

BIG
WORLD
PICTURES

presents



Dir. Tamer El Said
Egypt/Germany/Great Britain / 2016 / 118 min / DCP
In Arabic, with English subtitles
Aspect ratio: 1.85:1 Sound: Dolby SR 5.1

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SYNOPSIS

IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CITY

“This film within a film is a haunting yet lyric chronicle of recent years in the Arab world, where revolutions seemed to spark hope for change and yield further instability in one stroke. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Khalid Abdalla plays the protagonist of Tamer El Said’s ambitious feature debut, a filmmaker in Cairo attempting to capture the zeitgeist of his city as the world changes around him—from personal love and loss to the fall of the Mubarak regime. Throughout, friends send footage and stories from Berlin, Baghdad, and Beirut, creating a powerful, multilayered meditation on togetherness, the tactile hold of cities, and the meaning of homeland. Shot in 2008 and completed [in 2016], the film explores the weight of cinematic images as record and storytelling in an ongoing time of change.” – New Directors/New Films press release

IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CITY is the debut feature of filmmaker Tamer El Said. It tells the fictional story of a filmmaker from downtown Cairo played by Khalid Abdalla (*The Kite Runner*, *The Square*) as he struggles to capture the soul of a city on edge while facing loss in his own life. Shot in Cairo, Beirut, Baghdad and Berlin during the two years before the outbreak of revolution in Egypt, the film’s multi-layered stories are a visually rich exploration of friendship, loneliness, loss and life in cities shaped by the shadows of war and adversity.

The world premiere of the film was in the 2016 Berlinale, where it received the Caligari Film Prize. Since then, the film has been invited to over 120 festivals around the world, receiving more than 12 international awards from France, Germany, the USA, Poland, Italy, Russia, Argentina and Turkey.

Since its world premiere, *IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CITY* has been well received by the international and Arab critics and was included on a number of lists of Best Films of the year. The film won the Critics Award for Best Arab Film in 2016, announced during the Cannes Film Festival. The jury of this award was made up of 24 critics from 15 countries, including Jay Weissberg (*Variety*) and Deborah Young (*The Hollywood Reporter*).

The film has found distribution in ten countries, including France, UK, Germany, USA, Poland, Lebanon, Morocco, UAE and Tunisia. Unfortunately, the film was never allowed to be seen in Egypt as the censors refused to issue a permit to screen the film.

PRESS

“Without doubt, the most important film in Egyptian cinema, if not Arab cinema, in a very long time” Jean-Michel Frodon, *Slate*

“A plangent, multi-layered dirge to the sensory overload of Cairo and the way it has irrevocably changed... A melancholic love-hate poem to Cairo and the role of filmmakers in any city in pain.” Jay Weissberg, *Variety*

“Majestic... a lionhearted elegy for the Egyptian capital, artistic heritage in the Arab world, inspired politics, and hope itself.” Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Artforum*

“Beautifully lensed and complexly edited in a dense patchwork of people, feelings and events.” Deborah Young, *The Hollywood Reporter*

“El Said’s debut feature is by all accounts a brilliantly atmospheric immersion in those strange days.” A top five “high hope” from the London Film Festival by *Sight & Sound*

“A proud requiem to the bustling metropolis.” *The Guardian*

“A poetic travelogue... A soulful performance... The film is already a period piece”. *The Independent*

“Visual poetry...tense with anticipation and restlessness...It’s hard to amply describe its pleasures in words.” *Little White Lies*

“It’s a work of gentle, swelling sadness that mourns a spirit of artistic and creative freedom”
**** (4 stars) *The Observer*

“Masterpiece...” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

“Tamer El Said films his city as one writes a farewell letter which, as everyone knows, is the most lively and poignant letter of love” *Le Monde*

“A striking film, an amazing mixture of tenderness and roughness” *Le Figaro*

“Modest and poetic at the same time, the film exerts an undeniable power of fascination”
Telerama

“The masterpiece of the Berlinale 2016” *CINEQUANON*

“One of the best films of 2016” *Nuovo Cinema Locatelli*

“One of the best Arab films in 2016” *BBC*

**** (4 stars) *The Evening Standard*

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Caligari Film Prize, Berlinale, Germany

Grand Prix, Festival des 3 Continents, France

Grand Prix, New Horizons International Film Festival, Poland

Best Director, Buenos Aires International Film festival (BAFICI), Argentina

Critics Award for Best Arab Film in 2016, Arab Cinema Center

Critics Award for Best Film, !f Istanbul Film Festival, Turkey

Best Film, San Francisco Arab Film Festival, USA

Best Debut Film, Forum of European Cinema Orlen Cinergia, Poland

Bronze Taiga Award, Spirit of Fire Film Festival, Russia

Youth Jury Award for Best Film, Festival des 3 Continents, France

Efebo D'Oro Award, Research Centre for Cinema and Narrative, Italy

Special Mention of the International Jury, !f Istanbul Film Festival, Turkey

“Indirectly and with overflowing stylistic cunning, the film slyly presents an entire region that has unjustly been in the shadows for far too long; a region that currently lies in the center of attention, but is nevertheless once again being obscured by clouds of ignorance and prejudice. This film is an outstanding example of how, as Godard put it, cinema is "not about making political films, but about making films politically.” *Jury of the Caligari Film Prize*, Berlinale 2016

“A moving and extremely personal city symphony that takes its audience on a journey connecting the most intimate to the state of the world we are living in today, a film from the heart” *Jury of New Horizons International Film Festival*, Poland 2016.

INTERVIEW WITH FILMMAKER TAMER EL SAID

by Yasmin Desouki

What motivated you to make IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CITY, and what inspired the title?

I've been wondering why, when we try to capture a moment in reality and put it on the big screen, something is always missing. Where does this magical mixture of spontaneity and structure go? How can a film be just as intense, multi-layered, complex, astonishing and surprising as life? I felt I had to question the method of making films and try to find a process that keeps each moment fresh and real, to allow the magic to come through.

I was born in Cairo and have lived in Downtown most of my life. It's one of the most photogenic cities in the world. It has this amazing mixture of tenderness and harshness. I wanted to try and learn how to film Cairo in a different, cinematic way, how to reflect and create the experience of Cairo on screen, to show the pulse of the street, the pulse of the people.

Personal life experiences motivated me to think of the film, too. Between 2005 and 2006, many events shaped my life. I lost my father. I also lost some friends in a fire that took place in a theatre in Beni Suef. It is horrible to imagine people burning inside a theatre and nobody is being held accountable. These were the last years of Mubarak's rule when it was clear on a political level that we couldn't continue like this. I wanted to reflect on all these complex feelings.

In the Last Days of the City is about the sensation that something is ending and a need to witness and document this moment. It has been the title of the film since 2008 and somehow it has always echoed with what is happening in reality.

How did you approach the making of the film, given it was inspired by real life stories?

Rasha Salti and I worked on the script for a year to weave all the stories together. We knew it had to have an open structure so we created a blueprint knowing it would develop while making the film itself.

With the actors I did many rehearsals, improvising the dialogue in order for them to get the right pace and to create a complicity between all of us. I was trying to remain open to what the city was giving me while at the same time keeping a level of control. So when we went to the shoot, I would ask the actors to forget everything they did in the rehearsal, to start from the beginning. The crew knew that we needed to be there and ready to capture the magic when it happened. This is something you can't organize. When we were in tune, we all knew it.

Can you talk about Khalid in the film - how much of his story is autobio-graphical?

Khalid is stuck between the past, his memories and a suffocating present in a city on edge. He is trying to find his way to a future that he can't see. This situation for me is very cinematic.

I want to distinguish between autobiographical and personal films. This film is a personal one. When I started to think of it, I was haunted by many events that were happening in my life. I promised myself that I would only speak about things I know. I don't feel comfortable speaking about people I don't know or presenting a world that I am not part of. I feel everything in cinema has to come from within.

Khalid as a character is in a battle against time. His mother is dying, he has to leave his flat, his ex-girlfriend is leaving the country and he has to finish his film. He doesn't feel that he has much time to achieve anything. Many things echo with what happened in my life, and his friends are my friends, but I don't see him as myself. Of course, the character has something of me in him, but he is distinct as well as fictional. Also, I didn't want to keep Khalid, the actor, from putting something of his soul into the character. And I think what he brought to the character is beautiful.

You were still in production at the time of the revolution in January 2011. Was there a decision not to include it, not to film it?

The revolution was a moment when you rethink everything, on every level. It was an amazing feeling seeing all our friends on the streets holding a camera freely, able to document without being arrested or trying to hide. It brought with it all these questions about what we should film, and our responsibility as filmmakers. During the 18 days I didn't feel the urge to film. I didn't want to look at what was happening through the lens of the camera. I wanted to participate and be part of this moment. But under the influence of others, we decided to film for half a day, and it felt wrong. For 2 years we had been shooting in the streets of Cairo using it as a backdrop and it always felt right, but it didn't feel right to use such a big moment as a backdrop for the film. When everything goes upside down, it's not simple. We couldn't use this moment before we understood it. And to understand it we needed time.

The revolution only opens up a possibility for change, but the change itself is our responsibility. I'm always asked if my film is about the revolution, or if it is 'revolutionary'. For me a revolutionary film is not a film that just films a revolution. It is a film that revolts against the old, established cinematic language. This is what I identify with. I always say the responsibility of doctors is to come up with new proposals for healthcare, and so the responsibility of filmmakers is to come up with new proposals for cinema.

The film took around 9 years to make. Can you elaborate on this process, why it took so long?

It is difficult to sum up 9 years in a few lines, but I will try. The journey of making any film is a journey of loneliness. Even though you are supported by everyone around you, the longer it takes the harder it is. Every day you feel that you have an appointment with your failure.

When I started work on the film I knew I wanted it to be like a free-wheeling kite in flight, like a train that doesn't stop, and as multi-layered as life. I didn't know how to find the balance between these three things at first.

To achieve this we had to create a production model that allowed me to have a high level of autonomy and freedom. Finding the right people to join this journey was not easy with almost no money. We had to organize a schedule that allowed people to work on the film without destroying their lives.

Egypt has a strong, well-established mainstream industry. There is no infrastructure for independent films, so we had to create an infrastructure to make the film the way we wanted. 90% of our energy was taken by building this infrastructure within a very difficult political and economic context. Keeping certain standards while lacking a big part of the budget was a crazy thing to do. We had to film, stop, look for money, film, and so on.

Directing and producing at the same time was hard, because you are fighting against yourself. Also, when you are talking about a film that was shot in 4 countries, with a crew from at least 10 countries, it's a lot of work.

The revolution gave a lot to me and the film, but it affected the schedule. It was impossible to make any plan and stick to it while there were daily battles in the streets.

The long production time is also related to building Cimatheque, a dream that grew with time. It's a place where people meet, watch films, learn things together - a home for independent cinema in Egypt. The revolution created a moment that made this dream possible. And it was impossible not to seize this moment. It's hard to imagine the time and effort it took to get this place built and opened.

I believe every film needs its time. Some films need less, some need more. In our case I'm convinced that the film needed the time it took.

ACTOR BIO

Khalid Abdalla (Khalid) is an actor who works across fields, as a producer and filmmaker but also in cultural production and alternative media. He has acted leading roles in films including Paul Greengrass's *United 93* and *Green Zone*, Marc Forster's *The Kite Runner*, Tala Hadid's *The Narrow Frame of Midnight*, and Danis Tanovic's *Tigers*. His upcoming films include: Susanna White's *Our Kind of Traitor*, Justin Kurzel's *Assassin's Creed* and Faruk Sabanovic's *Birds Like Us* - in which he plays a bat. In documentary film he has producing credits on Hanan Abdalla's *In the Shadow of a Man* and the upcoming film by Hanan Abdalla & Cressida Trew, *The Vote*. He also appears as himself in Jehane Noujaim's Oscar nominated *The Square*. Khalid is a founding member of three collaborative initiatives in Cairo – Cimatheque, Zero Production and Mosireen. Born in Glasgow and brought up in London, he lives in Cairo.

DIRECTOR BIO

TAMER EL SAID, Director, Screenwriter & Producer

Tamer El Said is a filmmaker living between Berlin and Cairo where he was born in 1972. He studied filmmaking and journalism and went on to make many documentaries and short films that received several international and local awards. He was also teaching at the High Cinema Institute in Cairo between 1999 and 2003. In 2002, he took on the role of Senior Producer and Artistic Consultant for Nile Productions, moving across to *Hot Spot Films* in Dubai in 2003. His time as Senior Producer at Hot Spot saw the company expanded dramatically, producing 250 documentaries in 58 countries, and winning several international awards. Tamer founded *Zero Production* in 2007 to produce independent films. He is also a founder of *Cimatheque - Alternative Film Centre* in Egypt, a multipurpose space that provides facilities, training and programming for the independent filmmaking community. El Said has also run mentoring workshops in many international film and art spaces including, among others, the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London, the School of the Art Institute in Chicago (SAIC) and Silent Green in Berlin.

CAST

Khalid Abdalla	Khalid
Laila Samy	Laila
Hanan Youssef	Hanan
Maryam Saleh	Maryam
Hayder Helo	Hassan
Basim Hajar	Tarek
Bassem Fayad	Bassem
Ali Sobhi	Ali
Islam Kamel	Editor
Mohamed Gaber	Gaber
Zeinab Mostafa	Mother

CREW

Director

Tamer El Said

Producers

Tamer El Said
Khalid Abdalla

Screenwriters

Tamer El Said
Rasha Salti

Co-Producers

Hana Al Bayaty
Marcin Malaszczyk
Michèl Balagué
Cat Villiers

Cinematography

Bassem Fayad

Editors

Mohamed Abdel Gawad
Vartan Avakian
Barbara Bossuet

Art direction

Salah Marei

Music

Amélie Legrand
Victor Moïse

Sound Mixing

Mikael Barre

Sound design

Victor Bresse

Color grading

Jorge Piquer Rodriguez

Costume design

Zeina Kiwan

Visual Effects

Unai Rosende