

# Toronto Palestine Film Festival

September 26-October 2, 2009  
102A-1075 Bay St., Ste 148  
Toronto, ON M5S 2B2



**MEDIA ADVISORY** - For Immediate Release  
September 14, 2009

## **Cherien Dabis opens TPFf with the Canadian Premiere of acclaimed *Amreeka***

**EVENTS:** Toronto Palestine Film Festival – Opening Night

**DATE:** Saturday, September 26, 2009 at 6:30

**WHERE:** Bloor Cinema, 506 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Toronto Palestine Film Festival (TPFF) is pleased to open with the Canadian premiere of the internationally acclaimed feature film ***Amreeka***. The film's director, **Cherien Dabis**, will be in attendance and conducting a Q & A with the audience after the screening.

Born to Palestinian immigrant parents, award-winning independent filmmaker and television writer **Cherien Dabis** has been named one of Variety's "Ten Directors to Watch" in 2009. As a television writer and co-producer, Dabis worked on Showtime's hit series *The L Word* for three seasons. She makes her feature writing and directorial debut with *Amreeka*, which has received audience and critical acclaim. Her short film, ***Make a Wish***, also screening opening night, received international acclaim when it premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival and Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival.



***Amreeka*** is a comedy-drama about Muna, a single mother who leaves Ramallah with her teenage son, Fadi, to provide him with a better future in small-town Illinois. As Fadi learns to navigate high school hallways, Muna, a former bank employee, scrambles together a new life cooking up hamburgers at the local White Castle. The film won the Director's Fortnight, FIPRESCI Prize (Critic's Prize) Cannes Film Festival 2009; Grand Jury Prize Nominee Sundance Film Festival, 2009. ([trailer](#))



TPFF will be closing the festival, on October 2 at the Bloor Cinema, with ***Laila's Birthday***, by Rashid Masharawi, and the documentary ***Checkpoint Rock***. *Laila's Birthday* tells the story of Abu Laila, a judge turned taxi driver, who must purchase a cake for his daughter's birthday. This becomes an epic task as Abu Laila navigates the chaos of daily life in Ramallah. ***Checkpoint Rock*** shines a spotlight on music in Palestine. Beginning with renowned musician Marcel Khalife at Mahmoud Darwish's funeral, the film traverses Palestine/Israel and presents a diverse range of musical performances along the way.

From **September 26 to October 2**, TPFf will showcase 34 films, including Canadian and North American premieres, and will [host](#) a **contemporary art exhibit**, a **film & food brunch** and several **forums**. For more information on TPFf, to schedule interviews with Dabis or others, or to request screeners, please review the **TPFF 2009 Media Kit** available online at [www.tpff.ca/media.htm](http://www.tpff.ca/media.htm).

[www.tpff.ca](http://www.tpff.ca)

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**Sept 26-Oct 2**

**tel:** 647-865-4090

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## FESTIVAL BACKGROUNDER



### **Amreeka**

Cherien Dabis - Fiction - 2009 - USA - 96 min - Canadian Premiere - Director in Attendance

Comedy-drama about Muna, a single mother who leaves Ramallah with her teenage son, Fadi, to provide him with a better future in small-town Illinois. As Fadi learns to navigate high school hallways, Muna, a former bank employee, scrambles together a new life cooking up hamburgers at the local White Castle.

*Grand Jury Prize Nominee Sundance Film Festival 2009, Winner FIPRESCI International Federation of Film Critics Award Cannes 2009*

### **Laila's Birthday**

Rashid Masharawi - Fiction - 2008 - Palestine/Tunisia/The Netherlands - 71 min

Abu Laila is a judge turned taxi driver who must purchase a cake and present for his daughter Laila's birthday. This becomes an epic task as Abu Laila navigates the chaos of daily life in Ramallah. The film is a revealing and humorous portrait of a city and decent man at the breaking point.

*Official Selection Toronto International Film Festival 2008*

### **Road Movie**

Elle Flanders + Tamira Sawatzky - Multi-Media Installation - 2009 - Canada - Director in Attendance

TFFF is proud to preview a selection of segments from Road Movie, the epic twelve-screen multi-media installation by Elle Flanders and Tamira Sawatzky. Continuing their work on landscape and its relationship to shifting political geographies, each segment traces a single journey on Palestinian or 'Jewish only' roads – all shot in stop-motion animation in single takes. One segment of Road Movie will premiere before individual programs throughout the Festival.

### **SAHTAIN! Film & Food Brunch**

Sunday Sept 27, 11:00-1:00 pm

93 HARBORD, 93 Harbord Street, Toronto

Traditional Palestinian brunch with talk and demo by acclaimed chef Isam Kaisi. Screening two food-themed short films.

#### **Missing Gaza**

Sobhi Al Zobaidi

Documentary - 2005 - Palestine/Israel - 13 min

A group of friends, originally from Gaza but unable to return because of the siege, meet for lunch in Ramallah. Over a traditional meal of molokheya, their lunchtime discussion is inter-cut with footage from Gaza of their friends, families and homes.

#### **Daggit Gazza**

Hadeel Assali / Iman Saqr

Documentary – 2009 – US – 8 min

Politics, food, and family are the topics of a phone conversation between Houston and Gaza that serves as voice-over commentary to the preparation of a spicy tomato salad.

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## ART EXHIBIT '09

### ***Jewels in the Machine: New Media Works at TFFF***

Sept 28 - Oct 3, 12:00pm - 7:00pm

Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul St., Toronto

Exhibit Opening: Tuesday Sept 29, 5:00pm - 7:00pm

Exhibit Curator: Reena Katz Contact: [jewelsinthemachine@tpff.ca](mailto:jewelsinthemachine@tpff.ca)

#### Artists and Works:

Jamelie Hassan – London, ON

The Oblivion Seekers, 1985 (*2009 DVD format premier of film-installation work*)

John Kameel Farah – Toronto, ON

New Piano Composition (*TPFF Commission*)

Project Hope – Nablus, Palestine

The West Bank: A Collection of Graphic Novels (*Cells from upcoming book*)

Sandi Hilal + Alessandro Petti – London, UK + Bethlehem, Palestine

Decolonizing Architecture (*Silent Projections*)

Jumana Manna – Oslo, Norway + Jerusalem

Familiar + Ramallah Computer Game (*Video Works*)

## FORUMS '09

### *Not Your Harem Girl: Cinema and Stereotypes*

Monday Sept 28, 4:00-6:00 pm

William Doo Auditorium, 45 Willcocks Street, Toronto

Panellists: Dana Olwan, Nahed Mansour, Natalie Kouri-Towe

As this year's festival theme is "non-stereotypical cinema," this panel will look at the history of stereotypical representations of Arabs in film, particularly Arab woman. The panel will also discuss how young Arab artists are subverting these stereotypes through filmmaking and literature.

### *Cinema Politica: Film and the Art of Resistance*

Wednesday Sept 30, 3:30-5:30 pm

Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul Street, Toronto

Panellists: Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Ali Kazimi, John Hupfield

Three documentary filmmakers who use filmmaking to tell unheard stories will discuss their art together. The evening will include a screening of shorts by Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Programming/Exhibition Coordinator of A Space Gallery, and John Hupfield from 7th Generation Image Makers, an arts and mural program for Native youth in Toronto.

### *Steel for the Spirit: Palestinian Cultural Production Today*

Friday Oct 2, 3:30-5:30 pm

Beaver Hall Gallery, 29 McCaul Street, Toronto

Panellists: Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Rafeef Ziadah, Yafa Jarrar

The closing panel features three emerging Palestinian artists discussing what drives Palestinian cultural production today. The panellists will examine art forms ranging from spoken word to satiric filmmaking to *dabke* (Palestinian folk dancing), and how each is used to tell the stories of the Palestinian people.

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