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## **Abu Dhabi widens Film Financing Circle**

### **Summit introduces new programs and prizes**

By **ALI JAAFAR**

The Circle, Abu Dhabi's media, film finance and training summit, is attempting to become the go-to place for emerging film talent in the Middle East.

Unspooling Oct. 6-9, the Circle is a key part of Abu Dhabi's effort, along with the Middle East Intl. Film Festival, which bows immediately afterward, on Oct. 10, and the Abu Dhabi Media Co.'s \$1 billion production arm Imagination, to become a player in the regional and international film industry.

This year's keynote address will be given by Fox co-chairman/CEO Jim Gianopulos, who will discuss the global film biz and its relevance to Mideast filmmakers and financiers. Last year's inaugural Circle keynote was given by Harvey Weinstein.

Other projects include the Shasha Grant screenwriting competition, with a \$100,000 prize; the Adasa Film Labs, a year-round program devoted to nurturing and growing the skills of up to 10 emerging Emirati filmmakers; and the Clooween Connection, a showcase for 10 Middle East directors that will seek to publicize their projects and introduce them to producers from around the world.

"We are already seeing these filmmakers grow and develop their styles," says Circle topper Adrienne Briggs. "They are telling incredibly unique and deeply personal stories that are distinctively of their own culture but also have universal themes."

Below is a selection of the new and established talents the Circle is working with this year.

#### **ADASA FILM LABS**

*Local aspirants awarded with a year's worth of filmmaking training*

##### **Fadel al-Muhari**

A prominent Emirati filmmaker with a production company based in Abu Dhabi, al-Muhari is considered one of the U.A.E.'s fastest-rising talents. He is developing his screenplay, a historical feature on the Portuguese invasion of Arabia in the late 16th century, with the Adasa Labs.

##### **Lamya Gargash**

Hailing from a visual arts background with a master's degree in communication design, Gargash is working as a visual designer in Dubai. She is an accomplished photographer and is set to publish a collection of her work later this year. With the Adasa Labs, she is writing a feature script about a young woman's struggle between family responsibility and personal happiness.

##### **Khadeja al-Buloshi**

Al-Buloshi has worked on a number of productions in the U.A.E. She is writing a screenplay about an Emirati woman

preparing for an upcoming wedding, with an eye toward the juxtaposition of traditional and modern lifestyles in the Emirates.

### **Alia al-Shamsi**

A rising young film talent in the U.A.E., al-Shamsi comes from a background in communications technology. Her current project with the Adasa Labs is a story of an Emirati woman forced to overcome social obstacles as she pursues her dream of becoming a TV war correspondent.

### **SHASHA GRANT**

*Two of the six candidates for the Circle's \$100,000 screenwriter prize*

#### **'Jose'**

**Writers:** Michael Rousselet & Erik Sandoval

**Synopsis:** Story of a 26-year-old immigrant who becomes a Marine.

**Background:** Rousselet and Sandoval are both natives of Los Angeles and recent USC grads. In recent years, Sandoval has written and directed several short films, including the Arabic-language "Sharq" (a winner at last year's Independents and Ojai film fests), "Reunion" and "The Ballad of Dylan and Corina."

#### **'Tafahum'**

**Writer:** Omar Saleh

**Synopsis:** An exiled political activist who once led protests returns years later to search for answers, seek meaning in his life and find lost love.

**Background:** Saleh is a Jordanian-Palestinian writer, actor and director from the Amman Filmmakers Cooperative. His films have been selected for the Carthage Film Festival, San Francisco Arab Film Festival, Jordan Short Film Festival and Izmir Short Film Festival.

**CLOEWEEN CONNECTION:** *Helmets gain a valuable showcase for projects in the pipeline*

### **Hany Abu-Assad**

Director and co-writer of "Paradise Now," which won the Golden Globe for foreign-language film, and Spirit Award for foreign film and a nomination for a 2006 Academy Award, Abu-Assad is developing a number of feature films in Los Angeles including "Eleven Minutes," an adaptation of the bestselling novel by Paulo Coelho.

### **Jehane Noujaim**

Noujaim produced and directed the critically acclaimed docs "Startup.com" and "Control Room." In 2006, she directed "Shayfeen.com/Egypt: We Are Watching You," about elections in Egypt seen through the eyes of three Egyptian women. Noujaim is in post-production on an untitled documentary about the 2008 Democratic National Convention, where her team interviewed more than 100 convention attendees.

### **Bassam al-Thawadi**

Al-Thawadi produced and directed "Al Hajiz," "Za'er" and "A Bahraini Tale," considered to be the first features ever produced in Bahrain. "A Bahraini Tale" was featured in numerous film festivals, including the Dubai Intl. Film Festival and the New York Arab and Asian Film Festival.

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