



Director of Photography: Bassem Fayad . Sound and Sound Design: Victor Bresse
Producers: Carine Doumit & Jad Abi-Khalil . Grading: REZ/ Bilal Hibri . Producer: Jad Abi-Khalil

DIARIES OF A FLYING DOG (Yawmiat Kalb Ta'r)

DIARIES OF A FLYING DOG



CONTENT

Time has no beginning and no end, if it spins in a circle. Each point can be a start or a finish, or simply an abstract point. We can chose to begin and end, or we can chose to be. A family of four generations in their house in the Lebanese mountains. A dog.

What does it mean to live in war that constantly changes features and never ends? What does it mean to care for a family in such a situation? Which values do you teach your children? What is society in a civil war? Or the nation? Can one heal before peace?

Using the example of his biography - from the first year of the civil war in 1975 till the early weeks of the Islamic State in summer 2014 - Bassem Fayad lovingly and courageously examines how life moves on while war rotates in and around it.

CREDITS

Lebanon/UAE, 2014, colour, digital,
75 min, Arabic with English subtitles

Director, Scriptwriter Bassem Fayad | Producer Jad
Abi-Khalil | Cinematographer Bassem Fayad | Editors
Carine Doumit, Jad Abi-Khalil | Sound, Sound-Design
Victor Bress



DIARIES OF A FLYING DOG



FILM-MAKER

Film-maker Bassem Fayad

Lebanese Director of Photography, Director and Photographer Bassem Fayad lives in Beirut. He has worked extensively as DOP of films on the Middle East, working in Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia and Cairo.

In 2002, he was selected by Kodak International as one of the 10 best talents in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In 2003-2004 Bassem Directed and Shot Beirut-Baghdad, which received a Special Mention at the Mediterranean Film Festival in Montpellier and The Road Beyond the Sunset that won the Public Award at the Ayam Beirut al Cinemaia Festival and Best Documentary at the Al Jazeera Film Festival in 2005.

In 2008 he was the Director of photography of the documentary "The One Man Village" by Simon El Habre that won over 10 international prizes. In 2011 he joined Mr. El Habre shooting his new film "Gate # 5".

More recently Bassem has worked as DOP with renown directors: Mohamad Soueid on " The Sky Above", Akram Zaatari on " Letter To A Refusing Pilot" and "Beirut Exploded views" among others, as well as Ghassan Salhab on his new feature "The Valley".



FESTIVALS

Dubai International Film Festival (UAE)
Beirut Cinema Days (Lebanon)
Mediterranean Film Festival Alexandria (Egypt)
Malmo Arab Film Festival (Sweden)
Arab Film Festival San Francisco (USA)
JCC - International Film Festival Carthage (Tunis)

FROM THE PRESS

Diaries of a boy and his dog

The filmmaker has set his camera outside the kitchen window of his family's summerhouse. He calls his mother and asks her to speak with him about anxiety.

Her reflections are those of one who knows the subject intimately and has probably had versions of this chat with her son before. The window is barred and, when she asks why the filmmaker wanted her to talk to him from this location, he replies that he wanted to film her behind bars. The shot also places him and his camera within the frame, reflected in the window glass.

Living in the world can make you neurotic. A lot of people have obsessive-compulsive disorder – or “are OCD,” as pop culture parlance would have it. OCD types tend to be perfectionists, which, while baffling or annoying to more easygoing colleagues, can be useful if a neurotic labors in the creative trades, filmmaking say.

A more useless neurosis is General Anxiety Disorder, a condition not uncommon among political activists living in countries apparently impervious to change – positive change anyway. GAD is common in Lebanon, it seems, and with good reason. Civil war, an ever-popular topic among “Lebanon experts,” is one.

Indeed, some observers of the country's remarkably dysfunctional domestic politics have suggested the Civil War that began in 1975 didn't “end” in 1990 so much as enter





into a more regulated phase.

For those who don't subscribe to this catholic definition of "civil war," there's other stuff to crank up personal anxiety levels. Endemic "security concerns," is one. Another, institutional corruption (aka kleptocracy), is as intimate a part of the citizenry's daily lives as water shortages and electricity cuts.

GAD provides a premise for Bassem Fayad's feature-length doc "Yaoumiyat Kalb Ta'r" (Diaries of a Flying Dog). Fayad's is an intensely personal work of "creative documentary", a form that stresses subjective experience and tends to be formally more interesting than classical documentaries aspiring to objectivity.

The film opens with a fixed shot of a rural road, stretching to a near horizon. Standing in for voice-over is a taped conversation between Fayad and a woman, a therapist it seems. They are discussing panic attacks when she asks him whether he's started shooting his film, this film. He's started filming his family, Fayad tells her, and the opening shot is the road to their mountain summer house, the doc's principle location.

The film includes conversations with the filmmaker's mom and dad about how it's possible to inherit the anxieties of the previous generation. He also speaks with his sisters about this matter and his camera observes the behavior of his little nephew Nizar, who becomes inconsolably upset if he hasn't changed into his pajamas after he comes home from school. Mingled with his informal conversations with family and friends are diary entries, taken from stressful periods his life – when he decides he no longer wants to live in Beirut, a city "that hates itself and hates me," in the aftermath of the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafik Hariri, and the monthlong Israeli siege of Beirut in 2006.

Accentuating Fayad's GAD is the coincidence of his having been born on Black Saturday, one of several Civil War-era massacres that saw Phalangist gunmen murder and kidnap hundreds of non-Christian Lebanese and Palestinians.

Mostly, though, the film is preoccupied with the filmmaker's efforts to convince Zen, his pet dog, to venture beyond the gate of his parents' house.

"Diaries Of A Flying Dog" is Fayad's directorial debut but he's become well known in artistic circles as a top-notch cinematographer who has worked with a small but diverse range of accomplished artists. His first significant credit was as co-director of photography for award-winning docs by Simon El Habre – "Semaan Bil Day'ia" (One Many Village, 2008) and "Gate #5" (2011) – lyrical works that linger over the discrete traces Lebanon's Civil War.

He also shot Diala Kachmar's prize-winning "Guardians of Time Lost" (2013), a work much closer to classical documentary that examines the culture of Beirut's sectarian-inflected street gangs. That year Fayad also photographed "Letter to a Refusing Pilot," a video art piece by Akram Zaatar, one of Lebanon's most high-profile contemporary artists, and, earlier this year, the artist's "Beirut – Exploded Views." Fayad's most recent feature film credit has been Ghassan Salhab's "The Valley," which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival this year. [...]

Cinema is meant to speak universally and – though Lebanon's Civil War and its knock-on effects have been a decadeslong obsession (as it were) among the country's documentary and fiction filmmakers – such docs tend to have limited international appeal, even within the relatively narrow art house market. That said, Fayad's boy-and-his-dog approach to this thorny subject is quirky enough to buoy up an otherwise heavy subject matter.

Suggesting that pets have a way of adopting the behavior of their owners, Fayad's minor key struggle to take Zen for a walk becomes a comic metaphor for the filmmaker's own neurosis. Having worked to reify ("thing-ify"), his Civil War-born anxiety, the film effortlessly undermines that when a friend (film producer and dog-lover Lara Abu Saifan), drops round the house for a visit. She abruptly decides to take Zen for a walk.

The dog obliges without much struggle. It's not such a



stretch to read "Diaries of a Flying Dog" as "a portrait of the artist as a neurotic." No doubt Fayad did set out to make a film about anxiety, but it's not really "about" neurosis or the dysfunctional country that inspires it.

The subject of this doc is the work that provides the creative outlet for Fayad's anxiety.

"Diaries" is about impeccably ramed shots of the barren hills adjacent the family house. It's about a tabletop, and the meticulous arrangement of books upon it, perfectly framed by the camera above. The books disappear from the frame, leaving a diary and an ashtray, with a cigarette balanced on the edge.

(Jim Quilty, The Daily Star)





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