



Dreams of the City

a film by Mohamad Malas



Dreams of the City (Ahlam al-Medina) أحلام المدينة

Content

When his father dies, Dib, his younger brother and their mother (Yasmine Khlát) move away from their hometown Quneitra to Damascus. The mother's despotic father reluctantly takes them in and tries to force the mother to remarry. Overwhelmed by the magic of the city, Dib wants to discover everything and is full of dreams. His daily life is shaped by insults and punishments however. Dib grows up against a backdrop of the political upheavals of the 1950s (the end of the military dictatorship in Syria and the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Nasser's taking of power in Cairo, Egyptian and Syrian unification in 1958) and loses his childish illusions in the face of such violence and brutality. The dreams of the city prove to be a nightmare. Mohammad Malas' partly autobiographical debut film marked the transition to auteur cinema in Syria.

Credits

Syria 1984, 130 min, color, Arabic with Engl. or French ST

Director	Mohamad Malas
Script	Mohamad Malas & Samir Zirka
Director of Photography	Urdijan Engin
Editor	Haitham Kouatly
Line Production	Georges Bishara
Production	National Film Organization

Cast

Yasmine Khlát, Rafik Sbeit, Bassel el Abdiadh, Hisham Khcheifati, Talhat Hamdi, Adnan Barakat, Naji Jabr, Adib Chhadeh, Ayman Zeidan, Nazir Sarhan, Raja Kotrach, Hasan Dakkak

Awards (selection)

Carthage Film Festival: Tanit d'Or, 1985

Berlin International Film Festival: Interfilm Award - Honorable Mention, 1985

Valencia Festival of Mediterranean Cinema: Golden Palm, 1985



Film-maker Mohamad Malas

Mohamad Malas was born in 1945 in Quneitra on the Golan Heights. He is a prominent Syrian filmmaker whose films garnered him international recognition. Malas is among the first auteur filmmakers in Syrian cinema.

Malas worked as a school teacher between 1965 and 1968 before moving to Moscow to study filmmaking at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). During his time at VGIK he directed several short films. After his return to Syria Malas started working at the Syrian Television. There he produced several short films including Quneitra 74, in 1974 and al-Zhakira (The Memory) in 1975.

Along with Omar Amiralay he co-founded the Damascus Cinema Club.

Between 1980 and 1981 Malas shot the documentary, al-Manam (The Dream), about the Palestinians living in the refugee camps in Lebanon during the civil war.

He directed his first feature film, Ahlam al-Madina (Dreams of the City), in 1983. The autobiographical coming-of-age film received the first prize both at the Valencia and the Carthage Film Festivals.

In 1995 Malas, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of cinema, shot with Omar Amiralay Nur wa Zilal a documentary film about Nazih Shahbandar whom he described as Syria's first filmmaker. The film was banned by Syrian authorities and could only be screened one time in 1993 at the American Cultural Center in Damascus.

Malas's second feature film, al-Lail (The Night), was realized in 1992. The autobiographical film is set in Quneitra in the years between 1936 and the Arab–Israeli War of 1948. It forms, along with Ahlam al-Madina, the first and second parts of a yet unfinished trilogy. Both films were shown at Berlinale's Forum section. Al-Lail received international recognition and won first prize at the 1992 Carthage Film Festival. However, the film was banned in Syria until 1996. In 2013 Ahlam al-Medina was among the top 10 of the "100 Greatest Arab Films List", which film professionals from the Arab World and associates of Dubai International Film Festival voted for.

Another collaboration between Malas and Omar Amiralay is the 1996 documentary film Moudaress about the Syrian pioneer painter Fateh Moudarres.

Bab al-Makam (Passion), released in 2005, was Malas's third feature film, it won the Special Jury Award at the Marrakech International Film Festival. Sullam Ila Dimashq (Ladder to Damascus), released in 2013, premiered at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival and was screened in more than 50 festivals since.

Mohamad Malas' 1991 book "The Dream. A Diary of the Film" was translated into English and published by the American University of Cairo Press in 2016. A monograph on Mohamad Malas will be published at Palgrave MacMillan by the end of 2017.



Press Commentaries

With a string of socially oriented features, Syrian cinema has moved recently into the forefront of Arab film production. And one might add neo-realist “street films” en vogue again throughout the Arab world, if entries at international fests are any indication. Mohammed Malas’ “Dreams Of A City” is a prime example of this trend. Pic is impressive as a debut feature. Malas is a creator to watch, so, too is Yasmine Khlaf as the other. (Variety, May 1984)

The film is excellently composed and powerful in its colors. The work of Mohamad Malas reminds one of Pagnol, yet of a Pagnol who is not satisfied with superficial beauty. (L’Humanité, May 1984)

If the cinematic structure in his country will allow, one can expect a lot from Mohamad Malas in the future. (Jeune Afrique, May 1984)

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