



Passion (Bab al-Maqam)

a film by Mohamad Malas



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Content

Iman (Salwa Jamil), a devoted Umm Kulthoum fan, lives in Aleppo with her taxi driver husband and daughters, and her brother Rashid's daughter, Jumanah, She feels that she owes it to Rashid, a political prisoner, to make it as a singer; meanwhile, her uncle, nephews and even her brother spy on her, sure that her passion for singing is proof that she is having an affair.

Inspired by a newspaper announcement and set against the backdrop of the 2003 Syrian elections, with streets filled with demonstrators against the American Invasion of Iraq, Mohamed Malas's film is an intense and extraordinary study of contemporary Syrian society.

Credits

Syria 2004, color, 100 minutes, Arabic with Engl., French or Ital. ST

Director	Mohammad Malas
Producers	Ahmed B E Attia, Febienne Servan Schreiber, Intissar Safia
Scriptwriter	Khaled Khalife
Cinematographer	Tarek Ben Abdallah
Editor	Kahena Attia
Composer	Marcel Khalife

Cast

Mahmoud Hamed, Naceur Ouerdiani, Oussama S Youssef, Salwa Jamil, Yara Chakra



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.



Text about the film

Letter by Mr Hamid Dabashi, Iranian Critic and Professor Cinema Critic at the Columbia University - New York

PASSION is one of the exquisite and powerful films I have seen in my recent memory.

I admire the poise, patience, and elegance with which you have told Imene's story.

Your camera is so confident. Your cutting, editing, sequences, camera locations, sound design, and above all the color of your film, its melancholic boding of a tragedy about to happen are all extraordinary.

I also believe in Imene's husband, his infatuation with the news of the US invasion of Iraq, in Rachid's absented character, and in the sense of futility you detect in the street demonstrations you have successfully added a critical, though perfectly nuanced,

factor to the terror of Imene's life. Such perfect balance between the politics of our despair and the terror of our inherited stupidities I have rarely seen.

The character of Joumana is astounding (and she is wonderful and amazing actor). In her, and in Imene's little daughter--in the very last sequence, before Imene is murdered--you have given the world a gift of grace, a sign of hope, a promise of emancipation.

What has remained with me most is how you have elevated a few lines of a small town crime into an astounding work of art, with malice towards none, not even the Abu Sobhi character, not Imene's father, brother, cousins--none. There seems to be an inevitability in the fate of all these people, caught as they are in a web of their own fears and anxieties, the hope they have lost, the dignity they have forgotten--and how wise, judicious, and careful you are in introducing just a smidgeon of politics to point to the deeper roots of despair, without forfeiting the weight of the more enduring social malaise you detect and canvas.

Your work in the interiors of houses, Mohammad, are just Unbelievable.

You have a visual sense of the space, of the interior architecture of Syrian houses, of streets and alleys, windows and doors, shrubs and trees, that speak eloquently of your extraordinary command over your camera.

Your perfect sense of the interior is very much reminiscent of Ozu.

One hour and 38 minutes with your film, and I feel I grew up Aleppo!

HAMID DABASHI

(A yet unpublished letter by Mr Hamid Dabashi, Iranian Critic and Professor Cinema Critic at the Columbia University- New York . U.S.)



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