

# Cine-Jam

## A workshop showcasing personal experiences through film

Cinema is an art, a means to express emotions, and its tools are only meant to serve the story that is being told.

This is the general sentiment of the 12 young Lebanese artists who participated in the film-workshop titled Cine-Jam, which is created and conducted by Lebanese cinematographer Muriel Aboulrouss.

The workshop, which took place for the second time in Beirut this summer, aimed at promoting Aboulrouss' beliefs, mainly that cinema is a form of art and not a commercial commodity.

"It kills me to see that here, in Lebanon, we have to follow the Hollywood recipe to make films and to abide by a set of western expectations of what a Lebanese story should be to get the people to watch it," Aboulrouss tells NOW Extra. "There are so many stories in this part of the world - beyond the stories of our civil war- that should be told," she adds.

"Cinema is the mirror of the world," Aboulrouss explains. "It reflects society and its own people. It reflects each and every one of us, and so to know our world better and be able to reflect it in film, we have to start with being able to reflect ourselves."

To achieve that aim, the cinematographer organized the film workshop Cine-Jam, which she describes as "anything but technical." It works on the development of the participants' personal expression and cinematic language by walking them through their own personal fears and using the resulting emotions in the process of creation. It requires that artists showcase their personal experiences at the end of the workshop through films that are then presented to the audience.

Eight applicants were accepted into the second edition of the workshop, but only because "they express enough excitement, passion, and need" to undergo the experience, she emphasizes. Twelve encounters then take place over the course of one month whereby each participant is expected to write, shoot and edit their own films. But Aboulrouss refrained from elaborating on what actually takes place during the session. "It is a secret," she says. "All I can tell you is that it is intense."

The first batch of applicants joined the workshop without a clear idea of what was going to take place. Aboulrouss later explained the process, and out of the six members that were present, only two remained. One was cinematographer Karim Ghorayeb; he later convinced two of his other friends to join the workshop.

"I thought it was a technical workshop, but we ended up working on something very personal... At school we learn the techniques of what makes a good picture, but here we learned that a good [film] is the one that reflects our emotions, the one that tells a story," says Ghorayeb.

The second batch of participants underwent the workshop during the summer, and most of them knew in advance of the process and the challenge it entails. The eight applicants of the workshop's second edition along with the initial four participants of Cine-Jam presented their work in an event titled "12 Emotions, 12 Films, 12 Artists," which screened the films at Metro Al-Madina, Hamra on Tuesday night. The screening was then followed by a discussion with the artists.

Lebanese Director Dania Bdeir explains that the process was "not an easy one." The participants hardly knew one another, yet they were expected to stay together for almost seven hours every day and to touch on their deepest, darkest places.

"I left after the first session... I fought it at the beginning, I didn't want to say anything or open up... But then, I noticed the change that the participants were undergoing and I wanted it for myself... So I came back and it was therapeutic," explains Bdeir, who in her short film "*Blank*," describes the emotions she feels when people tell her that her eyes express nothing, that they're "blank."

Aboulrouss says that it is only normal for participants to leave when they feel the intensity of the workload, but adds that she welcomes them back if they have a change of heart. The process of digging deep into

people's dark places is a risky one, but the cinematographer explains that she was taking the necessary measures to assure that everything remains under control.

"I had a friend psychotherapist working behind the scene with whom I'd share the experiences, and I would go back to them when necessary. And if in any case I feel I am dealing with a special case, then I would suggest they seek therapy."

Lebanese director Remie Maksoud who showcased her film "*Home*," which deals with the intimacy in a woman's life, confirms the above and tells that the workshop was a form of therapy. However, she adds, it also involved many other aspects of filmmaking. "In the end, the aim was not to psychoanalyze oneself but to make a film."

The 12 films that were shown had neither a scenario nor a clear dialogue, but according to the participants, that was only normal given that there were no rules to begin with, and that the aim was to conceive the image and the sound so that it reflects the emotion best.

Lebanese editor Rita Haddad, who presented her film "*Howl*," explained that the work was preliminary and primitive, adding that she felt it was not necessary to use words. This is why she relied on music and sound effects to tell how "in the land of childhood dreams, the monster is king."

"Cine-jam is about how you feel things and not about describing the feeling. In one month, the aim is to express an emotion in picture and sound, and if we can get that message across without having to tell you it verbally, then it is a success," concludes Haddad.

*The next Cine-Jam workshop will take place on November 15 and will run through December 15, 2012. To participate, email Cine-Jam creator and organizer Muriel Aboulrouss at [email@murielaboulrouss.com](mailto:email@murielaboulrouss.com).*