

Eclectic Beirut Art Film Festival looks to tomorrow

By Maghie Ghali
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Beirut Art Film Festival returns for its fourth edition this November, with a program of over 60 local and international fiction and documentary films, staged at venues around Lebanon, catering to lovers of the arts.

The theme of BAFF 2018 is “Tomorrow,” with hopes of kindling change among festivalgoers and a better future.

Tomorrow means the youth of Lebanon, BAFF founder and gallerist Alice Mogabgab said at the festival’s press conference, “the kids in schools and universities, and we will be visiting all the schools of Lebanon both private and public. We also can’t look to tomorrow if we don’t take lessons from the past.

“Cultural documentary films highlight these lessons and prominent figures from the past that had an impact on society and culture and improved society,” she added. “This festival’s role is to create awareness about these films to help us see how we can improve our future.”

BAFF is split into two halves. Projected at Metropolis-Sofil, the “intramuros” program runs Nov. 20-25, while the “extramuros” program comprises projections in schools, universities and cultural institutions around the capital and beyond.

The eclectic program speaks to varied tastes taking up subjects like theater, fine art, dance, music, history, photography and more, spanning Vermeer to the late DJ Avicii.

The Metropolis program will open with the national premiere of Henri de Gherlache’s 2017 documentary “Maurice Bejart, l’ame de la danse,” sponsored by the Swiss embassy. The doc was made to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the choreographer’s death, chronicling his life, work and renown.

The documentary “Niemeyer 4 Ever,” an emotional look at Tripoli’s Rashid Karami International Fair directed by Nicholas Khoury and produced by BAFF, will have its world premiere at BAFF.

Produced in the past nine months, the doc is the first in a collaboration



A scene from Nathaniel Khan’s 2018 documentary “The Price of Everything.”

with the Tourism Ministry that will see BAFF produce a series of documentaries on national heritage.

Projected during the news conference, Khoury’s 30-minute film blends the voices of architect Wasim Naghi and local resident Rawya Mazjoub with scenes of dancer Charlie Prince moving among Niemeyer’s concrete structures.

Other highlights include two films about Venetian painter Jacopo Tintoretto, produced by the Washington National Gallery of Art. The films promote an upcoming exhibition celebrating the 500th anniversary of renowned artists, which will be held at the gallery in January.

Courtesy of the Japanese embassy in Lebanon, Kaku Arakawa’s “Never-Ending Man: Hayao Miyazaki” explores the career of the renowned Japanese animator and filmmaker behind Studio Ghibli and such award-winning films as “Spirited Away.”

“When I was young I would

watch his films many times, especially ‘My Neighbor Totoro,’” the embassy’s cultural attaché Ai Odoriba said. “Although most of the characters in his movies are children, Ghibli also captures the hearts and minds of adults in and out of Japan. His films deal with war, nature and other important topics.

“The documentary screened during this festival,” she added, “is the story of this man who decided to retire aged 72 but decided to make one last film.

“He determined to use a technique he had avoided in the past, 3D animation, as a means to express his ideas that were not possible to convey with hand draw animation and it is likely his next film will be released in 2020.”

This year’s “Hats Off” section pays tribute to Lebanese filmmaker Georges Nassar, screening two documentaries about the director. “L’Artisanat au Liban,” commissioned by the Tourism Ministry,

will be shown alongside Badih Mashaad and Antoine Waked’s “Un Certain Nassar,” which focuses on Nassar’s journey to become the first director to represent Lebanon at the Cannes film festival.

The extramural festival will be offering free screenings throughout November into December at schools, universities and cultural institutions across the country.

The “BAFF for Youth” program (Nov. 1-19) projects a selection of films at 16 universities; the “BAFF Loves Lebanon” program will target 14 cultural institutions.

Staged in collaboration with the U.S. and Swiss Embassies, the “BAFF @ School” program (Nov. 1-Dec. 22) takes two documentaries on the road. Mark Daniel’s “Lady Liberty,” which looks at the iconic statue, will be shown in 3000 public institutions and schools across Lebanon.

With the help of the Swiss embassy, BAFF 2018 is also putting

an environmental foot forward with the launch of “No Water, No Life,” a campaign to raise awareness about the Lebanese water crisis.

In this regard, the second documentary to tour Lebanese schools is Paul Cochran and Karim Eid-Sabbagh’s “We Made Everything From Water.” This AUB production will be screened at all schools, inviting students to debate the water crisis.

“Tomorrow is also about environment, which is in danger and there can be no tomorrow if we have no water or air to breathe,” Mogabgab noted. “We wanted all the institutes and educational centers to partner with us to screen a film about the water crisis in Lebanon so we can see what is happening. It’s not cultural but it is about society and we’re all responsible.”

BAFF runs at Metropolis Cinema, Nov. 20-25 and is showing at other venues around Lebanon, Nov. 1-30. For the full program, visit bafflebanon.org