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Abu Dhabi's Circle Conference kicks off with Gianopulos, Banderas

Mike Goodridge in Los Angeles

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The second annual Circle Conference will take place this week in Abu Dhabi from Oct 6-8 at the Shangri-La Hotel.

As previously announced the conference, designed as a forum for international producers, financiers, film-makers and local communities to create new filmmaking opportunities in the Middle East, will feature a keynote address from Fox Filmed Entertainment co-chairman Jim Gianopulos.

The conference takes place in advance of the opening of the Middle East International Film Festival on Friday (Oct 10).

Also attending giving a series of master class sessions are Antonio Banderas, Spike Lee and McG, while other attendees include producer Kathleen Kennedy (The Kennedy/Marshall Company); Walid Al-Awadi, CEO, C Sky Pictures; Omar Amanat, Summit Entertainment, LLC; Ashok Amritraj, Chairman & CEO, Hyde Park Films; Craig Emanuel, Partner & Chair, LA Entertainment Department, Loeb & Loeb, LLP; Kristin Jones, SVP, Domestic Production, International Development & Acquisitions, Miramax Films; Andy Kim, SVP, Finance & Business Development, The Weinstein Company; Hal Sadoff, Head of Independent and International Film, International Creative Management; Mitch Singer, CTO, Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.; and Graham Taylor, Head of Independent Film, Endeavor Agency, among others.

"Despite the short time that has passed since Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) founded The Circle initiative, we proudly believe that we've succeeded in shedding the light that Abu Dhabi is the place to discover emerging talent, as indicated by the high caliber of international names we have attending our conference," said H.E. Mohammad Khalaf Al Mazarouie, who is general director of ADACH.

In addition to the annual Circle Conference, other initiatives include the Cloeween Connection, a program that highlights ten emerging Middle Eastern filmmakers, providing a platform to introduce their work to the public and to industry decision makers to help facilitate project financings. The ten talented emerging directors participating in this year's program include: Hany Abu-Assad (Palestine); Daoud Aoulad-Syad (Morocco); Asghar Farhadi (Iran); Samir Habchi (Lebanon); Ahd Kamel (Saudi Arabi); Nacer Khemir (Tunisia); Nabil Maleh (Syria); Jehane Noujaim (Egypt); Bassam Al Thawadi (Bahrain); and Hisham Zaman (Iraq).

The Circle also offers an international screenwriting competition for the Shasha Grant, which includes a \$100,000 award, designed to help identify, develop and launch the careers of outstanding regional filmmakers. The six finalists of this year's program include: *Sambo Do Maazouz* by Hicham Ayouch (Morocco); *Sand* by Alvin Easter (USA); *The Breadwinner* by Robert Heydon (Canada); *Pleonastic* by Samuel Kiehoon Lee (Korea); *Tafahum* by Omar Saleh (Jordan); and *Jose* by Michael Rousselet and Erik Sandoval (USA). These filmmakers will have the opportunity to present their pitch to a juried panel of industry professionals who will award the grant.

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