



PRESS RELEASE

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Biodiversity & Cinema

8 films to discover this summer along with a unique experience!

The "Biodiversity and Cinema" program is the first collaboration in Lebanon between 22 environmentalists and filmmakers who took part in a biodiversity residency in December 2023 and then worked on the production of 8 short documentaries. Their films will be shown this summer in Kobayat in Akkar, Bkassine in Southern Lebanon, Tripoli, Beirut and various locations in the Bekaa.

A unique experience in the Arab world

Led by Hammana Artist House, the REEF association and AFLAMUNA, the "Biodiversity and Cinema" program uses cinema as a lever for promoting Lebanon's natural heritage. The aim is for local communities to have a better understanding of biodiversity, its importance and the need to preserve it. The project is supported by the French Embassy in Lebanon, the French Institute in coordination with Lebanon Eco Movement and benefited from a production grant from IMS (International Media Support). *"The project establishes a connection between artistic visions and issues of general interest, and forges links between artists and activists, environmental experts, civil society organizations and the general public. Creating bridges and encounters is what makes sense to us at Hammana Artist House, and that's why we wanted to set up this initiative with REEF and AFLAMUNA",* explains Aurélien Zouki, co-artistic director of Hammana Artist House.

Launched in December 2023, following a call for applications, Biodiversity and Cinema brought together 22 ecologists and filmmakers in a residency at Hammana Artist House. Through this first stage, they have forged bonds and deepened their knowledge of biodiversity thanks to the presence of multidisciplinary experts (specialists in trees, mycology, birds, marine life, etc.) and field visits. The residents were then divided into teams and worked throughout the first semester of 2024 on the creation, filming and production of 8 short documentaries.

"Through this project, the only one of its kind in the Arab world, we want to encourage and enrich contemporary Arab cinema creation with narratives about ecology, biodiversity and rurality. This ties in with what we've been doing within the REEF association, especially with our annual encounters in rural areas since 2019," says Eliane Raheb, producer of the films and artistic director of REEF.

8 films to be released this summer

Shot in various regions of Lebanon, the 8 films tackle different themes relating to the preservation of biodiversity: pesticides and permaculture in the Bekaa, the private takeover of common property illustrated by the sale of a grotto in northern Lebanon, the danger of imported invasive plants, the natural link between ancestral feminine traditions and the protection of the land, ornithological observation, the importance of endemic species such as the juniper or the matthiola flower, and the challenges surrounding water resources from Tripoli to the Qornet El Saouda mountain.

To discover these stories, several screenings are scheduled this summer throughout Lebanon, in the presence of the film crews, to encourage exchanges with the public. The first will take place on Friday July 26 at the 6th REEF festival in Kobayat, with an awards ceremony sponsored by the OIF (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie). A second screening is scheduled in Bkassine in Southern Lebanon, which represents a strong symbol given the current situation of the inhabitants. The following dates and locations will follow: August 29 at Hammama Artist House, August 31 in Tripoli. Details of these screenings and other dates will be announced on REEF's association website, Facebook and Instagram pages.

"The program has been a turning point in my life."

The "Biodiversity & Cinema" mode of collaboration, based on cooperation, sharing and emulation, was an exceptional human experience for all participants. Sharing her experience, Joëlle Abou-Chabké, filmmaker says: "The Biodiversity and Cinema residency enabled me to reconnect with the deeper reasons why I want to make films. It enriched me personally and professionally, and strengthened my conviction that cinema can be a powerful tool for change."

As for the environmental activist Ghiwa Fakhry: "The program has been a turning point in my life, as it was the first time I had come into contact with so many brilliant environmentalists in my country who are fighting for the environment and to stay in their country. These like-minded people are working on the same mission to protect the environment and are doing it in various ways: through academia, fieldwork, advocacy, activism, and in their daily efforts to maintain their agricultural lands, even in the most marginalized areas."

FILM SYNOPSIS

The Snake Hill by Joëlle Abou Chabké

Joëlle, a filmmaker, returns to her homeland with her husband Melhem to start a permaculture project. With the support of her herpetologist friend Rami, she tackles her fear of snakes. However, she soon realizes her real mission begins when she discovers the neighboring lands are being devastated by pesticides.

A Grotto for Sale by Muriele Honein

In the mountains of Donnieh in Lebanon, a natural grotto full of stalagmites, water and bats is for sale. Alternating between reality and fantasy, it's a portrait of the grotto, by looking at its inside, surroundings, neighbors, while questioning the future of the grotto.

The Tree of Hell by Raed Zeno

Raed discovers by chance that the beautiful tree growing in front of his house is one of the invasive trees that threatens the environmental diversity in the Lebanese forest. He begins the journey of exploring this tree with his friend Hadi and Dr. Muhammad, who specializes in invasive plants, at a time when the country is exposed to another type of invasion represented by Israeli attacks on humans and their environment.

The Earth Weavers by Rima Kaddissi

"The Earth Weavers" celebrates the collective journey back to the land, a journey of women bonded by their shared stories. It's a testament to the transformative power of communal care, where women come together to reclaim their ancestral knowledge, language, culture, and land. Their stories speak volumes about the profound connection between humans and the natural world, portrayed not just as a source of solace, but also as a form of resistance against the oppressive forces that seek to disconnect us from our roots.

Shift by Moussa Shabandar & Shérine Raffoul

Every morning for as long as he can remember, Chadi has been on the lookout for birds in his region, Hammama. A journey from death to life.

Memory within a tree by Wassim Tanios

It's a journey in the high arid mountains with two dedicated men to encounter the Juniper tree, revealing their active connection to this tree thus restoring its lost value as a sacred living organism, a keeper of memory and an ecological pillar essential in our present time and to our future.

Mānthōūr Bayrūt by Farah F. Naboulsi

A native Beirut takes a journey to the edge of her city, where she is drawn to explore a state of oneness with an endemic flower, the matthiola. The flower's endangered status stirs up questions about the scattered sense of belonging and duality of her world. Through diverse encounters, the flower reveals herself as the protagonist, and invites the narrator to explore the wilderness and brutality of Beirut's last remaining public coastal areas.

Along the water by Rebecca Taouk

The film embarks on a reverse journey of water, starting at the river's mouth Abou Ali and traveling upstream to its origin. Along this path, we encounter four individuals—Samir, Hisham, Antoine, and Ghiwa—each interacting with different landscapes along the river's course. From the bustling city of Tripoli, through the serene Valley of Qannoubin and the mountain cedars region, the journey culminates with Ghiwa at Qornet el Sawda, the highest peak in the middle east and the biggest source of water in the region. The film highlights challenges faced by water and nature, the importance of biodiversity, and how nature positively impacts mental and emotional well-being.
