



British Academy of Film and Television Arts  
BAFTA Goes To The Arab World

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11 – 14 July 2008



BRITISH ACADEMY  
OF FILM AND TELEVISION ARTS

5<sup>th</sup> Dubai International Film Festival

Bridging Cultures. Meeting Minds.  
December 11-18, 2008

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## CELEBRATE EXCELLENCE IN ARAB, ASIAN & AFRICAN CINEMA

The Dubai International Film Festival launched the Muhr Awards for Arab Cinema in 2006 to recognise the finest in filmmaking in the Arab world. The 2008 edition of the festival will introduce the Muhr Awards for AsiaAfrica with new categories to honour the commitment and talent of cinema professionals from countries in Asia and Africa.

Last date for submission is August 31, 2008. For information on eligibility, rules and regulations log on to [www.dubaifilmfest.com](http://www.dubaifilmfest.com)

David Parfitt

## Chairman of the Academy

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to our BAFTA Goes to the Arab World weekend, a celebration of established and emerging film talent. This prestigious event will showcase some of the best recent releases from filmmakers who defy simple categorisation, and is a continuation of Arab film weekends previously held at BAFTA, in partnership with the Zenith Foundation. It recognises Arab cinema's viable contribution to the industry and embodies the Academy's ongoing commitment to quality world cinema.

Films by Arab directors have been reaching out to moviegoers since Egyptian cinema's golden age of the 1950s and 60s. The country's film industry, known as 'Hollywood on the Nile', was third in line, behind Hollywood and Bollywood, in terms of film output. Yet despite award-winning critical success across the decades – at high-profile festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin and beyond – Arab productions have often struggled to find a broader international audience. The common hurdles of film funding and distribution affect Arab cinema like any other, but the added obstacles of censorship, bureaucracy and ongoing political turmoil have made it even more difficult for these filmmakers to be seen and heard, and for their films to break through.

Despite these challenges, Arab filmmakers are asserting their right to express the complex and diverse tapestry of their societies more personally, directly and unapologetically than ever before. We appreciate and applaud their persistence of vision, and invite you to expect the unexpected.

Abdulhamid Juma

## Chairman, Dubai International Film Festival

The Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) is proud to be associated with the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in celebrating Arab cinema this weekend.

Since its inception, DIFF has played a pivotal role in creating a cinematic movement in the Arabian Gulf and supporting filmmaking talent in the larger Arab world. The festival has brought the best of international cinema to the Arab region and provided a global platform for Arab filmmakers.

Cinema has, time and again, proved to be the greatest medium that can entertain, inform and question, thereby creating better understanding and wider acceptance of varied social mores, political ideologies and economic policies.

DIFF is an annual event that is built on the theme "Bridging Cultures. Meeting Minds." We began in 2004 at a time when the world was visibly divided and people were curious about cultures and civilisations other than their own. The festival has always encouraged endeavours that aim to promote open-mindedness and stimulate intellectual dialogue. BAFTA Goes To The Arab World is an important event in taking cinema to a more mass and diverse audience.

In the last 100 years, Arab cinema has flourished as a tool of creative expression within a fascinating milieu. Through their films, Arab filmmakers have continued the ancient art of storytelling by using a modern medium and have captivated audiences around the world.

I am confident BAFTA Goes To The Arab World will be a great success and hope all its viewers will enjoy their cinematic experience.

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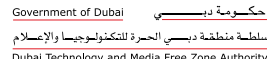
Cover:  
A mother travels to war-torn  
Lebanon to search for her  
missing son in Under The Bombs.  
Credit: Artificial Eye/Patrick Baz



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Covering some 24 countries and a wealth of cultures, the Arab world has produced engaging, challenging and starkly beautiful cinema that is becoming firmly established on the international scene. The recent success of emerging new talent builds on a rich and varied cinema history, which stretches back nearly 100 years.

The first Arab nation to establish a film industry was Egypt, beginning with silent movies in the 1920s. By 1948, Egypt had produced 345 features and built seven studios. Today, its star-led industry has produced over 3000 features, with its most popular genres spanning musicals, melodrama and realism.

The 1940s saw the Egyptian musical flourish, with approximately half of all productions embracing the genre. It remained popular for several decades until its decline in the 1970s. In Egypt's populist cinema, actors, dancers and musicians were able to significantly shape films to complement their unique and personal talents. Giants of Arabic music such as Umm Kulthum, Abdel Halim Hafez and Farid al-Atrash, starred in melodramas – something of a precursor to today's pop video. Musician Mohammed Abdel Wahab played a significant role in the success of the musical, partly due to his decision to drop traditionally long musical introductions in favour of six minute compositions.

Music and drama provided common ground with other Arab countries, facilitating the export of Egyptian cinema to the whole region. This made Egypt one of the biggest exporters of popular culture to the Arab world up to the 1990s, particularly with the dissemination of film on television.

It was not all song and dance in Egyptian films, however, even during the heyday of the musical. In the 1950s and 60s, the gangster film began to thrive in Egypt, with the 60s in particular seeing the rise of the thriller. Amongst such thrillers were masterpieces such as Salah Abu Seif's *Raya Wa Sekina* (1953) and *The Monster* (1954), and Kamal El Sheikh's *Chased By The Dogs* (1962) which bore Al Sheikh's trademark visual flair.

The 50s and 60s also saw the appearance of accomplished realist films, including Youssef Chahine's *Cairo: Central Station* (1958).

The literary novel was emerging as a major influence too, as evidenced by the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz – more than 30 of the Nobel Prize winner's novels have been adapted for the big screen. More recently, Egyptian cinema is moving in a new direction that combines higher production values and mass audience appeal with controversial socio-political themes.

Arab filmmaking outside of Egypt didn't take off until the 60s and 70s and stood in contrast to mainstream Egyptian cinema in style and content. The root of most of this filmmaking was political, often in resistance to colonialism, and included films from Algeria, Syria and Palestine. However, the 1970s saw a shift



Left:  
Aylin Prandi as the eponymous  
Paloma in award-winning  
Algerian drama *Paloma Delight*.  
Credit: © Sunday Morning  
Productions 2007

away from official ideologies and political discourses. The use of anti-heroes and themes of empty patriarchy (a metaphor for totalitarian regimes) became prominent. Over the next 30 years, these relative newcomers would surpass Egypt in terms of internationally-acclaimed auteur output.

Among the most notable examples of such global recognition is Algerian director Mohammed Lakhdar Hamina's *Chronicle Of The Years Of Fire* (1975). His film about the Algerian war of independence from France took the Palme D'Or at Cannes. Another influential Algerian director, Merzak Allouache, was credited as one of the first to challenge the Algerian national liberation narrative with his anti-hero film *Omar Gatlati* (1976). He also made a perceptive observation of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in his acclaimed film *Bab El Oued City* (1994).

This appetite for political subject matter is particularly interesting in the case of Syria. The influence of the Eastern Bloc, where many Syrian directors studied, resulted in a distinctive filmmaking style. Their films are often staunchly independent, avant-garde, socially and politically critical, at times subversive, and all produced, somewhat paradoxically, under the sponsorship of the Syrian state. Usama Mohammad's *Stars In Broad Daylight* (1988) used the planning of a family wedding to explore patriarchal and socio-political violence, whilst *The Extras* (1993) by Nabil Maleh, about a couple in a secret relationship, highlighted the destructive impact of a 'big brother' state and society.

Since the 1990s, new directing talent has made great progress in raising the profile of Arab cinema by producing quality films that attract ever-increasing international acclaim. These films combine a visual sophistication with intimate narratives, rooted in the uniqueness of local cultures, while also touching on wider universal concerns. Coming-of-age drama *Halfaouine: Child Of The Terraces* (1990) earned a crop of festival awards for Tunisian director Ferid Boughedir, whilst Ismael Ferroukhi's Moroccan pilgrimage drama *Le Grand Voyage* (2004) received a BAFTA nomination for *Film Not in the English Language*.

Women also feature as part of this new landscape with Tunisia's *The Silences Of The Palace* by female director Moufida Tlatli winning the Special Prize at Cannes

in 1994. More recently, Lebanese actress Nadine Labaki enjoyed international success with her directorial debut *Caramel* (2007).

The political outlook in the Arab world continues to inspire filmmakers. Lebanon's civil war drama *West Beirut* (1998) took prizes at both Cannes and the Toronto Film Festival, whilst Palestinian Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* (2005), the story of two men recruited as suicide bombers, achieved multiple awards success including a Golden Globe and Oscar nomination.

Last year, Algerian Rachid Bouchareb's WWII drama *Days Of Glory* (2006), about the French Army's recruitment of soldiers from France's African colonies, received an Oscar nomination and even prompted the French government to change its policy regarding war pensions for these indigenous veterans.

Film has provided the Arab region with the ability to express itself to an international audience that is increasingly interested in what it has to say, due to the prominence of the region in international affairs. However, these Arab language films cannot truly be defined on a national or pan-Arab level as they ultimately reflect the individual voices of their directors.

The international critical success of filmmakers from the Arab world seems set to continue. With wider distribution of Arab films already on the increase, signalling a potential growth in audiences, Arab filmmaking is fast establishing itself as a vital and exciting force in world cinema.

Mona Deeley  
Director, *Zenith Foundation*  
[www.zenithfoundation.com](http://www.zenithfoundation.com)

**Right:**  
The sadness and magic of one of Cairo's poorest neighbourhoods is seen through the eyes of 11-year-old Shams in *The Eye Of The Sun* (Egypt).  
Credit: Hesham Farouk Ibrahim





## Here and Now

A new generation of filmmakers from the Arab region are dealing with tumultuous events across the Middle East and delivering bold, often daring, cinematic visions. Two-thirds of the Arab world is under the age of 30, so it is fitting that so many young and dynamic filmmakers are breaking through.

In Egypt, the long-standing powerhouse of the Arab film industry, 30-year-old Marwan Hamed shocked, and delighted, critics and the public alike with his taboo-busting big screen adaptation of *The Yacoubian Building* in 2006. That film's success has helped spur on the current resurgence in Egyptian cinema, with films like Mohammed Moustafa's *Free Time*, which followed a group of youthful Cairo friends struggling to deal with drink, drugs and social pressures. Ibrahim El Batout's *The Eye Of The Sun*, which recently won the Best Film prize at the Taormina Film Festival, is another example of the return to Egyptian cinema's heyday in the 1950s and 60s when filmmakers such as Youssef Chahine, Salah Abu Seif and Henri Barakat were prepared to tackle social drama in often devastating ways.

Across North Africa, the emerging filmmakers of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have carried on the trailblazing work by pioneer directors such as Nouri Bouzid and Moufida Tlatli to explore themes of sexuality and women's role in modern Arab societies. With an often beguiling mix of Arab, African and Francophile influences, the likes of Nadir Moknèche's *Paloma Delight* and Elyes Baccar's *She & He* confound stereotypical notions of what constitutes Arab cinema in favour of thoroughly modern, authentic cinematic offerings.

While their forefathers may have occasionally felt burdened by the need to address a cacophony of ills – whether the Arab-Israeli war, the rise of fundamentalism or the role of women – within the confines of a single film, many of the region's newer filmmakers have been able to deliver their own personal tales with a confidence that belies the often limited resources at their disposal.

In Palestine, for example, the adversity of the political and economic situation has

not stopped exciting young talents such as Tawfik Abu Wael, Sameh Zoabi, Annemarie Jacir and Najwa Najjar from forging ahead with making their debut features.

In Lebanon, the lasting effects of the 1975–1990 civil war and subsequent 33 day war with Israel in 2006 continue to shape the films coming out of that beleaguered country. Intriguingly, however, filmmakers such as Philippe Aractingi with *Under The Bombs* and Borhane Alaouie's *Khalass* have found distinct ways to reflect their country's troubles, veering from fact-based docudrama in Aractingi's case, to a gritty urban thriller with Alaouie.

Even in countries with no established cinematic tradition, debut directors are stepping up to the plate and delivering crowd-pleasing, critic-friendly fare. Jordan's first feature in 50 years, *Captain Abu Raed* by first-time filmmaker Amin Matalqa, won the World Cinema Audience Award at this year's Sundance Film Festival. What's more, he achieved that without the use of flying carpet clichés or the gritty realism of suicide bombings.

In the Gulf, too, where in some countries – such as in Saudi Arabia – cinemas themselves remain banned, filmmakers have managed to produce features in difficult circumstances. 2006 saw the first-ever Saudi films produced with Abdullah Al-Moheisen's *Shadow Of Silence* and Izidore Musallam's *How Are Things?*

In the United Arab Emirates, the likes of Nayla Al-Khaja (Arabana), Hani Al-Shaibani (*Dream*), Ali Mostafa (*Under The Sun*), Waleed Al-Shehhi (*Aushba's Well*) and Manal Bin Amro (*Stuck Face*) are all taking their first big screen steps on the way to creating a grassroots film scene. They may have a long way to go before establishing themselves as world-class auteurs but if the citizens of Dubai and Abu Dhabi prove to be anywhere near as successful at building a film industry as they are at building their towering new skyscrapers, then Arab cinema is in for a very exciting future.

Ali Jaafar  
Europe & Middle East Correspondent, *Variety*

Left:  
In *Captain Abu Raed* (Jordan), an airport janitor finds a discarded captain's hat and is befriended by a group of children who believe he's a pilot.  
Credit: Sabri Hakim

*“All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.”*

These words, originally written in quite a different context by T.E. Lawrence in *The Seven Pillars Of Wisdom*, might well have echoes for filmmakers who’ve made movies in the Arab region.

A diverse catch-all description, the Arab region stretches from North Africa to the Middle East, and has depicted locations that reflect the realities of modern political tensions as well as more fantastical worlds like Tatooine in the *Star Wars* saga.

The ‘exoticism’ offered by such venues is often accompanied by extreme filming challenges, from remoteness to heat to the more immediate question of keeping film stock at the right temperature. Freddie Young, cinematographer on David Lean’s *Lawrence Of Arabia*, made light of such issues.

“There were no problems,” he said, “it was 110 [degrees] in the desert. We always kept the camera under a big umbrella with a wet cloth over it, so we had no problems. We had a caterer with a refrigerator for all the food, and I kept my film in that. We lived under tents for about nine months in Jordan, and they were very good.”

One rather sensitive aspect of shooting in a desert is the pristine nature of the landscape, which can easily be ruined by a stray crew member leaving errant footprints in the sand. Anthony Minghella, interviewed prior to the release of his BAFTA-winning *The English Patient*, recognised this when he came to shoot scenes in the Sahara Desert.

“The landscape scars easily, so rehearsing those scenes and staging them is a nightmare. When I went to the desert with the location scouts and the producer, and we were looking for places to shoot, it was so spiritually nourishing, so vast and austere and extraordinary.”

Whether in the spiritual wilderness of the desert, or the bustling and chaotic souks of North African and Middle Eastern cities, such unique locations can give great atmosphere to a movie,

lending it a flavour that runs deep in the audience’s subconscious.

Locations can also inform performance, adding a literal authenticity to stories set in these places, from Gillies MacKinnon’s *Hideous Kinky* and Paul Bowles’ *The Sheltering Sky*, through the odd Indiana Jones adventure, via *The Life Of Brian* and the occasional Ridley Scott movie. The British director has returned, over time, to the Moroccan city of Ouarzazate – a name, ironically, that translates as ‘without noise’.

There, the Atlas Studios are, presently, the largest in the world, and offer technical hardware and ‘know how’ to match the surrounding deserts that have served as backdrops for such films as *The Man Who Would Be King*, *Kundun*, *Cleopatra*, *Babel* and – for Scott – *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down* and *Kingdom Of Heaven*.

So, while such places are increasingly welcoming, aware of the value they deliver to western productions and possessed of local crews ever more experienced at meeting their demands, there is a strong feeling that by opening themselves up to filmmakers, they expose themselves to the world. Stephen Gaghan certainly found this when he was prepping his movie, *Syriana*.

“The whole process of making this film changed my life,” he says, “it changed the way I looked at the world, and changed the way I looked at the Middle East. I spent a lot of time there and the vast majority of the people that I came across are in this moderate middle that exists all over the world.”

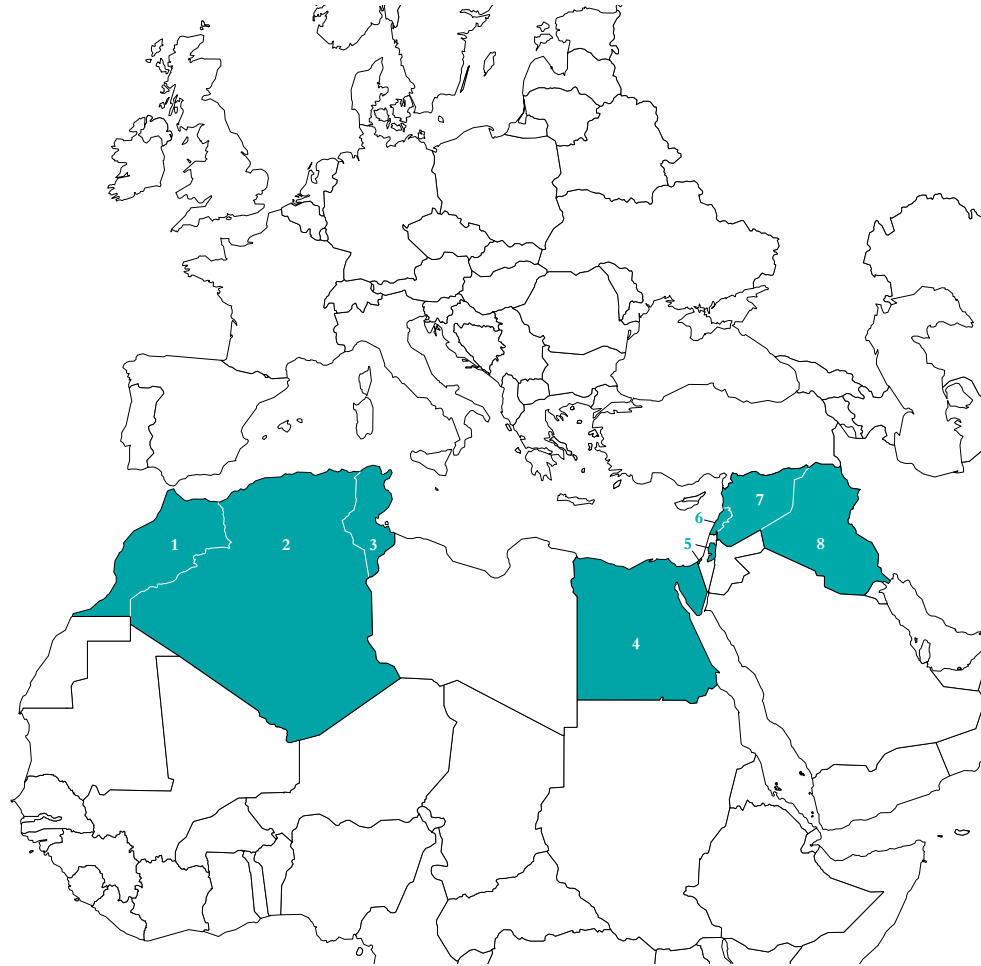
Lawrence would doubtless nod in approval, as the active daydreamers find a greater truth.

Anwar Brett  
Journalist



**Left:**  
Kate Winslet and Saïd Taghmaoui  
in *Hideous Kinky* (1998), filmed  
on location in Morocco.  
Credit: [Moviestore Collection](#)

**Right:** Though the Arab World spans some 24 countries, our focus this weekend is on the following eight, which have an established filmmaking tradition.



## 1. Morocco

Thanks in part to the efforts of King Mohammed, a self-confessed cinephile, Morocco has attracted many high-profile directors – from Ridley Scott to Paul Greengrass – to come and film in the country. As for its own local filmmakers, the likes of Nabil Ayouch (*Whatever Lola Wants*), have made concerted efforts to support and bolster young directors in the country while pursuing their own increasingly international careers. The Marrakech International Film Festival, held annually, also offers a valuable forum for cultural exchange between Moroccan and foreign filmmakers.

## 2. Algeria

As the only Arab country that can boast a Palme d'Or, thanks to Mohammed Lakhdar Hamina's *Chronicle Of The Years Of Fire* (1975), Algerian cinema can hold its head up high. A recent history that includes public underinvestment and the ripple effect of a brutal civil war waged between the government and Islamist forces for much of the 90s, however, has hindered its film industry. Things are improving, though, with the likes of Djamila Sahraoui's award-winning road movie *Barakat!* signalling a vibrant new cinematic voice.

## 3. Tunisia

A moderate, progressive Arab country which has largely avoided the social and political unrest that has blighted so many others in the region, Tunisia is well-placed to emerge with distinctive cinematic output. Films such as Nouri Bouzid's *Clay Dolls* and Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences Of The Palace* have already enjoyed critical and commercial success at home and abroad. A dynamic generation of new filmmakers such as Elyes Baccar (*She & He*) are also comfortable tackling subject matters dealing with sexuality and other taboos.

## 5. Palestine

While Palestinians continue to struggle in their attempts to achieve statehood and reach a lasting peace with Israel, Palestinian filmmakers have enjoyed remarkable success internationally for much of the last decade. Since the first Palestinian feature film was made – generally recognised to be Michel Khleifi's *Wedding In Galilee* (1987) – the likes of Elia Suleiman (*Divine Intervention*) and Hany Abu-Assad (*Paradise Now*) have eloquently and artfully captured the elusive existence of a people rendered homeless on their own land.

## 7. Syria

Syria remains, in many ways, a sleeping giant of Arab filmmaking and cultural expression. Though its cultural influence pervades – just as its political influence does – through much of the Arab world, Syria has yet to replicate the success of its powerhouse TV industry in the film world. While heavy state control remains an everyday factor for many Syrian directors, it hasn't stopped interesting cinematic voices such as Mohamed Malas, Omar Amiralay and Abdullatif Abdulhamid (*Out Of Coverage*) from emerging out of the country.

## 4. Egypt

The centre of the Arab film industry, Egyptian cinema was at its most productive in the 50s and 60s. While it suffered a slump in quality and quantity in the last two decades – not helped by economic and political stagnation through the 80s and 90s and an over-reliance on derivative family comedies – there are strong signs of its resurgence. *The Yacoubian Building* (2006) has helped spur on a renaissance of more erudite adult fare such as Ibrahim El Batout's *The Eye Of The Sun*.

## 6. Lebanon

Lebanon's vibrant cultural scene has translated to the big screen through filmmakers such as Ziad Doueiri (*West Beirut*) and Nadine Labaki (*Caramel*) delivering cross-over hits with commercial appeal and cultural integrity. For all the undoubted glamour of Lebanese high society, the country has been hurt by the effects of the Lebanese civil war between 1975–1990 and the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, as seen in 2006 with the 33 day long war with Israel, the aftermath of which was captured hauntingly in Philippe Aractingi's *Under The Bombs*.

## 8. Iraq

For reasons all too obvious, filmmaking in Iraq has suffered for much of the last three decades. From pro-Saddam Hussein propaganda of the 80s to near-total collapse during the United Nations sanctions of the 90s, and a virtual standstill after the 2003 invasion by coalition forces, Iraq's film industry is – like the country itself – re-building in the midst of war. Mohamed Al Daradji's *Ahlaam*, as well as a powerful series of shorts by aspiring Iraqi filmmakers, suggests that a talented group of creatives are awaiting the opportunity to blossom.

## Go Further

The following is a select list of Arab films produced across the last 50 years that have been recognised and rewarded by some of the world's most prestigious film festivals and organisations.

- 1951 *A Night Of Love* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Grand Prix
- 1951 *Son Of The Nile* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Grand Prix
- 1954 *The Monster* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Grand Prix
- 1955 *Life Or Death* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 1958 *Cairo: Central Station* (Egypt) – Berlin Film Festival nomination: Golden Bear
- 1962 *Chased By The Dogs* (Egypt) – Berlin Film Festival nomination: Golden Bear
- 1964 *Last Night* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 1970 *The Earth* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 1975 *Chronicle Of The Years Of Fire* (Algeria) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 1976 *Omar Gatlatto* (Algeria) – Moscow Film Festival win: Silver Prize
- 1976 *The Message* (Syria) – Oscar nomination: Original Score
- 1979 *Alexandria, Why?* (Egypt) – Berlin Film Festival win: Silver Bear
- 1982 *Sandstorm* (Algeria) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 1988 *Stars In Broad Daylight* (Syria) – Mediterranean Cinema win: Golden Palm
- 1988 *The Trace* (Tunisia) – Berlin Film Festival win: Caligari Award
- 1990 *Halfaouine: Child Of The Terraces* (Tunisia) – Valencia Festival of Mediterranean Cinema win: Golden Palm
- 1991 *Beach Of The Lost Children* (Morocco) – Venice Film Festival nomination: Golden Lion
- 1994 *Bab El Oued City* (Algeria) – Cannes win: FIPRESCI Prize
- 1994 *The Silences Of The Palace* (Tunisia) – Cannes win: Camera D'Or
- 1997 *Destiny* (Egypt) – Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or and a Lifetime Achievement Award win for its director, Youssef Chahine
- 1997 *Chronicle Of A Disappearance* (Palestine) – Venice Film Festival win: Luigi De Lorentiis Award
- 1998 *West Beirut* (Lebanon) – Cannes win: Francois Chalais Award
- 2002 *Rachida* (Algeria) – London Film Festival win: Satyajit Ray Award
- 2002 *Divine Intervention* (Palestine) – Cannes win: FIPRESCI and Jury Prizes. Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or
- 2003 *A Thousand Months* (Morocco) – Cannes win: Le Premier Regard
- 2003 *Zaman: The Man Of The Reeds* (Iraq) – San Sebastian Film Festival win: Future Talent Award
- 2004 *Le Grand Voyage* (Morocco) – BAFTA nomination: Film Not in the English Language. Venice Film Festival win: Luigi De Lorentiis Award
- 2004 *Thirst* (Palestine) – Cannes win: FIPRESCI Prize
- 2005 *A Perfect Day* (Lebanon) – Locarno Film Festival win: FIPRESCI Prize
- 2005 *Paradise Now* (Palestine) – Golden Globe win: Best Foreign Language Film. Oscar nomination: Best Foreign Language Film
- 2006 *Days Of Glory* (Algeria) – Cannes wins: Best Actor and Francois Chalais Awards. Cannes nomination: Palme D'Or. Oscar nomination: Best Foreign Language Film.

**Right:** Acclaimed Egyptian director Youssef Chahine was nominated for the Cannes Palme D'Or for his depiction of religion and violence in *Destiny* (1997). He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Festival in the same year. Credit: BFI Stills



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