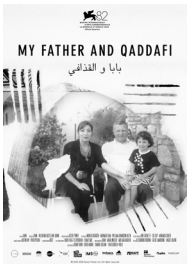
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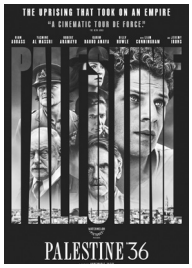
Film Descriptions

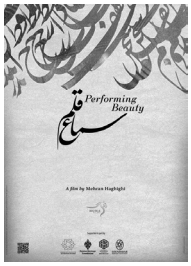
The MESA FilmFest is a valued part of the MESA Annual Meeting, and a virtual FilmFest allows registered attendees to view films the week before through the week after the conference. Only MESA 2026 registrants have access to view films by streaming from the FilmFest site:

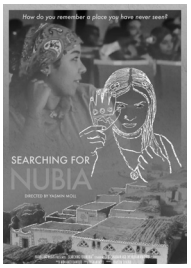


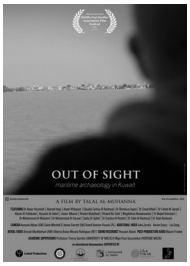












Aisha's Story. (Palestine) 2025, 66. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Elizabeth Vibert, Chen Wang. Producer: Elizabeth Vibert, Salam Barakat Guenette. **Docuseek.** "Food is the most precious part of Palestinian heritage." Aisha Azzam and her husband started their family grain mill in Baqa'a refugee camp, Jordan, 35 years ago. She treasures her role in safeguarding culture by milling the grains and herbs essential to Palestinian cuisine. Through food, Aisha traces the story of Palestinian displacement and rebuilding family and community in a refugee camp. Harvesting, milling, cooking, and feasts ground the film's arc of displacement, longing, steadfastness and resistance. In Aisha's words, "Food is what keeps us together as Palestinians."

An American Mosque. (USA, Pakistan) 2013, 27. In English. Director: David Washburn. Producer: David Washburn. **Documentary Educational Resources (DER).** An American Mosque is a film about Islam in America, religious intolerance, and the interfaith response to an historic hate-crime. When the Islamic Center of Yuba City, California, was burned to the ground in 1994, it was the first arson to destroy a mosque in US history. At the time, this incident was largely ignored. Now, decades later, this symbolically important story is revisited. Late one night, arsonists broke into the newly-constructed mosque, doused prayer rugs with gasoline, then lit the building ablaze. The mosque was reduced to ashes and an investigation ensued.

Bard (Rock). (Iran, Khuzestan) 2016, 25. In Lori with English subtitles. Director: Hamid Jafari. Producer: Hamid Jafari. **Hamid Jafari.** In a remote region of Khuzestan, in southwestern Iran, a woman toils daily in stone quarries with a sledgehammer and a crowbar. She sells the rocks for construction. At home she cares for her disabled and elderly husband. In a lyrical and observational style the film reveals her harsh life and also its beauty.

Beneath the Skin. (United Arab Emirates) 2025, 10:44. In English, Tagalog and Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Ameera Alharmoodi. Producer: Linda Dong. **New York University Abu Dhabi.** Khadija, a 24-year-old Emirati-Filipino woman, runs away from home and checks into a rundown hotel in Abu Dhabi. The muffled shouts from the next room press in on her, amplifying the storm already raging in her mind. In a moment of frustration, she cuts her hair and dials a number she knows by heart. Hours later, a familiar figure arrives. Words are spoken, some fragile, some sharp, but none can change what has already been set in motion. As dawn approaches, she steps forward into the unknown, carrying only the weight of what she has left behind.
❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

Between The Sirens. (Kuwait) 2026, 10:22. In English and Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Sabeekah Alsharaf. Producer: PLC Archives Productions Team. **PLC Archives Productions.** Between the Sirens is a hybrid documentary that follows the experiences of seven students navigating daily life during a period of regional uncertainty. As classes move online and sirens, news alerts, and social media updates become part of their everyday routines, the group learns to adapt to a rapidly changing reality. Through personal footage, observational moments, and recreated memories, the film explores how ordinary life continues in extraordinary circumstances. Between the noise of uncertainty and the disruption of routine, friendships become a source of comfort, resilience, and connection. At its heart, Between the Sirens is a story about adaptation, community, and the moments that bring people closer together when the world around them feels uncertain.
❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

Both Your Countries. (Palestine, Jordan) 2026, 19:26. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Amina Darabie. Producer: Amina Darabie. **17 Swans**

Media. A short documentary exploring *Photovoice* (a photography methodology) and feelings of national belonging amongst Palestinian youth in Jordan. The director reveals contradictions within her own family, and engages with other school aged children at a summer school.

Celluloid Underground. (Iran) 2023, 80. In English. Director: Ehsan Khoshbakht. Producer: Mary Bell, Adam Dawtrey. **Docuseek.** Celluloid Underground is an autobiographical feature-length documentary by Iranian filmmaker, writer and curator Ehsan Khoshbakht, about his experience of growing up in Iran after the 1979 revolution, when his love of cinema became the catalyst for his rebellion against the Islamic regime. It's the story of his friendship with the mysterious Ahmad, a maverick film collector who hid thousands of banned 35mm prints and posters in basements in downtown Tehran, to save them from the fundamentalist fanatics. Born just after the revolution, Ehsan grew up obsessed with all the movies he wasn't allowed to see. He became Ahmad's closest collaborator in the underground cinematheque, before escaping to a new life in London. In Celluloid Underground, Ehsan celebrates the power of cinema to resist tyranny, and the unsung heroism of the friend who changed his life. From the pain of his exile, he questions whether their shared obsession was worth the price they each paid for it.

Do You Love Me. (Lebanon, France, Germany, Qatar) 2025, 75. In Arabic, English and French with English subtitles. Director: Lana Daher. Producer: Jean-Laurent Csinidis & Lana Daher. **Icarus Films.** Do You Love Me is a playful and personal journey through Lebanon's audiovisual memory, composed entirely of archival footage. It is a love letter to Beirut, spanning 70 years of film, TV, home videos, and photography, exploring the Lebanese collective psyche – marked by joy and intimacy, destruction and loss. Through the eyes of citizens, filmmakers and artists, the film reconstructs a fragmented history in a country without a national archive, celebrating creative expression as both resistance, renewal and a way to preserve memory.

Doomscrolling: Trapped in The Scroll. (Kuwait) 2026, 17:54. In English and Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Farida Hassan & Lynn Sleiman. Producer: Lynn Sleiman. **PLC Archives Productions.** In an age where endless content is only a swipe away, doomscrolling has become an invisible part of everyday life. Doomscrolling: Trapped in the Scroll explores how the habit of endlessly consuming online content can quietly shape people's routines, emotions, and sense of time. Through the personal experiences of university students, the documentary follows the gradual evolution of a seemingly harmless habit into a cycle that affects sleep, focus, and daily life. What begins as a way to escape boredom slowly turns into hours lost to an endless stream of videos, posts, and notifications. Alongside their story, expert insight reveals the psychological mechanisms behind doomscrolling, explaining how social media platforms are designed to capture and retain attention through dopamine-driven reward systems. ❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

El-Sisi: Egypt's New Pharaoh. (Egypt, France) 2025, 53. In Arabic, English and French with English subtitles. Director: Claire Billet, Nadia Blétry. Producer: Claire Billet, Nadia Blétry. **Icarus Films.** To an outsider, Egypt looks like a dynamic country reinventing itself. Under president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, construction is booming, with dams, bridges, roads, and tourism mega-projects proliferating in the desert and along the Mediterranean coast. But behind the flashy projects, Egypt is a country on the brink of collapse. In the decade since Sisi took power in a coup, poverty has exploded, and the social safety net has been dismantled in favor of providing seemingly unlimited funding to the military, which the regime depends on for its survival. Egypt is now the third most indebted country in the world, its economy largely dependent on income from the Suez Canal and tourism. And those mega-projects? They are propped up by support from the Gulf states, the IMF and the European Union — and ultimately will be sold off to foreign investors. In El-Sisi: Egypt's New Pharaoh, directors Claire Billet and Nadia Blétry speak with regular Egyptians struggling to make ends meet, political dissidents, and social and economic experts, revealing a country where poverty abounds, criticism is not tolerated, and the military has infiltrated almost every sector of the economy. Much of the film was shot clandestinely, since it's illegal in Egypt to film scenes of poverty, the destruction of heritage or to criticize the army's increasing dominance.

Every Living Thing. (Canada, India, United Arab Emirates) 2026, 115. In English. Director: Uzair Merchant. Producer: Gayathiri Guliani & Uzair Merchant. **Bkreativ Production & Kleos Entertainment Group.** Water is the origin of life and the thread that binds creation, prophecy, and survival. Sacred texts, from the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Torah to Indigenous cosmologies, describe water as divine and life-giving. Today, science reveals a parallel truth: humanity is entering a global water emergency. Every Living Thing is a cinematic investigative documentary that explores how water, once a shared source of life, is increasingly privatized, politicized, and weaponized. Across continents, rivers are drying, aquifers are collapsing, and more than two billion people lack access to safe drinking water. As climate change accelerates extremes, floods in one place, drought in another, control over water is rapidly becoming control over human life itself. The film unfolds in five acts, moving from myth and prophecy to scientific measurement, political power, and lived human consequences. We travel from melting glaciers and shrinking reservoirs to boardrooms, policy chambers, and conflict zones, revealing

how water is traded, restricted, and financialized. Through investigative reporting, expert insight, and poetic visual language, the film exposes the systems that turn a basic human necessity into an instrument of profit and control. Yet Every Living Thing is not only a warning. The final act turns toward possibility, highlighting Indigenous water stewardship, community-led governance, and emerging technologies that offer more equitable futures. Returning to prophecy, the film asks a final question: when water becomes humanity's ultimate test, will it be the reason we collapse, or the reason we finally unite?

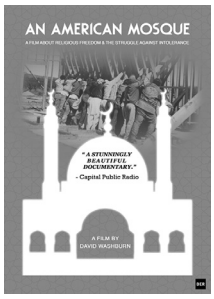
Failaka Island - Scars of Time. (Kuwait) 2025, 5. In English. Director: Sabeekah Alsharaf. Producer: PLC Archives Productions Team. **PLC Archives Productions.** A place suspended between history and memory, Failaka Island bears the visible scars of a conflict that forever changed its identity. Through the remains of abandoned buildings, weathered landscapes, and echoes of lives once lived, Failaka Island – Scars of Time journeys into one of Kuwait's most significant historical landmarks. Blending historical reflection with contemporary observation, the documentary explores how the aftermath of war continues to resonate across generations. As the island's silent ruins stand against the passage of time, they become powerful symbols of loss, endurance, and survival. More than a story about destruction, the film is a meditation on remembrance, an exploration of how places carry the weight of history long after the events themselves have passed.❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

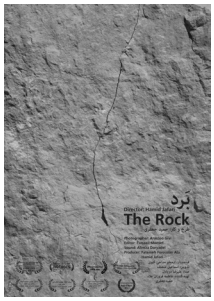
Floating in the Sand. (Saudi Arabia) 2026, 18. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Dahlia Baeshen. Producer: Rasha E.Alemam for Yellow Camel. **Premiere Film Distribution.** A young girl named Joory longs to visit the sea her late mother loved, but her grieving father refuses, burdened by loss and the hidden fear of not being able to swim. As their emotional distance grows, Joory takes matters into her own hands, unaware of the vulnerability holding him back.❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

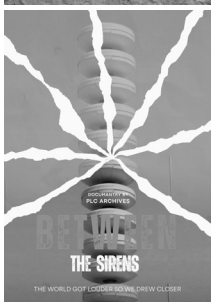
Gaza Ghetto: Portrait of a Palestinian Family. (Palestine) 1985, 82. In Arabic, Hebrew and English with English subtitles. Director: Joan Mandell, PeA Holmquist, Pierre Bjorklund. Producer: PeA Holmquist, Joan Mandell. **New Day Films.** Gaza Ghetto is the first documentary produced in Gaza Strip. It highlights the historical precedents that fuel today's horrific violence and genocide, and continue at the heart of the Israeli occupation and Palestinian dispossession. Intimate scenes of Palestinian family life (a child born, a grandmother dies) in Jabalia, the largest Palestinian refugee camp, are intercut with visits to the architects of the Israeli military occupation. Ariel Sharon, soldiers on patrol and settlers candidly discuss their responsibilities. Spend 82 minutes with the Abu el-Adel family and their friends and neighbors in Jabalia, and you will understand how the roots of the Israeli occupation influence today's realities, and make desires for peace and justice all the more urgent.

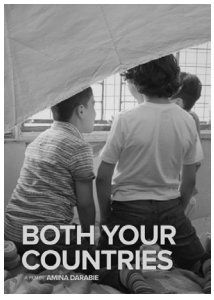
Joonam. (Iran) 2023, 104. In English and Farsi with English subtitles. Director: Sierra Urich. Producer: Sierra Urich, Keith Wilson. **Grasshopper Film.** Filmmaker Sierra Urich grew up in rural Vermont, a place and an upbringing far removed from Iran, the homeland of her mother, Mitra, and grandmother, Behjat. Only knowing Iran through family stories, food, and holidays, and with the prospect of travel to the country a seemingly impossible dream, she embarks on a personal quest to make sense of her fractured Iranian identity. Navigating barriers of language and culture (not to mention the complications of geopolitical conflict and displacement), Sierra turns to Mitra and Behjat to construct a deeply moving and sometimes disarmingly funny portrait of three generations of women and their complex relationship to an Iran of the past. Named for a Farsi term of endearment, Joonam is infused with humor and heart like only a film about family could be. Interrogating family history and memory, including her grandmother's experiences as a preteen bride and her mother's rebellious teenage years during the Iranian Revolution, Sierra Urich constructs a rich, personal film that poignantly reflects the experiences of the Iranian diasporic community and speaks to anyone affected by the dislocation that accompanies immigration.

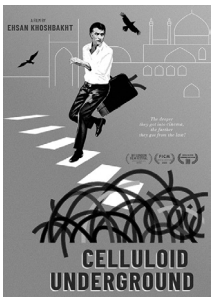
Leila and the Wolves. (Palestine, Lebanon) 1984, 94. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Heiny Srour. Producer: Heiny Srour. **Collective Eye Films.** Drawing on the Arab heritage of the 'Arabian Nights', Leila and the Wolves combines fictional drama, archival footage, fantasy sequences, mosaic pattern, to refute the colonial and male dominated version of history. Leila travels across time and space to explore the collective memory of Arab women in Palestine and Lebanon and their hidden role in historical events.

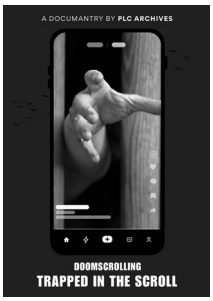


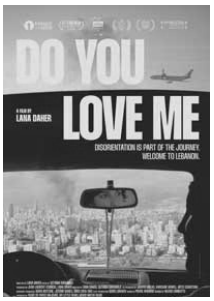




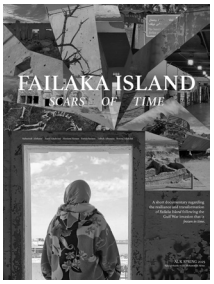


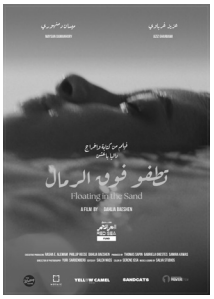


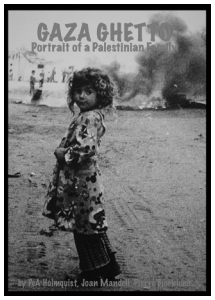














Lice. (United Arab Emirates, Taiwan) 2026, 12. In Mandarin, Arabic and English with English subtitles. Director: Abigail Chien. Producer: Abigail Chien, Fatima Al Qubaisi. **New York University Abu Dhabi.** Moon, a young bride-to-be, searches for her missing engagement ring, only to confront the suppressed fears and emotional truths she has long avoided. The title Lice draws inspiration from a line in Eileen Chang's earlier essay Dream of a Genius when she wrote at the age of seventeen: Life is a gorgeous gown, crawling with lice." The phrase captures the film's central paradox: the coexistence of beauty and discomfort where something appears intact on the surface while carrying persistent, almost invisible disturbance underneath. ❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

Love Iranian-American Style. (USA, Iran) 2006, 63. In English and Farsi with English subtitles. Director: Tanaz Eshaghian. Producer: Tanaz Eshaghian. **Documentary Educational Resources (DER).** Sexual purity, money and a mother's worries come together in this humorous guided tour of America's status-obsessed Iranian Jewish community. The film follows Tanaz, the narrator, a hip New Yorker whose Iranian family attempts to marry her off now that she's reached the age of 25. Tanaz vacillates between soppy American ideas of romance, and a more business-like Iranian approach, and in the end may be unable to execute either.

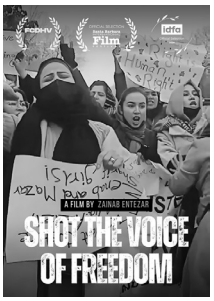
Made in Morocco. (Morocco) 2025, 9. In English. Director: Lauren Burns. Producer: Lauren Burns. **Lauren Burns.** An oral history of the significance of artisan crafts and its potential future in Morocco as told by an emerging entrepreneur and woodworker in the ancient medina, or city, within Meknès.

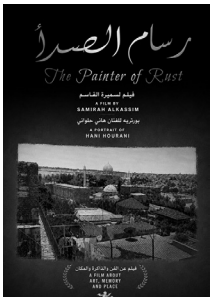
Made with Love. (Pakistan) 2024, 15. In Sindhi with English subtitles. Director: Kainat Thebo. Producer: Kainat Thebo. **Kainat Thebo.** While exploring Sindhi culture, Made With Love highlights the significance of women in society and portrays the struggles of a woman to be appreciated, told through the story of a retired schoolteacher who creates art and craft from waste materials.

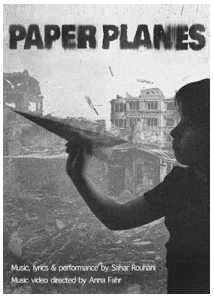
Malangni. (Pakistan) 2026, 12:10. In Urdu with English subtitles. Director: Mahjabeen Abid. Producer: Maryam Missal. **Patakha Pictures.** Malangni follows the life of a 44-year-old Saraiki theatre performer who has spent decades captivating audiences with her dances and performances. Once celebrated, she now grapples with the fading spotlight, longing for the same warmth of applause that once defined her world. Behind the vibrant makeup she applies each night lies a struggle: the desire to be loved in a society that stigmatises women like her. As she navigates loneliness, judgment, and the harsh realities of ageing in the performing arts, Malangni reveals the emotional and human cost of a life lived on stage.

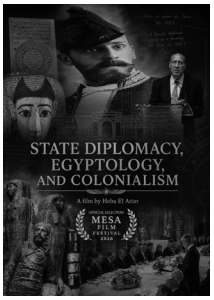
Mouth Harp in Minor Key: Hamid Naficy in/on Exile. (USA, Iran) 2017, 61. Director: Maryam Sepehri. Producer: Payman Fotovat and Maryam Sepehri. **Third World Newsreel (TWN).** The film follows renowned Iranian/American media studies scholar Hamid Naficy's life in the United States and his family in Iran to capture a documentary portrait that packs a powerful punch elucidating the complexities of personal identity in a globalized world, where individual, national, and transnational forces interact. A lyrical and lively documentary film about an exiled scholar in America and the family he left behind, Mouth Harp in Minor Key sheds light on the dynamics of our contemporary times, beset by globalization and consolidation of capital and media, on the one hand, and by fragmentation and disruptions of nation-states, on the other.

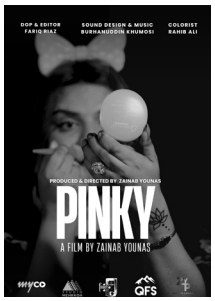
My Father and Qaddafi. (Libya) 2025, 88. In Arabic, French and English with English subtitles. Director: Jihan. Producer: Jihan, Dave Guenette, Mohamed Soueid, Sol Guy, Valentina Castellani-Quinn. **Jihan Kikhia.** When Jihan was six years old, her father flew to Cairo and never returned. Mansur Rashid Kikhia was the Foreign Minister of Libya, ambassador to the United Nations, and a human rights lawyer. After serving in Qaddafi's increasingly brutal regime, he defected and led the peaceful opposition. For many, Kikhia was a rising star who could have been the next leader of Libya, however, in 1993 he disappeared from his hotel in Egypt. Jihan's mother Baha Omary, a strong-willed Syrian-American artist, began searching for him, launching the family into an international political maze. Her mission to find justice brought her to the Libyan desert in the middle of the night, face to face with Qaddafi to negotiate her husband's release. Yet it wasn't until after the regime's fall, 19 years later, that his body was found in a freezer near Qaddafi's palace. My Father and Qaddafi takes the audience on a raw and reflective journey as Jihan pieces together a father she barely remembers, while discovering the troubled history and politics of Libya. Her journey starts from fading personal memories, leading to encounters with family members, her father's peers, and historical archive footage. Hoping at first to uncover the truth, Jihan instead transforms the mystery into a curiosity that brings her closer to her father and her Libyan identity. She approaches politics not as a distant

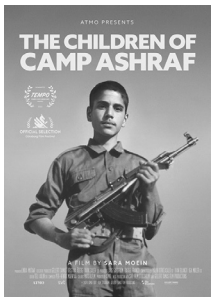












for her longings, hopes and dreams. At the heart of the film is Elliott, a young boy and cancer survivor who endured intensive treatment after being diagnosed at just two years old. Throughout the video, Elliott flies a paper plane, becoming a living symbol of resilience, survival, and the strength to keep dreaming despite overwhelming odds. Paper Planes is ultimately a tribute to the children and civilians trapped inside wars they did not choose, and to the fragile hope that survives even in the darkest moments.

Performing Beauty. (USA) 2026, 59. In English, Persian and French with English subtitles. Director: Mehran Haghighi. Producer: Mehran Haghighi. **Homa Films.** Performing Beauty is a feature-length documentary and visual poem in seven movements that explores the aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural significance of the Persian calligraphic script Nasta'līq. Often described as the most elegant of Islamic scripts, Nasta'līq is more than a writing system: it is a choreography of line and form that embodies cultural identity, memory, and artistic refinement.Blending evocative imagery, classical and contemporary poetry, and the voices of calligraphers, scholars, artists, and designers, the film reveals how a script born of verse became a symbol of presence and beauty across centuries and geographies. It traces Nasta'līq's historical unfolding from its origins in Persian poetry to its role in visual culture today, where it continues to inspire new artistic expression in painting, design, and digital media. Structured as a suite of movements rather than a conventional narrative, Performing Beauty unfolds like calligraphy itself — rhythmical, layered, and contemplative. Viewers are invited to encounter Nasta'līq not as a subject to be explained, but as a living tradition to be experienced. Without narration, the film lets the art speak through its practitioners, resonating with poetry, music, and silence. By weaving past and present, Performing Beauty illuminates how this script endures as a cultural emblem, symbol of resilience, and poetic form in motion.

Pinky. (Pakistan) 2025, 21:36. In Urdu with English subtitles. Director: Zainab Younas. Producer: Zainab Younas. **Zainab Younas.** Pinky follows Abishay, the first transgender officer in Balochistan's police force, as she overcomes societal barriers. From a humble background in Quetta to earning a BS in Fine Arts and participating in the IVLP in the US, her journey reflects resilience, activism, and the fight for transgender inclusion.

Searching for Nubia. (Egypt) 2026, 50. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Yasmin Moll. Producer: Yasmin Moll. **Yasmin Moll.** What does it mean to remember a place you have never seen? A new generation of Nubians battle misconceptions outside and inside their community as they search for a homeland lost but not forgotten. On the way they discover that finding home is never as simple as you imagine. The last of a century-long series of dams displacing Nubians across Egypt from their ancestral lands straddling the Sudanese border was the Aswan High Dam of 1964. Since then, Nubians have kept the memory of their drowned homeland alive through stories, songs, and photographs. But each generation still has to discover for itself what it means to call Nubia home, and not every answer is accepted as accurate or appropriate by others. Searching for Nubia is about how the lived experience of finding home is never as simple as you imagine.

Shot the Voice of Freedom. (Afghanistan) 2024, 70. In Dari with English subtitles. Director: Zaynab Intiẓār. Producer: Zaynab Intiẓār. **Docuseek.** Since the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban have imposed a reign of terror, particularly brutal toward women. Risking their lives and those of their loved ones, women protest the regime, standing up for the right to freedom, education, and security. Shot the Voice of Freedom reveals the brutality of repression, the arrests and intimidation that follow, and the extraordinary bravery required to resist—while the international community remains alarmingly silent.

State Diplomacy, Egyptology, and Colonialism. (USA) 2026, 11. In English. Director: Heba El Attar. Producer: Heba El Attar. **Heba El Attar.** The Catalan diplomat and jurist, Eduard Toda i Güell, represents a pivotal figure in nineteenth-century Spain's engagement with the Arab world. This short examines two key aspects of his legacy: his acquisition of over 1,350 Egyptian antiquities during a short posting in Cairo, and the enduring relevance of the travelogue he published about his time in Egypt.

The Children of Camp Ashraf. (Iraq, Iran) 2024, 83. In Swedish and Farsi with English subtitles. Director: Sara Moein. Producer: Linda Mutawi. **Docuseek.** Parwin and Amir grew up in a military camp. As toddlers they were sent away by their parents who wanted to focus on fighting the Mulla-regime of Iran. 30 years later they are still hoping to reunite with their mothers. Will they ever succeed? An untold

scandal involving around a thousand children world wide, addressing the most urgent issues of our time: exile, identity, radicalization and our inability to see the needs of vulnerable children. “My mother loves the Mujaheddin and its leaders. But she loves me too. I wonder - who does she love the most... “. Amir Vafa’s mother joined the People’s Mujahedin as a young and enthusiastic teenager. At the time, the People’s Mujahedin, with its strange mix of Marxism and Islamism, was one of the larger organizations fighting the Shah’s regime in Iran. When the Shah was overthrown in 1979, the People’s Mujahedin continued the struggle against the Khomeini clerics from their new base, Camp Ashraf in neighboring Iraq -- a country that Iran was in a prolonged military conflict with at the time. When the Gulf War broke out in 1990, the children, growing up at the military base, were sent to supporters around the world. About a hundred of these unaccompanied minors ended up in Sweden. Amir, Parwin, Atefeh and Hanif were placed with their new foster families who raised them to become martyrs in the struggle against theocratic Iran. Children from this political cult speak on camera for the first time.

The Painter of Rust. (Jordan) 2025, 40. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Samirah Alkassim. Producer: Samirah Alkassim. **Samirah Alkassim.** In this 40-minute documentary portrait, we spend time with acclaimed Jordanian painter and intellectual, Hani Hourani, who reflects on his youth, his life as an artist, and his creative practice that straddles the line between realism and abstraction. Central to the film is his early involvement in fostering the seeds of a new Arab cinema, something his peers were very much interested in creating, one that would reflect their realities. While he did not continue his involvement with cinema, the connection between his own artistic tendencies and the questions about cinematic form that he and his peers were asking is clear. My film tries to examine Hani the artist through images, those he creates and those in which he is the subject. It raises the question of how we can come to know a person through the surface of the image, one that, for Hani, is intimately tied to place - to Amman, and the people within it, even if they are a present absence in his paintings.

The Palestine Exception. (Palestine) 70. In English. Director: Jan Haaken, Jennifer Ruth. Producer: Jan Haaken, Jennifer Ruth. **Collective Eye Films.** After years of right-wing assaults on higher education, attacks took a new form in 2023 and 2024 that has been described as the new McCarthyism. As students across the country organize protests against Israel’s war on Gaza, decades-long taboos in academia around criticism of Israel-the “Palestine exception”-are shattered. This film features professors and students as they join calls for a ceasefire and divestment from companies that do business with Israel and face waves of crackdown from administrators, the media, the police and politicians. Scholars from diverse disciplines explain what is at stake in these protests and why so many young people identify with the Palestinian cause. The documentary unfolds as a story of college campuses as sites of both rebellion and repression, places where personal and collective histories converge in unexpected ways.

The Path Forward. (Palestine, Israel) 2024, 39. In English. Director: Julie Cohen, Mo Husseini. Producer: Julie Cohen. **Grasshopper Film.** As the conversation about the war in Gaza (and the larger issues surrounding Israeli-Palestinian relations) becomes increasingly vitriolic, unhelpful and at times unhinged, powerful alternative voices are emerging. A growing chorus of Palestinians and Israeli Jews are speaking up - often in cross-cultural pairs - against war, occupation and violence, and for peace, justice, empathy and sanity. The Path Forward directed jointly by a Jewish American filmmaker and a Palestinian American filmmaker seeks to amplify the voices of three of the most eloquent and inspiring of these pairs: Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon, who have both lost family members to the conflict; Sally Abed and Alon Lee Green of the co-existence group Standing Together; and feminist peace activists Yael Braudo-Bahat and Riman Barakat. Interweaving their moving on stage dialogues in the U.S. and Europe with their poignant life stories, this documentary creates a tapestry of voices for peace and reconciliation. The film, created to be non-triggering, contains no images of war, death or campus protests. Instead, viewers will be immersed in the mind-opening, heart- opening world of innovative thinkers finding a new path forward.

The Researcher with a Movie Camera. (United Arab Emirates, China) 2026, 16:29. In Chinese with English subtitles. Director: Andy (Hanyang) Xu. Producer: Josie Zhao, Better (Ruzai) Hao. **New York University Abu Dhabi.** Once a tourist who learned to operate a camera through travel, he now returns as a researcher holding a camera. He follows Chinese tourists in Abu Dhabi, trying to answer several questions: how the city prepares itself to be seen, how tourists experience it, and how they later reflect on what the journey reveals about themselves and their own culture. But in tracing their ways of seeing, he begins to fold back on his own ways of looking. The boundary between tourist and researcher starts to blur. Eventually, the film becomes a self-reflexive meditation on tourism, memory, the fragile authority of the ethnographic image, and an epistemological challenge to the very act of research. An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film

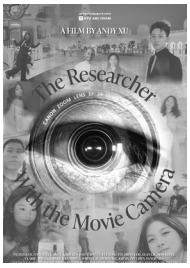
The Site Is Breathing. (United Arab Emirates), 9. No dialogue. Director: Shamsa Aldarmaki. Producer: Shamsa Aldarmaki. **Shamsa Aldarmaki.** When I walk around Abu Dhabi, my home city, I am surrounded by endless infrastructure. Every day, it seems like something new appears: a building, a road, a structure occupying what was once an empty space. The city is constantly changing, growing at a pace that can feel difficult

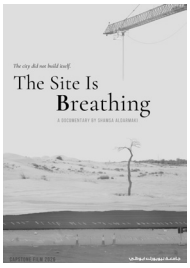
to grasp. Sometimes it feels like magic, as if the city is building itself. But looking closer, I begin to notice something. Across the city are construction sites, sometimes visible, sometimes hidden. You might hear them before you see them: the distant sounds of machinery echoing through the city. Often, these sites are enclosed and concealed, separated from the finished image of the city around them. Through an observational approach, this film reflects on Abu Dhabi's ongoing transformation and attempts to look beyond the surface. It considers the relationship between what is visible and what remains unseen, drawing attention to the processes that continue to shape the city every day.❁❁An Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS) Spotlight Film❁❁

Threads of Memory. (Middle East, Palestine) 2025, 13:46. In Arabic with English subtitles. Director: Rania Abu Taima. Producer: Rania Abu Taima & Mapheze Saleh**. Rania Abu Taima.** This documentary follows three generations of Palestinian women who have carried the art of embroidery from the Nakba to the most recent genocide in Gaza. The grandmother, displaced in 1948, does not appear on screen, but her legacy lives on through the embroidery she passed down—a living memory and an act of defiance against silence and forgetting. Her patterns, threads, and techniques are embedded in the daily life of her granddaughter, who learned them as a child and has preserved them as part of her identity and cultural heritage. The mother—the film's protagonist—continues this tradition, using embroidery not only as a craft but as a form of identity and resistance against the blockade, repeated mass violence, and the ongoing trauma she has witnessed since childhood. Every stitch becomes a symbol of survival, a quiet yet profound statement of continuity and belonging. Today, she strives to teach her young daughter, creating moments where needle and thread form a bridge between past and present, between the Nakba and ongoing devastation, and between suffering and resilience. Scenes of the child learning her first stitches are intimate and tender, revealing how identity and memory grow even before language and political awareness. Through these interwoven stories, the film demonstrates how embroidery evolves from a simple decoration into an enduring act of preserving memory, asserting presence, and shaping the future from delicate threads of the past. It is a journey of women, heritage, and resilience—a testament to the power of continuity in the face of destruction

Uncommitted. (USA) 2026, 89. In English. Director: Razi Jafri. Producer: W. Kamau Bell, Jasmine Hawamdeh Frisly Soberanis. **People First Productions, Jambika Docs.** As the war in Gaza devastates Palestinian families abroad and overseas, Arab and Muslim American organizers launch the Uncommitted National Movement, mobilizing nearly a million protest votes during the 2024 Democratic presidential primaries to demand a ceasefire and greater political accountability from Democratic Party leadership. Set between Dearborn, Michigan and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Uncommitted offers intimate vérité access as organizers navigate grief, backlash, coalition-building, and the difficult realities of challenging political institutions they once trusted. Rather than focusing solely on suffering, the film examines how Arab and Muslim Americans transformed anguish over Gaza into one of the most significant grassroots political mobilizations in recent U.S. history. More than a chronicle of a single election cycle, Uncommitted explores the long-term political consequences of the movement and the broader questions it raises about representation, democracy, diaspora politics, and political power in the United States. As public opinion continues to shift on Israel-Palestine and debates surrounding U.S. foreign policy, lobbying influence, and electoral accountability become increasingly prominent, the film traces how a movement once dismissed as symbolic continues to shape political discourse, candidacies, and organizing efforts across the country. Ultimately, Uncommitted is a story about political agency: how marginalized communities seek to transform grief into collective action and redefine their place within American democracy.

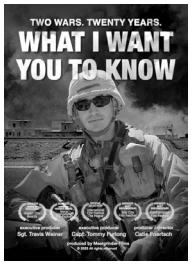
What I Want You To Know. (Afghanistan, Iraq) 2023, 56. In English. Director: Catie Foertsch. Producer: Travis Weiner, Tommy Furlong. **New Day Films.** What I Want You To Know is a documentary film that's an intimate journey alongside Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans as they share deeply personal stories from their deployments, exploring truth and justice in the context of their wars and considering the cost to themselves, fellow veterans, and civilians on the ground. Interspersed with actual footage and images from the wars, these stories create a compelling viewing experience that asks audiences to consider the reality of America's post-9/11 wars and their impact - which most young

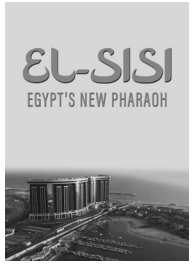










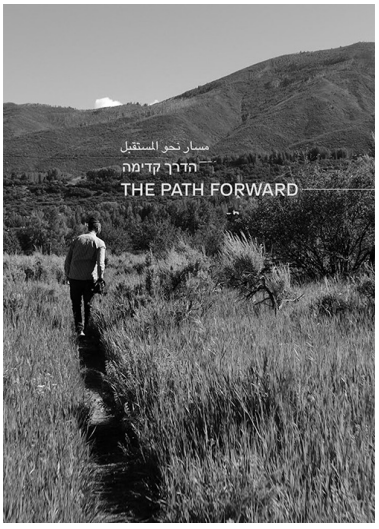




people have little or no awareness of, and most adults have forgotten. What I Want You To Know provides an antidote to claims that the post-9/11 wars were fought to defend American freedoms and bring human rights to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, by relaying what veterans themselves found and experienced on the ground. US Army veteran Col. Gregory Daddis, Command Historian to the US Multi-National Corps-Iraq, commented, “Good strategy should lead to a better state of peace. What this amazingly powerful film puts into question is whether the US wars of the last two decades ever came close to that goal.”







MESA 2027 FilmFest

Call for Submissions

Beginning Winter 2027
Submit by May 1

Note: Earlier Deadline

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Leila and the Wolves
The Palestine Exception
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Docuseek
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The Children of Camp Ashraf
https://docuseek2.com

Grasshopper Film
Joonam
The Path Forward
https://grasshopperfilm.com/

Hamid Jafari
Bard (Rock)
https://www.docunight.com/d/hamid-jafari

Homa Films
Performing Beauty
https://www.homafilms.com/

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h.elattar@csuohio.edu

Icarus Films
Do You Love Me
El-Sisi: Egypt's New Pharaoh
https://icarusfilms.com/

Jihan Kikhia
My Father and Qaddafi
https://myfatherandqaddafi.com

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Lauren Burns
Made in Morocco
https://laurenaburns.com/

Linked Productions
Out of Sight
https://linkedproductions.com/works/2025-Underwater-Cultural-Heritage-Kuwait

Mermaid House
Nasser's Republic, the Making of Modern Egypt
michal@filmmakerscollab.org

Morning Bird Pictures
Paper Planes
https://www.morningbirdpictures.com/paper-planes.html

New Day Films
Gaza Ghetto: Portrait of a Palestinian Family
What I Want You To Know
https://www.newday.com/films/

New York University Abu Dhabi
Beneath the Skin
Lice
The Researcher with a Movie Camera

Patakha Picture
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PLC Archives Productions
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Third World Newsreel
Mouth Harp in Minor Key: Hamid Naficy in/on Exile
https://film.twn.org/products/mouth-harp-in-minor-key-hamid-naficy-in-on-exile

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