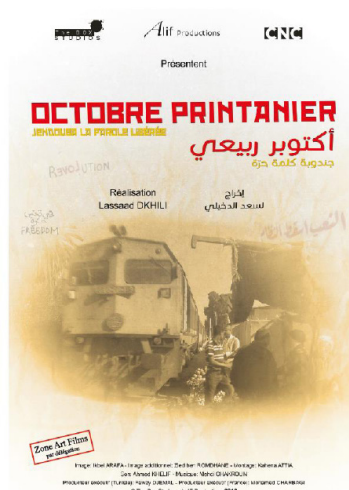


Article

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30 years and A Revolution: Two or three things about Tunisian Cinema



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This text is a subjective observation of one of many histories of Tunisian cinema that can be related. This text is a point of view on Tunisian cinema without any analytical or critical claim. It's one of 24 possible truths about this history.

It took more or less thirty years and a revolution for Tunisian cinema to be interested in human and to move from an intellectually abstract cinema to one that deals with reality and the humanity. Thus it evolved towards a writing which privileges the plot and narrative which touches the affect. After the January 2011 revolution, we are witnessing the birth of a generation of filmmakers of all ages who are developing a new vision of Tunisia by taking a critical and analytical look at this country. A generation that offers free cinema

without intellectual pretension, which wants to be close to a certain popular demand. It is a cinema that dares to base itself on this new idea of 'no borders' to go and touch the feelings where it hurts to do good to a cinema that succeeds in gleaning prizes in major international festivals where Tunisian movies were absent for years

For sure, this post-revolution generation also took advantage of what their elders did during the years of dictatorship by creating breaches through which they distilled ideas of freedom by breaking certain taboos. It was in the eighties that Tunisian cinema tackled the taboos it tried to break through with mirror films like *Halfaoine* by Farid Boughdir or that of Nouri Bouzid *L'homme de Cendres* and that of Moncef Dhouib *The Sultan of the Medina*

as well as Moufida Tlatli's film *The Silence of the Palaces*. Films that have reconciled the audience with its cinema and its creators. During the years which followed other directors will make attempts which remain timid. This trend will continue in a discontinuous way, until the end of the 1990s. Personal films where the individual is at the center of the story. From the 2000s, Tunisian cinema experienced a new turning point with the emergence of new women and men filmmakers who were going to exploit other universes and



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other genres, by digging deeper into the idea of breaking taboos, by attacking other themes where politics is inscribed at second reading. Filmmakers who excel in terms of aesthetics and story development. Thus directors such as Jilani Saadi, or Nidhal Chatta, or Raja Amari and Kalthoum Bornaz do not hesitate to take the cinema to other fields which were 'reserved for foreign films' *No Man's Land* by Nidhal Chatta is a mixture by David Lynch and Godard, a story in the form of a road mo-

vie which narrated singular characters who are lost and who suffer from a lack of belonging. While Jilani Saadi with his film *Khorma* which is an allegory of power, he is digging a new furrow in this new tendency to show the flaws of a dictatorship which some critics call 'soft'.

Raja Laamari with her film *Red Satin* highlights the importance of emancipation and the re-appropriation by the woman of her body; An 'ar-



The Silences of the Palace

rogant' film that goes even further in the idea of breaking the taboos that block a 'conservative' and 'schizophrenic' society.

The documentary film will also experience an even more reckless development. Documentary filmmakers are starting to self-finance and self-produce thanks to the democratization of the means of production and digital. The directors are no longer dependent on state subsidies to capture a reality in continuous movement. A reality which lends itself to this new tendency to show Tunisia in other ways

than fiction does not show it. The revolution of January 2011 allowed the liberation of directors thanks to digital technology which en-



Fellaga

abled them to deal with topics that were both ethnographic but also sociological and political. A significant number of films marked this period, some of which will be cited which are original in their treatment and their speeches. Among these films we find *Kharsallah, the Seed of God* By Kamel Laridhi, *Spring October* by Lassaad DKHILI and also Abdallah Yahya with his film *We are Here* which puts a singular look on a disadvantaged suburb.

The film critic Tarek ben Chaabane said in his book 'Reading Tunisian cinematographic production' by asking the question 'mythical revolution or myth of the revolution?' 'That the filmmakers of the cinematographic field and those who fight to hoist it have all had to arise in history by positioning themselves in front of this authenticity', and he adds, 'the moments of poetry arise when the cameras get rid of the influence of ideology'. An ideology from which they distance themselves by looking for this long hidden truth and by looking where it was impossible to deliver us or let us know what this revolution has brought positive. It shows us the hope of

a youth who did not believe in anything and who begins to appropriate the street, to appropriate language, freedom of expression and other prohibitions. Films like *Fellaga* by Rafik Omrani or *Cursed is the Phosphate* by Sami Tlili, are documentaries which auscultate the new emerging society after the revolution and which offer an idea of what will happen to Tunisia by giving voice to singular people, to



Tlameess.

those who were at the heart of the revolution. Cinema took advantage of this revolt to touch on all themes and diversify points of view. Tackle the family, the problem of the couple, the marginality by criticizing both society but also the media by highlighting the importance of the human. Freedom of expression dearly paid and won. Tunisian cinema after the revolution is a cinema of the flourishing of being by freeing itself from appearing, by riding the wave of freedom with filmmakers like Mohamed ben Attia and Lotfi Achour. A freedom used to explore other more personal universes, even more universal by freeing oneself from

the cinema object to express oneself with image and sound by creating universes far from identity identification and which recounts the return at the origins. Ala Eddine Slim, who joins in this vein, will even push this reflection in his latest film *Tlameess*.

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