



Over the Sand, Under the Sun

a film by Mohamad Malas & Hala Alabdallah



Over the Sand, Under the Sun (Fawq al-Raml, Taht al-Shams) فوق الرمل ... تحت الشمس

Content

Short documentary about political prisoners struggling to come to terms with haunting memories, produced for the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The film presents a reflection on the effects of prison in general and on the theatre director Ghassan Jbaili in particular. The artist used his work to come to terms with his haunting memories and regain the world outside the prison walls.

Credits

Syria 1998, 32 min, Arabic with English or French subtitles

Directors	Mohamad Malas & Hala Alabdallah
Director of Photography	Pierre Dupouey
Editing	Dominique Pâris

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.

Film-maker Hala Alabdallah

Filmmaker Hala Alabdallah studied Agricultural Engineering at the University of Damascus before moving to Paris where she studied cinema. She has directed three acclaimed documentaries and was a jury member in several international film festivals.

Filmography

I am the One who Brings Flowers to her Grave (with Ammar Albeik), 2006

Hey, don't Forget the Cumin (2008)

As if we wre Catching a Cobra (2012)

Besieged Like Me (2016)



Text about the film

Excerpt of book chapter "Cracking the Wall of Fear" by Miriam Cooke

In 2000, film-makers Muhammad Malas and Hala Alabdallah produced their adaptation of Ghassan al-Jabai's 1994 short story *On the Sand under the Sun*. It was finally possible for this terrible story to be performed and filmed, even if the film had not yet been released for public screening. Whereas al-Jabai had scripted executions so indirectly as to be illegible, by 2000 the incomprehensible became crystal clear. Malas, Alabdallah and al-Jabai staged and then filmed the surreal story "written" in Tadmor prison. Al-Jabai had written the story in his head in defiance of the prohibition of writing. But the film portrays the writing as ink on paper next to an over floating ashtray behind bars. Signifying beyond lexical meanings, the written words had evoked the choking, coughing, airlessness of the cell. In stark contrast with this textual allusiveness, the film literally presents torture and the handwritten words etched black on the white of the clean sheet of paper. The actor - young, strong, and attractive in their black slacks and tee-shirts - enter carrying cage walls. They build the cells around themselves, the barbed wire roof is lowered onto the bars, a crown of thorns, and al-Jabai, playing himself, commands them to whip the ground. A shower of lashes and then, abruptly, the actors dismantle the structure and leave. There are no oil drops - the shadows of last night's victims on the yard wall - only unambiguous shapes of hanging cadavers. The camera's focus reveals the secrets of the allusions; they become dully familiar.

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