



## PRESS RELEASE

### REEF encounters 2024: a sixth edition focusing on human and biodiversity

For the sixth year in a row, REEF Encounters, an event combining environment, rurality, art, and cinema, will take place in Kobayat on July 26, 27, and 28, 2024. It will be preceded by a new collaboration with Oakenfest in Lehfed on July 19 and 20. This edition will host new events and activities. In light of the ongoing attacks against the inhabitants and lands of southern Lebanon, as well as the genocide and ecocide in Palestine, REEF 2024 will consider this context through its program.

### Preserving human and biological diversity in the current context

Despite its small territory, Lebanon is home to exceptional biodiversity, including endemic species such as cedar and juniper trees, the striped hyena, and the Lebanese viper. However, this ecosystem is under threat from all sides. Rampant climate change, uncontrolled urbanization, arson, logging, quarries, over-hunting and fishing, lack of sewage and waste treatment, and private control of common property pose significant dangers. Similarly, the human diversity that characterizes Lebanon and its neighboring countries is a vulnerable intangible asset to be preserved.

In addition to these challenges, Lebanon is suffering from ongoing social and economic disintegration exacerbated by the violence inflicted on its southern inhabitants and the genocide in Palestine. Ethnic cleansing, pollution from chemical weapons, and the destruction of habitats, lands, and historical monuments amplify the loss of diversity and deprive current and future generations of their ecological and cultural heritage. According to REEF's organizing committee: "In the midst of this cycle of violence, injustice, and intolerance, REEF is a way of holding on to the diversity that has shaped our land and the people throughout our region. In this gloomy climate, REEF is anchoring its presence in rural areas to cultivate inclusion, openness to others, and all forms of culture and creation."

#### The butterfly, REEF's mascot for 2024

Chosen as the symbol of REEF 2024, butterflies contribute significantly to the balance of biodiversity. Like bees, they are crucial pollinators whose existence is threatened by pollution and the destruction of their natural habitats. If they were to disappear, the food chain and plant diversity could suffer, along with their natural predators such as bats, birds, and amphibians. Through its metamorphosis, the butterfly is a metaphor for transformation and hope. Across cultures, it has become a symbol for rebirth and resurrection, for the triumph of the spirit and the soul over the physical prison.

## Highlights of the 2024 program

*The activity schedules can be found on REEF's website*

### REEF, special guest at Oakenfest July 19-20, 2024

Since 2013, the Oakenfest has been showcasing the alternative music scene of the Arab world in the natural setting of the Lehfed oak forest. For the first time, REEF will be a guest at this festival, organizing three activities:

- Film screenings: "The Third Rahbany" a film by Feyrouz Serhal that sheds light on the life, career and legacy of Lebanese composer Elias Rahbani and "Coming home" a short documentary by Naim Naif & Margot Bowman about Freedom Dabka Group, a group of Palestinian-American performers.
- A moderate hike and another promenade Arz Jaj Cedar Reserve, both supervised by mountain guides and experts from Oakenfest and REEF.
- A comprehensive waste management operation for the festival will include sorting all waste, which will then be sent for recycling. This initiative, handled by REEF for Oakenfest, aims to reduce the festival's environmental footprint and promote sustainable practices among attendees.

### REEF Kobayat from July 26 to 28, 2024

- **"Biodiversity & Cinema"**

"Biodiversity and Cinema" is a project that brought together filmmakers and ecologists for the first time in Lebanon to create documentary works on biodiversity. Implemented by Hammana Artist House, REEF, and AFLAMUNA, it was launched at the end of 2023 with a "biodiversity residency." During this residency, a group of 22 filmmakers and ecologists followed a biodiversity awareness program before creating and producing eight short films. REEF 2024 in Kobayat will host the first screening of these works, with the filmmakers and environmentalists present to discuss their experiences and the issues raised in their films with the audience.

Shot in various regions of Lebanon, the films tackle different themes related to biodiversity:

- 'The Snake Hill' by Joëlle Abou Chabké on pesticides and permaculture in the Bekaa.
- 'A Grotto for Sale' by Muriel Honein on the sale of a grotto in Northern Lebanon.
- 'The Tree of Hell' by Raed Zeno on the danger of imported invasive plants.
- 'The Earth Weavers' by Rima Kaddissi on women's ancestral traditions.
- 'Shift' by Moussa Shabandar & Shérine Raffoul on the observation of migratory birds.
- 'Memory Within a Tree' by Wassim Tanios on the endemic Lebanese Juniper tree.
- 'Manthour Beirut' by Farah F. Naboulsi on the endemic flower in the heart of Beirut.
- 'Along the water' by Rebecca Taouk on the challenges surrounding water resources from Tripoli to the Kornet el Sawda Mountain peak.

The films will be voted on by the public and judged by a professional jury and an amateur youth jury, the "REEF Ambassadors". The winner of the professional jury prize will receive a financial award courtesy of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF).

- **The international short films annual competition**

For the 6th consecutive year, REEF Encounters is organizing a short-film competition for Arab filmmakers, aligned with the current edition's theme of "Biological and Human Diversity." This year, the following eight films have been selected and will be screened during the REEF encounters :

- I Come from the Sea by Feyrouz Serhal
- Cinders by Oskar Luko
- Manity by Hussien Ibraheem
- Golden Sea by Erik Sémarshkin

- The revenge of nature by Kim Elias Majdalani
- Xiaohui he ta de niu by Xinying Lao
- Kendila by Nadia Rais
- Light And Dust by Sami Emad Farah

A prize will be awarded by a professional jury to one of these films that will also be part of the audience and REEF Ambassadors awards.

**REEF's** jury of professionals will include this year Soleil Gharbieh, grant manager at the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), Michelle Kesserwany, filmmaker, Betty Taoutel, actress, author, and director, Marc Beyrouiti, Agriculture engineer, and Carlos Naffah, University Professor and Multidisciplinary Consultant in Public Policy & Infrastructure Development.

- **Selection of international films out of competition**

- "Les Chenilles" by Lebanese filmmakers Michelle and Joelle Kesserwany, winner of the Golden Bear for Best Short Film at Berlinale 2023.
- "The Key" by Palestinian director Rakan Mayssi.
- "Goodbye Julia" by Sudanese director Mohammad Kordofani, winner of the Prix de la Liberté in the "Un Certain Regard" section at the Cannes Film Festival and nominated for an Oscar in the International Feature Film category.
- "Vicky and her Mystery" by French director Denis Imbert (appropriate for all ages).
- "Tale of the Three Jewels" by Palestinian director Michel Khleifi (appropriate for all ages).

- **REEF ambassadors: 2nd edition**

After the success of its first edition in 2023, REEF Ambassadors program is now an integral part of the encounters. It is a tailor-made program for 13 to 15 young people from Akkar aged 13 to 18. In 2024, the REEF ambassadors will take part this year in information sessions on biodiversity, biomimicry, creative workshops, film screening sessions and an introduction to film criticism.

- **Sightseeing hikes and visits**

- "Helesban: from the valley to the mountain" : A trek through Helsban Valley and its oak trees to reach the top of a mountain. under the guidance of the 2023 REEF Ambassadors who have been trained for this purpose ahead of REEF.
- "Wilds and Tales" Walk and learn about plants, birds, reptiles. A hike along the Menjez River in the company of biodiversity experts combined with a visit to the fossil exhibition.
- "Refresh, on the Fir Trail", tales of trees in Kammuah. A walk to discover the cedar, fir of Silica and Juniper trees of the Kamuah Plain.
- "Discovering Kobayat" with a local guide, stories and landmarks of Kobayat will be revealed, as well as encountering some of the architectural heritage in the silk factory neighborhood.

- **A conference-debate: Human and biological diversity under threat, the case of South Lebanon.**

In the context of the violence perpetrated in southern Lebanon by the Israeli army, the conference-debate will draw an analogy between the dangers of politicizing identity in highly diverse societies and the threats to biodiversity through extensive destruction, monocultures (identity-based states), and other stresses such as resource depletion for war purposes. The talk will examine the damage done in southern Lebanon and explore possibilities for environmental recovery, such as soil recovery from phosphorus.

- **Zero waste encounters, plastic collection competition and upcycling workshop**

- REEF Encounters is pursuing its "zero waste" policy by sorting and collecting all waste, which is then recycled by partner companies. To mark the occasion, a plastic waste collection competition will be organized with the "Join the Circle", with a prize awarded to the winner.
- REEF Encounters also offers an opportunity to learn the basics of upcycling fabrics and garments with designer Rytta Couture. The resulting garments will be presented at the end of the event.

- **Two exhibitions hosted by REEF**

- "Lebanon: A Treasure of Biodiversity" is an exhibition by the French Institute featuring 25 emblematic photographs of Lebanon's endemic species and natural ecosystems.
- "From Ink to Action: Using Comic Art to Save the Planet" is an immersive exhibition produced by the Lakes International Comic Art Festival (LICAF) and the British Council - MENA. Through comics, artists from Lebanon and the Arab world explore the challenges of the climate crisis and environmental threats.

- **Rural dinners "from the heart": a tribute to women's rural culinary heritage**

REEF Encounters 2024 will honor rural culinary traditions passed down by women. Over the three days of the encounters, three talented women, along with their kitchen associates, will transform into chefs to share their culinary specialties. These rural dinners will showcase the ancestral tradition of foraging.

In addition to these dinners, REEF will host a workshop on potatoes, an ingredient that is cultivated abundantly in Akkar. Participants will have the opportunity to explore how to transform the potato into an additional source of income. The outcomes of the session will be showcased during the 'Dinner from the Heart' event.

- **An evening of music with Salwa Jaradat**

A Palestinian singer born in Beirut, Salwa Jaradat has performed in several ensembles and theatrical productions in the city. Her concert at REEF is a tribute to Southern Lebanon and Palestine.

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## PRACTICAL INFO

- The Silk Factory, a remarkable 18th-century historic monument, will host most of the events at REEF Kobayat. REEF Encounters in Kobayat activities are free of charge, with the exception of rural dinners and a small fee for the hike buses.
- Hikes, Kobayat sightseeing and the musical performance require prior registration on the following number: 81 073 756.
- Details and conditions of access to Oakenfest are available at <https://ihjoz.com/events/7872>

## PRESS & MEDIA CONTACT

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<http://www.reefassociation.org/>



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## **REEF ORGANIZERS**

**REEF** began in 2019 as an event combining the environment and cinema in the village of Kobayat in the Akkar region of northern Lebanon. Building on the success of its five editions, it has evolved into a collective developing programs that harness the power of arts and culture to address the issue of environment protection in rural areas. In addition to its encounters, REEF designs and develops creative workshops to empower rural women and youth, film competitions to support creative filmmaking on environment issues, and eco-responsible activities (recycling, composting, upcycling...). The REEF team is made up of environmental experts, artists, filmmakers and project managers. REEF works also on setting up a multidisciplinary local network of entities and individuals working together throughout the Lebanese territory on common projects and goals.

**AFLAMUNA** is a cultural nonprofit based in Beirut working to harness the power of independent Arab cinema to elevate the most pressing social, political, and cultural movements of our time. Established in 1999, it has launched multiple programs and initiatives that helped independent Arab cinema flourish and support filmmakers. AFLAMUNA promotes the decentralization of the culture in rural spaces as well as the development of the youth skills in expressing themselves through video and films.

**The Council of Environment was founded in 1995 in** Kobayat and has been working since then to protect Akkar's natural heritage and raise awareness of ecological issues. The association was the first in Lebanon to build a watchtower to prevent forest fires and other violations. It offers training courses for mountain guides and fire prevention as well as environmental awareness sessions in Akkar schools. The Council is part of a network of environmental NGOs working together for a common cause.

## **REEF 2024 IS SUPPORTED BY**

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Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie

The French Embassy - French Institute

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## **IN PARTNERSHIP WITH**

Oakenfest

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