



IN COOPERATION WITH FILMAKADÉMIE BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG SUPPORTED BY ROBERT BOSCH STIFTUNG

PRODUCER YARA ABI NADER LINE PRODUCTION AYLA NABULSI / 4TH WALL PRODUCTIONS JORDAN ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SAHAR M. KHOURY  
 DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JONAS SCHNIEDER ART DIRECTOR KRISTEL ABOU KARAME  
 SOUND ENGINEER HISHAM SHARAFEDDINE EDITOR PATRICK TASS  
 SOUND DESIGN & ORIGINAL MUSIC TONI GEITANI CREDITS & POSTER DESIGN FARAH EL SAMMAN

Robert Bosch Stiftung FILMAKADÉMIE BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

# Chronic

a film by Mohamed Sabbah



## Chronic (A Shafir) ع شفير

### Short Content

Omar, a photographer, has a special experience with death. He is trying to express it through a new project.

One day, three photo sessions and witnesses. Between the walls of a studio, one photographer and three people meet up after a casting. Bodies express stories of sex, love and trauma in the city of Beirut.

### Long Content

Omar, a Lebanese photographer, has a special experience with death and is trying to live his mourning through a new project. Following a casting, he receives three guests, one after the other. One day, one house, bodies express stories of sex, love and trauma in the city of Beirut.

Walid, a young dancer, avoids falling in love and getting attached. Omar seems to have a complex relation with dancers. He seeks a kind of revenge from Walid.

May, a Lebanese woman, lost her Syrian lover Kinan who died while escaping by boat across the sea to Europe. She tries to confront and comfort Omar. She tries to embrace him, in vain.

Antoine, a French-Lebanese man, used to live in Paris. He was on a visit to Beirut when he survived an explosion, what made him move back to Lebanon. He has a special lifestyle, violence plays a major role in his life. Omar and Antoine engage in a harmful game.

Visitor after visitor, chapter after chapter, Omar's pain is revealed and he is provoking danger.



## Credits

Mohamad Sabbah, Lebanon/Germany 2017, 89min, Arabic with Engl. or French ST

Writer, Director Mohamed Sabbah

Producer Yara Abi Nader

Line Production Aya Nabulsi, 4th Wall Productions Jordan

Director of Photography Jonas Schneider

Art Director Krystal Abou Karam

Sound Engineer Hisham Sharafeddine

Editor Patrick Tass

Sound Design and Original Music Toni Geitani

Sound Mixing and Additional Sound Design Simon Peter

Assistant Director Sahar M. Khoury

Project Coordinator Guido Lukoschek

in Cooperation with Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg | Supported by Robert Bosch Stiftung

## Film-maker Mohamed Sabbah

Mohamed is a young film director from Beirut. In his movies he treats subjects as impossible love, body relations, death, family and observes his city Beirut that is his biggest inspiration. His short films, "Awakening", "The return" and "Where there is nothing but water" have been selected and won prizes in several local and international festivals. "Chronic" is his first feature film, it is a story that he felt the need to share.

## Director's Note

"Chronic" was first of all born out of a need and an urge to do it, to write and to film it.

The film results from an accumulation of experiences and stories that I lived and heard in my life and as a citizen of Beirut. Beirut, as I see it and live it, is a city that makes you live with a constant feel, a chronic feel, of losing something or someone. I have always felt that I am on the edge of a big change, on the edge of falling. In the past few years, I went through different stories of loss: I lost a lover, I lost a grandfather and I lost, at some point, hope in Beirut, in Lebanon and in the big childhood dreams. Those experiences marked me hard, they changed the way I look at things and affected my daily and creation behaviors.

Omar and I resemble a lot. The process that Omar adapts in the film resembles my own process as a director and writer of Chronic. Omar followed what he felt, he needed to



transmit sensations, to ask questions and to capture and archive stories, emotions and faces. This is exactly what pushed me to do "Chronic" so I can live this same journey through images and sounds.

From the idea till the last steps of the post-production, I tried to conceive the film in total freedom: I wanted to explore a free form and narrative construction. I rarely asked myself big questions of where the film is going. Scene after scene, dialogue line after dialogue line and shot after shot, the film 'somehow' constructed itself. From a deep feeling inside of me and with a big trust and connection with the crew and actors, we all went together on this "adventure" as I like to call it.

## From the Press

**Arab Queer Cinema Emerges to Break Taboos** - *by Joseph Fahim for Middle East Institute on Aug 10, 2017*  
(excerpt)

Lebanon has always been the most liberal and tolerant Arab country when it comes to L.G.B.T. issues—a recent court order conceding that homosexuality is not illegal is the first of its kind in the Arab world. And it's in Lebanon where the first wave of Arab queer cinema is surfacing. It is a movement ushered by openly gay Arab filmmakers whose pictures explore the full spectrum of the modern Arab L.G.B.T. experience using a myriad of narrative and aesthetic devices.

The first film to announce the movement was Samer Daboul's *Out Loud* (2001), a multi-character drama at the center of which is a persecuted young gay couple who take refuge in a hippie commune. The production of the film was infamously disrupted by anti-gay protests, which forced Daboul to finish editing in the United States.

No fewer than four films delivered by openly gay Lebanese filmmakers have been released over the past 12 months: Raed Rafei's *Eccomi... Eccoti*; Selim Mourad's *The Emperor of Austria*; Anthony Chidiac's *Room for a Man*; and Mohamed Sabbah's *Chronic*. Chidiac and Sabbah's films are the more ambitious of the bunch. Queerness is front and center in both stories, but by integrating sexual politics within a larger socio-political framework, both films demonstrate the limitless possibilities Arab queer cinema can reach.

Contrary to Daboul, these filmmakers did not face tangible obstacles making their films. "Things are changing. More films tackling homosexuality are being produced now, and we're no longer afraid of making our films," Sabbah told me. *Chronic* premiered at the Beirut Cinema Days Festival in March to a largely warm reception. The film is an experimental non-fiction drama that uses a film audition as a springboard to explore sexuality, the Syrian War and the lingering legacy of colonization.



“I think people are ready for these stories now. I realize there’s more resistance in the rest of the Arab world, but this resistance is rooted in stereotypes and clichéd representations, and that’s why we need to present an alternative narrative that shows the reality of things. We need to break these stereotypes.”Sabbah added.

Queerness is not the main motif behind these stories, as Sabbah asserts. “I don’t have a message I want to promote. I am, however, a gay person and this identity will always be an integral, if not, the central competent of my films.”

Sabbah believes Lebanon’s religious diversity, and lack of an overarching religious authority as in other Sunni-dominant Arab states, allows space for a level of social and cultural expression, particularly when it comes to L.G.B.T. In much of the Arab world, homosexuality remains illegal with severe punishment. Degrees of tolerance vary from one state to the other, but L.G.B.T. communities often face regular harassment and crackdowns from state authorities, with religion and morality often evoked to arouse public sentiment.

The erratic witch hunt largely prompted award-winning Moroccan author and director Abdellah Taïa—the first openly gay Moroccan writer—to leave his hometown Salé in 1998 and move to Paris where he embarked on a highly successful literary career. His deeply felt, beautifully lensed 2013 film adaptation of his memoir, *The Salvation Army*, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival, is a major stepping stone in the young course of the Arab queer movement.

“I didn’t want to tell my story as a gay person; I wanted to tell the story of what was happening in my childhood house,” Taïa told me. “And there was a lot of things happening in this house: poverty, love, transgression. I wanted to deal with the poor reality of Morocco, and the enforced rules of politics, religion, and society.”

Full text <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/arab-queer-cinema-emerges-break-taboos>

**mec film**  
**Emdener Strasse 48d**  
**10551 Berlin**  
**Germany**

**++49-30-66766700**  
**info@mecfilm.de**  
**www.mecfilm.de**