

Beirut Business Report

Beirut Art Film Festival highlights environmental issues

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BEIRUT - The fourth Beirut Art Film Festival (BAFF) was brought together under the theme of "Tomorrow" — the future of the young generation that appears to be jeopardised by degradation of the environment and climate change.

"The future is about the youth but also about the preservation of the environment. What would our tomorrows look like without clear air and water?" asked BAFF founder and art gallery owner Alice Mogabgab.

"The festival this year is designed to be an active player in the society, not only to entertain but to learn lessons from the past to improve the future."

The festival, which began November 1, showcases more than 60 international documentaries and films dealing with universal issues in an artistic format or through iconic figures who left their mark on humanity.

In addition to environmental concerns, the documentaries cover architecture, archaeology, cinema, design, music, dance, painting, photography, the history of art and heritage and other subjects.

In its extramuros showings, which run through November 30, BAFF will expand beyond Beirut. Screenings of a selection of documentaries on water are scheduled in universities, schools and cultural centres across Lebanon as part of the festival's awareness campaign "No Water, No Life."

A 30-minute documentary titled "We Made Every Living Thing from Water" by Lebanese director Paul Cochrane will be featured throughout November, especially in schools.

"This year, we wanted to engage all our network of partners to raise the alarm about environmental issues," Mogabgab said. "In the absence of any national effort to safeguard water and the environment as a whole, 'No Water, No Life' seeks to draw the attention of every single Lebanese."

"Anyone who would watch this documentary cannot but react. It is a desperate and harrowing cry about the great dangers brought by the steady deterioration of the environment on water. I deducted one thing from it and that is what we could salvage from the wrath of war, can no longer be safe from the dilapidation of the environment," she said.

The documentary is to be screened across the country on Lebanese Independence Day, November 22.

“It will be the festival’s present to Lebanon and its people. It is at the core of our campaign and shows that we are not doomed and there are possibilities for a remedy but we need to pass on the message and wake up the people,” Mogabgab said.

She noted that the festival has been increasingly focusing on issues of concern in Lebanon and the region. “It sheds light on the realities in the country to change approaches and visions in the society but we need to consult the past to be able to find solutions and keep going,” Mogabgab said.

BAFF’s Intramuros Programme takes place in two Beirut theatres November 20-25. The opening ceremony will feature the world premiere of “Josephine Baker, the Story of an Awakening” about the American-born French dancer and entertainer who was an activist and French Resistance agent, and “Maurice Bejart, l’ame de la Danse” (“Maurice Bejart, Spirit of Dancing”) about French choreographer on the anniversary of his death.

Intramuros screenings will also include “Niemeyer 4 Ever,” a Lebanese documentary that draws the poignant picture of the Rachid Karameh International Fair in Tripoli, Lebanon. The avant-garde structure conceived by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer became a “ghost town” before reaching its objective because of the war. Also showing will be “Graffiti men Beyrouth” that depicts how Lebanese graffiti artists reproduce their European and American models’ heritage and adapt it to their contemporary issues, including war, freedom, the refugee crisis and unemployment.

Other films include “Beyond the Obvious: Daniel Schwartz,” a cinematic portrait of the Swiss photographer who has scoured the globe for four years to raise interest in his project focusing on melting and collapsing glaciers; while the passion that bonded Mexico’s two most outstanding painters, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, is revealed in a 52-minute French documentary “une passion voracante” (a voracious passion);

“Raphael: Lord of the Arts” tells the story of one of the greatest Renaissance artists who, with Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, form the traditional triad of Renaissance masters; the documentary “Le Louvre Abu Dhabi” explores the architectural and cultural features of the museum, which was conceived as a link between tradition and modernity and a bridge between cultures.

“Sounds of the Alhambra,” a 52-minute film that falls between a documentary and a concert, draws on the history of the architectural masterpiece in southern Spain and the musical inspiration it had on numerous composers.

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