



Press release  
September 5, 2023

### **REEF Encounters closes its fifth edition in Kobayat and heads for Hermel from September 8 to 10**

**Nearly 6,000 people from Akkar and all regions of Lebanon took part in REEF Encounters, held from August 31 to September 4, 2023 in Kobayat. Featuring the environment, cinema, performing arts and rural life, this fifth edition of the festival offered a number of emotionally-charged highlights that were acclaimed by the public. From September 8 to 10, the Hermel public will welcome an extension of REEF encounters on the banks of the Orontes.**

#### **3 awards and 2 special mentions for short and medium-length film competitions**

The fifth edition in Kobayat was closed with the award ceremony for short and medium-length film that were screened during the Encounters.

11 Arab films, screened during the Encounters, were part of the short-film competition selection from 120 movies received by the festival team. The jury members for the short film competition were actress Nada Bou Farhat, director Hady Zaccak and visual effects expert and post-producer Mahmoud Korek.

First prize was awarded to the short film "The Claw Machine" by George Salameh. According to jury member Mahmoud Korek, "by adopting a simple form consisting of paper, pen, black-and-white scribbles and a few words, this work took us into the heart of terrifying transformations. We saw Gaza, Beirut, Baghdad, Aleppo, Homs and all the towns and villages that are transformed by those who stay and those who leave.

The film looks at those claws we feel around us without seeing them. This short film reminds us that transformations not only change us but they also devour us."

The jury's second prize went to Jihad Saadé for his film "Pas loin d'ici". The jury praised the performances of actors Rabih El-Ahmar and Léa Jarih. Nada Abou Farhat declared that "the film takes us gently and simply, brilliantly, towards invisible transformations. The film tells us nothing because the story is no longer possible in the city of Beirut. Bottled-up Beirut remains the city of borders and barriers, which now live within us. At the heart of this equation lies the impossibility of the encounter."

The professional jury also added a special mention to Nicolas Fattouh's animated film "How My Grandmother Became a Chair". For Hadi Zacack, "the film transforms the themes of our elders' old age, family ties and class differences into a poetic work characterized by its audiovisual elements. It's a silent work that teaches us a lot."

Thanks to Aflamuna, co-organizer of REEF, the competition for short films from the Arab world will continue online, with a "general public" prize to be awarded at the end of September. 9 short films can be viewed free of charge on the aflamuna online site under the theme of transformations until the end of September.

As an amateur jury, the "Young REEF Ambassadors" chose to reward the Colombian medium-length film "Sonic Forest" by Josh Thome and Simón Hernández, while also mentioning the Russian film "Haulout". The 10-member jury, made up of teenagers aged 13 to 16 from Akkar, explained their choice by the film's ability to shed light on the nurturing role of nature and the forest, and the struggle of indigenous Colombians to preserve their natural heritage. The jury also appreciated the film's close link between the natural sounds emanating from the forest and the music created by men.

### **Set course for Hermel!**

The Orontes River (El-Assi) will be the focus of the first edition of REEF in Hermel from September 8 to 10. Long overexploited as a site for local recreation and tourism, the Orontes is now seriously polluted. Festival highlights in the Hermel will include:

- Two mornings of activities in nature: around the Orontes integrating rafting and hiking, and in the heights of the Hermel, the "jird", to explore the natural riches and the dangers that lurk there;
- screenings of Arab and international films and one-minute films made by the women of Hermel;
- a conference-debate organized by the Hermel Cultural Association with Legal Agenda on the challenges of preserving the Orontes, with various Hermel experts presenting the challenges and solutions for preserving this vital resource, as well as a discussion-projection on food sovereignty organized by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung - Beirut Office;
- a concert with musician and Oud player Hussein Khalil and the talents of Hermel;
- a creative workshop for youngsters

These free events will take place on the premises of the Hermel Cultural Association and at the Maison de l'Oronte. The detailed program can be found on the festival's website and social networks.