

MSFF LAUNCHES MAJOR ARAB WOMEN FILMMAKERS PROGRAM

The First Signature Initiative, a Partnership with the Prestigious UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, Includes Three Full-Ride Master of Fine Arts Graduate Directing Scholarships To “Give Voice to the Unique Perspective of Arab Women”

May 19, 2015: The Mohamed S. Farsi Foundation (MSFF) announced today the launch of a new program, **Arab Women Filmmakers**, to achieve greater representation of women, particularly Arab women, in the film industry.

Its first signature initiative is a partnership with the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television (UCLA TFT), one of the world’s most prominent academic institutions for entertainment and performing arts education. Together they have created the **Hani Farsi Graduate Scholarship Fund** that includes three new four-year full-ride graduate scholarships for UCLA TFT’s Master of Fine Arts in Directing designed “*to give voice to the unique perspective of Arab women.*” The Hani Farsi Graduate Scholarship Fund recipients have been selected from an outstanding pool of applicants who will begin their M.F.A. graduate program at UCLA TFT starting in Fall 2015.

While this scholarship fund and partnership with UCLA TFT are important steps toward addressing the imbalance within the entertainment industry, they are simply a start. The objective of the Arab Women Filmmakers program is for like-minded individuals and organizations to collaborate with MSFF and attain more diversity within the film industry.

Arab female directors have unique stories to tell and are, unfortunately, underrepresented in the entertainment industry. The few women who have told their stories have received critical acclaim for their films, including Lebanese director Nadine Labaki’s *Where Do We Go Now*; Saudi Arabia’s Haifaa Al-Mansour’s BAFTA nominated *Wadjda*; Egypt’s Jehane Noujaim’s Academy Award-nominated documentary *The Square*; and Jordanian director Cherien Dabis’s *May in the Summer*. *The Square* is the first Egyptian-made film to be nominated for an Oscar – and it was directed by an Arab woman.

The UCLA TFT Directing program is devised to develop artists in film, television and digital media with an emphasis on humanistic visual storytelling. The program is focused on the power of story to not only delight and entertain, but to enlighten, engage and inspire change for a better world.

“We want these scholarships to be a catalyst, to capture the imaginations of future filmmakers, and to inspire them to reach their goals,” said Hani Farsi, Chairman of the Mohamed S. Farsi Foundation. “This partnership with the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television represents the first step in a call to action, which we hope will lead to a positive change for women in the film industry and in my part of the world.”

“We are greatly honored to be the inaugural home for the Hani Farsi Graduate Scholarship Fund to give voice to the unique perspective of Arab women,” states Teri Schwartz, Dean of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. “We share Hani’s belief in the power of entertainment and performing arts education to give access and opportunity to an outstanding cohort of diverse new

storytelling voices. With the Hani Farsi Scholarship Fund for the M.F.A. in Directing, we have the unique chance to nurture and empower an exciting new generation of extraordinary filmmakers – in this case, Arab women - who will make a difference in the world by illuminating and enriching our lives with a powerful array of new stories that might not have had a chance to be told if not for Hani’s generosity and transformational vision.”

“I've been very privileged to work in the USA, and there are incredible resources available in Los Angeles. To be able to have this scholarship gives women the potential to have one of the best film educations you can have in the world. If I was at the beginning of my career, I would jump at the opportunity. I hear there are some incredible winners and I can't wait to see the work that comes out of it “ - *Jehane Noujaim, Director and Oscar nominee for The Square.*

“It’s a great idea because it will allow more women to become directors. The scholarship is important because it's really costly, it makes a way for women from parts of the world who couldn't even dream of learning this craft. I'm sure a lot of women have the ability and talent but have not been allowed to achieve it because of a lack of money” - *Nadine Labaki, Director, Caramel.*

"We need more Arab female voices in Los Angeles in the centre of the industry so we can start to make changes from within the industry as well. It's one thing to stay working in our region but we also need to challenge the industry from within. And it is challenging, opening those doors. Making the leap from an independent international filmmaker to a commercial director one is hard enough, but add female filmmaker to that, and then add Arab female filmmaker, and it becomes infinitely more challenging." *Cherien Dabis, Director May in the Summer (Palestinian/Jordanian - American filmmaker).*

"I think people in the Arab world need to see their own stories on screen. Its all very well making films about beautiful people who live far away, but to be able to see a film about your own life, and the kind of people you know and hear your own accent, it's equally important. It tells you your life is worthy too, your small stories count, your life counts. Cinema is not for something for other people in other places." *Annemarie Jacir, first Palestinian female director to have a feature film release.*

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About the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

The vision of the [UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television](#) is to serve as a premiere global interdisciplinary professional school that develops outstanding humanistic storytellers, industry leaders and scholars whose diverse, innovative voices enlighten, engage and inspire change for a better world. Consistently ranked as one of the top entertainment and performing arts institutions in the world, UCLA TFT offers an innovative curriculum that integrates the study and creation of live performance, film, television and the digital arts. The distinguished graduate and undergraduate programs at UCLA TFT include acting, directing, writing, producing, animation, cinematography, lighting design, set design, costume design, sound design, moving image archive studies, and the school offers doctoral degrees in theater and performance studies and cinema and media studies.

About MSFF

The Mohamed S. Farsi Foundation (the MSFF) is a London based grant-making foundation funding charities and social enterprises around the world, and its areas of concern are healthcare, education, international development and arts & culture. It was founded in 2009 by Hani Farsi to honor his father and his lifetime of charitable work. The MSFF has three grant making programmes; Trustee Awards, Strategic Partnerships, and Arab Women Filmmakers.

Hani Farsi was born in Saudi Arabia and moved to the United States when he was 15 to attend South Kent School in Connecticut. After graduating he went onto study for his Bachelor and Master's degree in International Studies at The American University in Washington DC. He moved to London in 1993 where he started the office of the Farsi family, organising the investments and holdings of the family and acting as a platform to explore further opportunities. During the mid 1990's he created a hospitality company that grew to include various well known London restaurants including Cecconi's and the internationally known Soho House chain of members' clubs.

The Arts have always been a passion of Hani Farsi which has led to his involvement in the areas of theatre and motion pictures. Between 1993 and 2000, he dedicated himself to the Donmar Warehouse Theatre Company in London by becoming a member of its Board of Trustees, under the direction of Sam Mendes, who created such noted productions as The Blue Room starring Nicole Kidman.

Hani and his production company Corniche Pictures have been producing and distributing independent feature films and documentaries for the last eight years. In that time Corniche Pictures have been involved in impactful projects with Hani as Executive Producer, such as Atiq Rahimi's "The Patience Stone", Elia Suleiman's, "The Time That Remains", and Mira Nair's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist". Corniche Pictures have recently produced the Feature Docs, "We Are The Giant", and the Nick Cave Documentary, "20,000 Days on Earth". Aside from a full slate of projects in development on the film side, Corniche are actively developing TV and Theatre offerings.

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