

Boston Palestine Film Festival returns for 16th year to ‘spark conversation’

[bostonglobe.com/2022/10/11/arts/boston-palestine-film-festival-returns-16th-year-spark-conversation/](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/10/11/arts/boston-palestine-film-festival-returns-16th-year-spark-conversation/)

By Dusty Christensen and Maya Homan Globe correspondent and Globe Correspondent, Updated October 11, 2022, 3:09 p.m. [Email to a Friend](#) [Share on Facebook](#) [Share on Twitter](#) [Print this Article](#) [View Comments](#)



An unwanted pregnancy. The atrocities of the Syrian civil war. A salon owner blackmailing a client into working for an occupying military power.

These are just some of the topics featured in the 16th annual Boston Palestine Film Festival, which returns Oct. 14-23 with an array of short films and documentary and narrative features that highlight Palestinian culture and perspectives. This year’s festival will be hybrid, with seven in-person programs screened across three venues in Boston, and seven that can be seen virtually. The majority of the in-person films will be shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, with the Emerson Paramount Center and Coolidge Corner Theatre screening films at the latter end of the festival.

The lineup features live-action and animated movies from a wide range of directors. They include internationally renowned filmmakers like Jordan-based writer and director Darin J. Sallam, whose drama “Farha” opens the festival Friday at the MFA, and the Academy Award-nominated Hany Abu-Assad, whose thriller “Huda’s Salon” plays at the museum the next day.

Get The Big To-Do

Your guide to staying entertained, from live shows and outdoor fun to the newest in museums, movies, TV, books, dining, and more.

Jordan-based writer and director Darin J. Sallam's drama "Farha" opens the Boston Palestine Film Festival at the Museum of Fine Arts. Courtesy of Boston Palestine Film Festival

"We program films by Palestinians throughout the world," said Michael Maria, the festival's director of programming. "So Palestinians that live in Palestine and Israel, Palestinians that live in refugee camps around the area, and then Palestinians in the diaspora, US and elsewhere."

There will also be some local talent: Filmmaker and Emerson professor Hanadi Elyan will be in attendance to participate in a Q&A event following the 7 p.m. screening of her film, "Salma's Home," on Oct. 20 at the Emerson Paramount Center's Bright Family Screening Room. The film will be preceded by a showing of actress and director Samar Qupty's "Hush," a narrative short that follows two friends dealing with the possibility that one of them has an unwanted pregnancy.

Elyan told the Globe that "Salma's Home," like her other films, features strong Arab women as leads — in this case, the two wives and daughter of a man who have to put aside their differences and deal with his death and their resulting inheritance.

"We usually see these characters put in certain little small boxes filled with stereotypes: of the victim Arab woman, or the oppressed, or even the terrorist sometimes," Elyan said. "But we never see strong women making their own decisions and taking control of their own lives, so that's what I'm most interested in."

Many of the films screened at the festival are created by members of the Palestinian diaspora, but having a Palestinian director is not a requirement to participate in the festival. The films can be "directed by any person of any background or nationality, as long as they honestly present Palestinian voices," Maria said.

Elyan's parents are both Palestinians who became refugees when they were children, making Jordan their adopted home, she said. She was born in Dubai and grew up between the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, which is where "Salma's Home" takes place.

"Palestinians come in different forms and from different places, and sometimes there is gatekeeping over the Palestinian identity," Elyan said. "Sometimes, unfortunately, it is reduced to one sort of narrative. So having a diverse program like the one that the Boston Palestine Film Festival usually puts together is quite important."

Academy Award-nominated director Hany Abu-Assad's thriller "Huda's Salon" will be screened at the MFA on Saturday. Courtesy of Boston Palestine Film Festival

In addition to narrative films, the festival will feature several political documentaries. They include "Little Palestine, Diary of a Siege," which documents the brutalities of the Syrian civil war inside the Damascus-based Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk, and "The Devil's Drivers," which chronicles eight years in the lives of Palestinians who eke out an uncertain existence smuggling undocumented workers into Israel for construction jobs.

"We are in a very tough situation," one unnamed worker explains in the film. "We're forced to drive with smugglers to Israel. ... Any moment they can catch us and send us to jail."

Filmmakers Daniel Carsenty and Mohammed Abugeth obtained remarkable access to the smugglers as they sped through the desert, avoiding Israeli soldiers while crossing the border in the one southern part of the West Bank where Israel's border wall hadn't been built yet. The documentary shines a light on the plight of Palestinian workers who, unable to find viable jobs in the occupied West Bank, risk arrest or Israeli gunfire to cross the border. One worker who makes it into Israel details his experience sleeping on the floor of job sites with no bathroom.

"They put their lives at risk, but they do so to survive," smuggler Hamouda says of the workers he shuttles daily.

Also screening at the festival is the documentary "Boycott," which follows three plaintiffs who challenged their states' laws against boycotting Israel. The subjects of "Boycott" include Texas-based childhood speech therapist Bahia Amawi, a Palestinian-American mother of four who lost her job after she refused to sign the state's antiboycott pledge, and Alan Leveritt, publisher of the weekly Arkansas Times newspaper who refused to sign an antiboycott pledge for the newspaper to receive state-paid advertising. Both sued over their states' laws.

Maria said he is looking forward to the conversations and sense of community that this festival spurs as more festival-goers return to theater seats. (Last year's event included one film that was screened in person.)

"The films are meant to be watched collectively, and not just people sitting in their living rooms alone," he said. "It's supposed to spark conversation, spark the chance for people to question some preconceived notions they may have, and to explore their own development."

And for filmmakers, too, the return of in-person screenings is a relief.

"The communal experience is so important and we've been robbed from it in the pandemic and it hurts," said Elyan, the director. She said that in the theater, people are more attentive and draw emotional energy from those around them.

Plus, she added, "Salma's Home" was meant to be seen in the theater. "It's beautifully shot, so you want to showcase it on a big screen."

Learn more at <https://bostonpalestinefilmfest.org/>.

Dusty Christensen can be reached at dusty.christensen@protonmail.com. Follow him on Twitter [@dustyc123](https://twitter.com/dustyc123).

Maya Homan can be reached at maya.homan@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@MayaHoman](https://twitter.com/MayaHoman).