, and edit while developing curatorial projects that critically engage with the politics and poetics of images.

2024

● Screening ○ Public Program



Sunday, 6 September

6:00 PM Opening

7:00 PM **Stranger than Fiction** | Nour Ouayda ○

8:00 PM **Agora** | Alaeddine Slim ●



Monday, 7 September

8:00 PM **Birdland** | Leila Kilani ●

Followed by Q&A



Tuesday, 8 September

6:00 PM **Les Tempêtes (Silent Storms)** |

Dania Raymound-Boughenou ●

Followed by Q&A



8:00 PM **Khartoum** | Anas Saeed, Rawia Alhag, Ibrahim

Snoopy, Timeea Mohamed Ahmed, Phil Cox ●

Followed by Q&A



Wednesday, 9 September

8:00 PM **Perfumed with Mint** | Muhammad Hamdy ●

Followed by Q&A



Thursday, 10 September

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM **Cinema as Infrastructure: Perfumed with Mint as a Case Study** ○

8:00 PM **Deserts** | Faouzi Bensaïdi ●

Friday, 11 September

2:30 PM **Syrian Cinema Sessions | Case Study: Memory, Archive, and Narratives - Screenings and Audiences** ○

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM **Excessive Genocide by Samir Skayni and The Ongoing War and Rare Images by Ahmed Isamaldin** ○

8:00 PM **Republic of Silence** | Diana El Jeiroudi ●

Followed by Q&A

Saturday, 12 September

2:30 PM **Syrian Cinema Sessions | Case Study: Institutional Structures and Independent Initiatives** ○

6:00 PM **"No Glass Wall Will Hold the Frame"** |

Saba Innab ○

8:00 PM **Habibi Hussein** | Alex Bakr ●

Followed by Q&A

Sunday, 13 September

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM **Images' Right to Return by Mohanad Yaqubi and On the Political Economy of the Film Industry and the Infrastructure of the Image by Mariz Kelada** ○

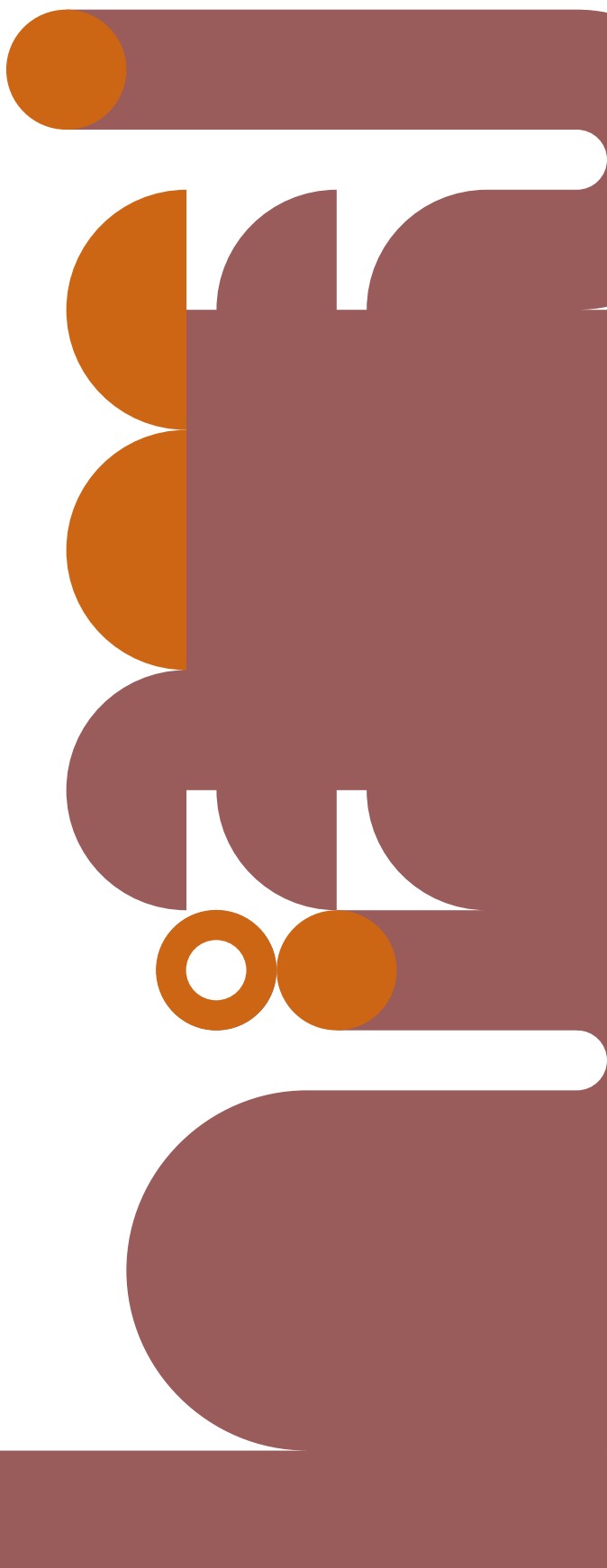
8:00 PM **The Settlement** |

Mohammed Rashad ●

Followed by Q&A

ALPHEA

Spirits and Ghosts



AGORA

Ala Eddine Slim
Tunisia

In an isolated town, the missing return under mysterious circumstances, unsettling their relatives and the inhabitants of the town. Investigations are carried out in an attempt to understand what is happening, under the watchful eyes of stray dogs and crows.

BIRDLAND - INDIVISION

Leila Kilani
Morroco, France

On the hills of Tangier stands the decrepit house of La Mansouria, home to Lina, her father Anis, her grandmother Amina, and the “good” Chinwiya. When Amina pushes a real estate deal that would make the family billionaires, Anis refuses, giving up his share to build a bird refuge instead. Then an unexplained fire breaks out in the hills, and it rains birds over the forest.

LES TEMPÊTES (SILENT STORMS)

Dania Reymond-Boughenou
Algeria, France, Belgium

Strange storms of yellow dust sweep across the entire town. Nacer, a 45-year-old reporter, is covering the bizarre phenomenon. As supernatural events unfold, Fajar, Nacer's deceased wife, reappears. Faced with increasingly threatening storms, Nacer must confront a haunting past from dark years everyone wishes to forget.

2025 · 80'

KHARTOUM

**Anas Saeed, Rawia Alhag, Ibrahim
Snoopy, Timeea Mohamed Ahmed, Phil
Cox**
Sudan, UK, Germany, Qatar

Before war reshaped Sudan's capital, five residents of Khartoum pursued their daily lives: Khadem Allah sells tea and coffee and raises her daughter Rita; Majdi races pigeons with his son; Jawad drifts between protest and spiritual reflection; Lukain and Wilson collect bottles from landfills, dreaming of new shirts. When fighting scattered them to East Africa, they rebuilt Khartoum, and their lives, drawing on memory and with solidarity.

2024 · 111'

PERFUMED WITH MINT

Muhammed Hamdy
Egypt, France, Tunisia

Bahaa, a lovesick physician and his old friend Mahdy try to escape the ghosts of their past, running from one abandoned house to another as they are chased relentlessly by shadows.

2023 · 120'

DESERTS

Faouzi Bensaïdi
France, Germany, Morocco, Belgium

Mehdi and Hamid work for a debt collection agency in Casablanca. Prisoners of their own restlessness, the two gawky associates travel to remote villages in the South of Morocco to wrest money from indebted people.

2021 · 183'

REPUBLIC OF SILENCE

Diana El Jeiroudi

Germany, France, Syria, Qatar

Twelve years in the making, *Republic of Silence* is a cinematic memoir of a nation's ordeal, from 1980s Syria to exile in Berlin. It begins with the director's memory at age seven, when her father gives her a camera, and unfolds into a life fractured across Syria, Europe, and the United States by dictatorship, wars, and the corruption of international politics, until it comes to rest in Berlin, in a life so orderly it turns cold. Sometimes the image holds what is happening around the filmmaker; then it collapses, and white words on a black screen conjure what the image cannot hold. Amid it all, the filmmaker and those closest to her find a homeland in cinema, music, dreams, family, and friendship.

2025 · 96'

HABIBI HUSSEIN

Alex Bakri

Palestine, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Sweden

Hussein is the last projectionist of the old cinema in Jenin. When a German NGO renovates the building, he desperately tries to prove his skills, hoping to reclaim his former job. But his craftsmanship and passion for cinema may no longer be enough as times have changed.

2025 · 94'

THE SETTLEMENT

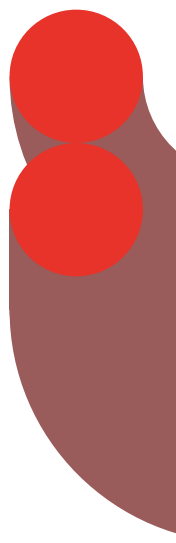
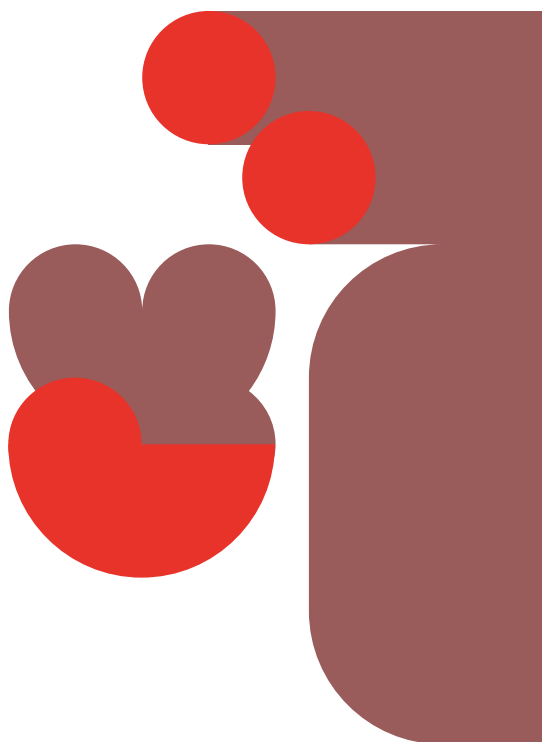
Mohamed Rashad

Egypt, France, Germany, Saudia Arabia, Qatar

In the city of Alexandria, Sayed el-Deeb, a steel factory worker, died on the job. The only compensation offered to his family was employment for his two sons, Hossam (23 years old) and Maro (12 years old), alongside the worker responsible for their father's accidental death.

FORUM

Thinking Through the Rubble,
Beneath the Surface



September 6, 2026, 7:00 PM

Stranger than Fiction

Nour Ouayda

Moderated by Samira Makki

Stranger than Fiction is a project by Nour Ouayda that explores how non-fictional images and sounds generate speculative fiction as a way of engaging with spatial and temporal experiences that are continually unsettled by catastrophes and major transformations. Taking her own work as a starting point, Ouayda brings together works by other artists and filmmakers who engage with similar approaches across different times and geographies. This iteration of the program sits at the intersection of film curation, filmmaking, and research, weaving together audio-visual excerpts and a performative lecture to explore the interplay between the real and the possible.

Nour Ouayda is a filmmaker and film programmer. Her work explores the multiple relationships between image, text, voice, and sound through filmmaking, curating, research, and writing. Between 2018 and 2023, she worked at the Metropolis Cinema Association, where she developed the Cinematheque Beirut project. She is a member of the editorial team of the Montreal-based film journal *Hors Champ* and a member of the artist collective The Camelia Committee. She also teaches film programming in Beirut.

Samira Makki is an independent researcher largely studying cultural labor and mostly writing about film.

September 10, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Cinema as Infrastructure: Perfumed with Mint as a Case Study

A focused discussion about the relation between the production infrastructure and the film form with the director and producer of *Perfumed with Mint*.



Moderated by Nour Ouayda

September 11, 2026, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Excessive Genocide

Samir Skayni

Where do the boundaries of genocide end? What is the dividing line between those who experience genocide directly and those who experience it through mediated forms? And how have we come to rely on terminology that subordinates what unfolds before us to our intellectual machinery, rather than contesting that machinery? This seminar takes as its point of departure the concept of “excessive genocide,” which is often transmitted through images and by the perpetrators of violence themselves, permeating the realms of memory, imagination, and everyday life.

Samir Skayni is a writer and journalist based in Beirut. He worked across the fields of architecture and philosophy before turning to journalism. He is the author of two books published by Dar al-Farabi and the Arabic translator of Mohammed El-Kurd’s *Perfect Victims* and the *Politics of Appeal*, published by Dar al-Adab in 2026. His third book will be published in 2027.

The Ongoing War and Rare Images

Ahmed Isamaldin

This intervention examines the role of images in shaping global solidarity with Sudan by interrogating the notion of “image scarcity” and arguing that the crisis lies, first and foremost, in the disruption of the narratives that give images their political meaning. Through the lenses of revolution, war, and the politics of archiving and documentation, the presentation examines how Sudan’s visual presence is shaped and explores the limits of its political impact.

Ahmed Isamaldin is a media artist, graphic designer, and researcher from Khartoum who is based in Berlin. His work spans visual communication, artistic research, cartography, and 3D image-making, engaging with questions of extractivism, state violence, migration, technology, and the politics of images. With a background in physics and a Master's degree in Visual Communication from the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin, his practice brings together research, design, and artistic intervention to trace the effects of violence on landscapes, bodies, and infrastructures, and to transform those traces into forms of memory, evidence, and collective survival.

RESEARCH
SESSION

Moderated by Mahdi Awada

September 12, 2026, 6:00 PM

“No Glass Wall Will Hold the Frame”

Saba Innab

Can a tool free itself from the authority of time and the epistemic structure that produced it, or is it necessarily bound by them? From this premise, and from the dialectical relationship between form and function, we examine the militarization and latent violence embedded in language and its visual manifestations within architecture as a system, using it as an entry point for exploring another dialectic: that between revelation and concealment. This deconstruction begins by examining the current construction cycle and its perpetual drive to making space empty—a drive linked to fascist capitalism and settler-colonial occupation—before moving beyond that analysis to consider the limitations that arise from imposing a (visual) form on a “revolution” before understanding the nature of the revolution itself, thereby automatically facilitating the confiscation of its potential role.

Saba Innab is an architect, artist, and researcher who lives and works between Beirut and Amman. Her interdisciplinary practice engages with questions of imaginaries of the land, patterns of building and dwelling, the temporalities of refugeehood and displacement under occupation, and the structures of colonialism and extractive systems. Through historical research, drawing, cartography, model-making, and spatial interventions, she explores the oscillation between the temporary and the permanent—politically and philosophically—and its spatial and poetic implications for language and architecture. Innab situates her interest in dwelling as a form of “cultivation,” and in building and latent architectural knowledge within a non-linear historical analysis that links the settler-colonial dispossession of land to successive forms and concepts of “land reform.” This analysis cannot be separated

from the imagined “emptying” of the land that precedes its material emptying, nor from the erasure and destruction enabled by the accumulation of capital and the structures of extraction and colonization.

Mahdi Awada (b. 1999, Beirut) is a Beirut-based artist working across painting, photography and moving image, confronting through his practice how pathology manifests spatially and unfolds within written language. His video works have been shown at various festivals, most recently the 24th Festival Internazionale Segni della Notte, Italy (2026); Experimenta: 12th International Festival of Moving Image Art, India (2024); and the 5th annual Small File Media Festival, Canada (2024).

Awada currently lives and works in Beirut, where he graduated with a BA in Studio Art from the American University of Beirut (AUB), and where he currently serves as Project Coordinator for the Cinematheque Beirut Project at Metropolis Cinema.

BEFORE THE IMAGE:
LABOR, ARCHIVES, AND
THE INFRASTRUCTURE
OF VISION

Moderated by Samira Makki

September 13, 2026, 5:00 PM - 7PM

Images’ Right to Return

Mohanad Yaqubi

In 2021, the Palestine Film Institute received a collection of film clips from the Israeli military archive, provided by an Israeli researcher. The collection consists of fragmented, mostly silent, and untitled footage digitized from 16mm film that has repeatedly appeared, without proper attribution or identification, in various Israeli and Western films as a representation of “Arabs.” These materials raise critical questions about archiving and power, the archivist’s ability to enable disappearance through the archive’s technical manipulation, and the possibility of constructing critical narratives from fragmentary historical remains.

Mohanad Yaqubi is a filmmaker and producer who co-founded the Ramallah-based production company Idioms Film in 2004. He is a member of the Subversive Film collective and has been a researcher and lecturer at the KASK School of the Arts in Ghent since 2017. His work explores questions of memory, cinema, and politics. His films—Off Frame AKA Revolution Until Victory (2016), R21 AKA Restoring Solidarity (2022), and Revolutionaries Never Die (2026)—have premiered at prestigious international festivals, including the Locarno Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), and the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), among many others.

On the Political Economy of the Film Industry and the Infrastructure of the Image

Mariz Kelada

Treating art and cultural production in general as an “exceptional” form of labor—superior to and more noble than other forms of work—creates a harmful conceptual rupture between labor, art, and politics. This presentation reexamines the Egyptian film industry as a case through which to develop an alternative understanding of cinematic labor as an integral part of the global political economy. It therefore calls for the development of practical forms of critical engagement that restore cinema to its role as a space for the practice of resistance, rather than merely expressing or representing it.

Mariz Kelada is a researcher and Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the American University of Beirut. She specializes in cultural anthropology, production studies, and political economy, with a particular focus on labor, solidarity, and political imagination in the cultural industries of Egypt and the Global South. She is currently working on her first book, *Technicians and Artists: The Labor and Extramoral Politics of Visual Media in Egypt*, and has published several articles on the politics of media production and its intersections with urban space, gender, and ethnographic methodologies. Since 2010, Kelada has worked in Cairo’s cultural sector in a range of roles, from project management to film production.



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Beirut

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