



Visions
du Réel
2024

Special Mention
International
Feature Film Competition

road[2]films

نحن في الداخل

We Are Inside

A film by
Farah Kassem

فيلم
فكح قاييم

GOOD
COMPANY
PICTURES



Aljazeera Documentary

نحن في الداخل

We Are Inside

Road2films presents,
in co-production with Good Company Pictures
and Al Jazeera Documentary Channel

نحن في الداخل We Are Inside
فيلم ل فرح قاسم a Film by Farah Kassem

Lebanon, Qatar, Denmark
2024 / 180' / DCP / Color / 4:3 / 5.1

Language: Arabic

cynthia@road2films.com
kassemfarah@gmail.com

[Download stills here](#)
[Download poster here](#)
[Link to the trailer](#)

Logline

After more than a decade, Farah returns to her hometown Tripoli in Lebanon to live with her widowed aging father, Mustapha.

It's her last chance to be part of her father's world though it must be through the only language he understands: poetry.

Synopsis

After more than a decade, Farah returns home to Tripoli, Lebanon, to care for her aging widowed father, Mustapha only to find her city in crisis. Their generational differences often lead to clashing perspectives on the country's political instability, making it difficult to communicate with each other. But within this lack of understanding there's humour and a will to understand. There's a secret refuge: Mustapha's weekly all-male poetry club, where a small group of stubborn yet lovable men gather to share poems in classical Arabic over sweets and with an agreement to disagree about everything.

In order to connect with her father, Farah decides to join the club and address Mustapha in verses to connect with the poet in him. As Mustapha's health deteriorates and the October 2019 revolution erupts nationwide, poetry becomes their chance for one last conversation.

Synopsis by Visions du Réel 2024

After a 15-year absence, Farah returns to Lebanon to spend time with her ageing father. In their Tripoli apartment, which has been in mourning for several years following the death of her mother, Mustapha and Farah attempt to find a common language. The five decades which separate them, as well as their differing points of view, give rise to discussions tinged with humour, but also a lack of understanding. But she knows that a refuge does exist, into which she will attempt to insinuate herself: poetry. By joining Mustapha's circle of poets, a club composed solely of men with a passion for literature, Farah gradually begins to understand their language, thus earning a chance of reaching her father. While the 2019 revolution rumbles on in the streets, Farah Kassem introduces us into this apartment, where words and images seek each other out between two doors, giving rise to a final, essential conversation. The director (*You Make a Better Window Than You Do a Door*, VdR 2017) returns to a Lebanon in crisis to make her first, deeply moving full-length feature film, in which Arabic poetry combines with the impermanence of life and precious, sometimes clumsy, exchanges of words between father and daughter – which will belong to them forever.





SIFF / 2025
国际展映
INTERNATIONAL
SCREENING



ZAGREBDOX
OFFICIAL
PROGRAM
2025



beursschouwburg

Doc SCREENS
ÉCRANS du réel
شاشات الواقع
2024



European
Media
Art Festival



Official
Selection



Awards & Festivals

19 AWARDS:

- Visions du Réel International Competition 2024 (Switzerland) - Special Mention
- Golden Apricot International Film Festival 2024 (Armenia) - Golden Apricot for Best Regional Film
- El Gouna Film Festival 2024 (Egypt) - Golden Star for Best Feature Documentary
- El Gouna Film Festival 2024 (Egypt) - NETPAC Award for Best Asian Feature Film
- Kasseler Dokfest 2024 (Germany) - Honorary Mention
- Entrevue Belfort 2024 (France) - Audience Award
- Entrevue Belfort 2024 (France) - Tènk / Documentaire Sur Grand Écran Award
- Mar del Plata 2024 (Argentina) - Astor Piazzolla Award for Best Film
- Laceno d'Oro 2024 (Italy) - Audience Award "Franca Troisi"
- Beirut International Women Film Festival - Best International Feature Documentary
- Atlanta Film Festival 2025 (United States) - Best Documentary Feature
- Jean Rouch International Film Festival 2025 (France) - Grand Prix Nanook
- Jean Rouch International Film Festival 2025 (France) - Special Mention Monde en Regards
- Berlin Kiez Film Festival 2025 (Germany) - Honorable Mention
- Stockholm City Film Festival 2025 (Sweden) - Best Feature Documentary Film
- FIDADOC June 2025 (Morocco) - Grand Prix Nouzha Drissi
- Amman International Film Festival 2025 (Jordan) - Awal Film Section - The Black Iris Award for Best Arab Feature-Length Documentary
- Karatsu International Film Festival KAIFF 2025 (Japan) - Best Documentary Award
- Jerusalem Arab Film Festival (JAFF) 2025 (Palestine) - Shireen Abu Akleh Jury Award



- IDFA 2024 (The Netherlands) - Best of Fest
- RIDM 2024 (Canada) - Panorama
- Beursschouwburg 2024 (Belgium) - Closing Event
- Écrans du réel 2025 (Lebanon) - Closing Film
- Antenna Documentary Film Festival 2025 (Australia) - International Competition
- DocPoint Tallinn 2025 (Estonia) - Main Selection
- Doc & Doc: Documentaire Grand Ecran 2025 (France)
- Best of Doc: Documentaire Grand Ecran 2025 (France) - Films Inédits
- Zagreb Dox 2025 (Croatia), State of Affairs Program
- Internationales Frauen* Film Fest Dortmund 2025 (Germany) - Panorama
- One World Romania International Human Rights & Documentary Film Festival (OWR) 2025 (Romania) - Dialogues Section
- EMAF 2025 (Germany) - Feature Film Section
- ALFILM – Arab Film Festival Berlin 2025 (Germany) - Feature Documentary Section
- Gabes Cinema Fen 2025 (Tunis) - CINÉMA VISIONS
- Ethnocineca 2025 (Austria) - International Competition
- Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) 2025 (China) - Panorama
- NAIFF2025, Nepal-America International Film Festival, 2025 (Maryland, US) - Features Section Competition
- EDOC - Out of competition 2025 (Ecuador)
- ARKIPEL Jakarta International Documentary and Experimental Film Festival 2025 - Years of Living Dangerously, 2025 (Indonesia) - In Competition
- Arabiske stemmer festival at Cinemateket 2025 (Denmark) - Out of Competition
- Tripoli Film Festival 2025 (Lebanon) - Out of Competition





In 2012, you shot your short documentary MY FATHER LOOKS LIKE ABDEL NASSER with your father, Mustapha Kassem. Back then, he was in his 70s and was suffering from a sleeping disorder and you have been visiting him while you were still living in Europe. A decade later, you moved to Lebanon, 15 years after you had left the country, to care for your aging father. Was it a conscious decision in your debut feature, WE ARE INSIDE, to continue pursuing this father and daughter journey?

Making My Father Looks Like Abdel Nasser was a way for me to deal with grief, memory and with the loss of my mother. It was important for me to go on that journey with my father, to find a common vocabulary to express that grief that was difficult to tackle within our household. And then during that filming process, whenever these conversations were brought up, reading his own poems was my father's way of responding and articulating loss. Back then, I didn't really understand what that truly meant. And therefore, I silenced him in the film. Whenever he would start reciting poetry, I would remove the sound/his voice and rather focus on the aesthetics of the act itself, the act of recital. With time, I became more aware of what this medium meant to him. And through it, he wasn't only grieving my mother, but also a country, a memory, a place where he no longer belonged. His poems traced the remains of a generation, the remains of a life that is long in the past. And within that linguistic estrangement he still saw beauty and poetry.

Before that, before I moved back to Lebanon,

whenever I would go and visit him and whenever we'd talk about politics, about belonging, what it meant to live in Tripoli, the elections, all of that, we would go into disputes. We wouldn't talk to each other for hours. And then he would knock on my door with a piece of paper in his hand, and say, "Have I read you my latest poem, my daughter?" This was my father's way of reconciling with me. And me listening to him was my way of saying, "let's reconcile". And then, he would start reading his classical Arabic poetry that I found very difficult to understand. But still, I was mesmerised by his passion for language and for poetry.

One day, he invited me to the Tripoli poetry club, where I met these men, all above 70, coming to that space with their papers and boxes of sweets, wanting to read and share poetry. It was very heartwarming to encounter this, and to see how this bubble, this refuge, can exist within the city. I witnessed these men practice the remains of their identity behind closed doors. This is when I felt the urge to dive into that world and attempt to understand what their poetry is all about and what the act of reciting poetry is meant to convey.

Nevertheless, continuing this father/daughter journey was first initiated by my father. He was the one who told me, "Hey, since you're here and have not much to do, how about we do this together?" He kind of invited me into that poetry universe that he believed was worth capturing. And he surely wanted someone to archive his recitals and wanted to make use of my camera!

You have been following your father for several years, you have witnessed his highs and his lows. You have carried very intimate conversations with him, but also very difficult and challenging ones. Has filming your father over this long period of time strengthened your bond together? Or did it really challenge what you have together?

In the very beginning, it wasn't that easy because he thought that I was expecting something from him, like when I did *My Father Looks Like Abdel Nasser*. But this changed very quickly. He got familiar with the camera. He understood the process. He thought: this is my daughter, she wants to make a film with me. So I am going to help her! Throughout time, making films together became something that belongs to the two of us. Something that only me and him can share, and a space that we come back to every couple of years to address matters. A space where we can allow and invite shifts of dynamic. It's true I am the one who is somehow in control, filming, I am behind the camera, but he decides when to exit and when to stay. *We Are Inside* is the arena where both our artistic mediums finally met. His poetry and my filming. We both knew that me filming him (whether reciting poetry or not) was somehow a way to keep him alive, and he agreed to that deal. And he stayed alive until the very last moment.

Even though your father is an engineer, he is also a very fine poet. He might be writing alone, but he shares his poems with a circle of friends and together they founded this poetry club, a club of elderly men who share their passion for poetry. How was it for you to access such a private club and bring in your camera with you?

I was intimidated by the poets from the moment I entered the room. They are very eloquent, even when they are asking each other something very mundane, like passing the sweets box. When I arrived, I was not the filmmaker. I was the daughter of Mustapha who came to visit. So for them, they were like, "Oh, this is your daughter. Does she write too? Oh, she doesn't write, okay. Did she marry?". At first, I was there getting to know them and defining how I relate to them. I thought it was a private space until I realised that actually, there are many who tried to enter this club and they were welcome to do so and read their poetry. But the poets are so specific in how they perceive poetry and not everyone can handle their feedback and criticism. Many of the newcomers didn't stick around after a session or two. The poets perceive themselves as gatekeepers of classical Arabic poetry. So when I entered that arena, I was aware of that fact. I was trying to understand how I am going to shift from being their friend's daughter to becoming myself, somebody who is also attempting to write poetry. Even if it was for the sake of communicating with my father and not really because I was passionate about poetry. I knew that I do not have the skills to write, and that I could be bad at it. But that didn't matter, on the contrary. I was trying to borrow some of their tools and see how I can adjust mine to theirs and bring something to the table. The dynamic changed throughout the years. At the end of the film I would go to the club without my father. My presence within that space was no longer tied to his.

You mentioned using tools, and one of your tools was your camera. There is so much observation in the film, you leave space for us to discover everything around you, from the house to the outside. The windows in the film play a major role: we see the pigeons, burning tires, military troops, protesters, smoke... Was it a conscious decision to unveil the outside through the windows?

When I started filming, I knew I wanted to work with few limitations. And one of these limitations was to try to look at this world, at this space, from the inside, towards the outside. There is something very special about Tripoli and about the juxtaposition between the private and the public space. How people live within their personal private space and how they relate to the outside, its happenings and the manifestation of public opinion. And I wanted to emphasise that. I wanted to stress on those little bubbles that exist in isolation, but also in connection. How do they take refuge from the happenings, and when do they step out and access that public space? What are the traits of a public space in a city like Tripoli? I wanted to mark this frontier: one that becomes very clear at times and in other moments, it disappears, it fades away.

And therefore the window is there, to specifically play on these nuances and the ways in which we look at that outside. My father's house happens to be on a crossroad and in front of a military base. So when we direct our gaze outside of the window, we see a part of Tripoli in constant motion. There is movement all the time that somehow mirrors the daily ever changing state of the city and its inhabitants.

It was also important to allow a shift in that gaze, from the background to the foreground: from the chaotic crossroad to a pigeon nesting in front of our window, allowing us to perceive a certain plurality of existence within one space.

Refusing to look out, was also another added layer to the window element. The window of our TV room giving on the military base, mirrored somehow the state of the country. But my father would never look out of that window. His TV was his window. It was his way of looking outside, even when the physical outside was next to him. I wanted to understand what made him turn his gaze at the screen. And I wondered how these different windows and spaces dialogue and what they were telling each other.

Which brings us to another very important character in your film, the city of Tripoli, the second biggest city in the country after Beirut. A city that has endured a lot, that has been marginalised by the ruling class for decades. You mentioned the outside and the inside in Tripoli, but in the film, we also see the old and the new, the old buildings against new structures, your father and his friends evoke the past: from the cabarets to the Palace Cinema, in which your father saw his favourite films. Even the famous sweets of Tripoli are in every single gathering of the poetry club. Beyond filming the in and out of Tripoli, how was it for you to revisit your city?

It was very difficult for me to know what to film in Tripoli because the way I relate to the city is very specific. I left when I was 18. Coming back

to it was a way for me to reconcile with parts of it that I didn't accept or like when I was younger. I grew up on the frontier between the old and the new city. I do feel that Tripoli is a city that is both in movement and in stagnation. It is moving towards something, but it is also attached to times that are no longer there. It exists in different temporalities. I was interested in finding ways to convey these different temporalities and what it feels to move within the city, witnessing its different histories and facades.

When we were filming the outside, we kept wandering, trying to see what we could encounter while traveling throughout the night in Tripoli. And these rides were endless. As if I was trying to find my place within it and the feeling of succeeding felt ephemeral. Ending at the Nour Square was important for me. Officially called the Abdul Hamid Karami Square (after Abdul Hamid Karami, a former prime minister with nationalistic Arab inclinations and one of the main leaders of the city after Lebanon's independence). Harakat Al Tawhid (Islamic Unification Movement) removed his statue in the 1980's and replaced it with the sculpture of the word Allah. Nowadays some call it the Nour Square, others the Allah Square. These different naming are revealers of the different identities, timelines, social and political transitions that this city has witnessed over the decades. And all these changes or stagnations linger in the collective memory. They exist simultaneously and make the city and the ways in which we perceive it, very complex. Especially after the square also became the centre of the 2019 revolution in Tripoli. These constant additions of events to the square's layered identity some-

how summarises Tripoli for me. It is a place in which different identities/narratives coexist and it is very difficult to isolate one from the other.

Moving from Tripoli towards a whole nation, you filmed your father for over five years. Lebanon was during that time living at a certain point in 2019 an unprecedented revolution in true colors, the youth across the country was demonstrating against its political elite. In the film, we see a very different image of Tripoli. The whole country has experienced the revolution in Tripoli very differently. Suddenly there was something very different happening while you were shooting. How did you live and document that period?

It was a confrontation. I had this film in mind, with a certain narrative that I was trying to construct/deconstruct throughout the filming period. A period that went on for 4 years. It was interesting and challenging to see how this narrative kept on updating itself. It is a film about time and the ways in which it unfolds. And I believe the elections, the revolution, etc.. were markers on this timeline. As I was depicting "reality" and trying to understand what was happening around me, I had to readjust my vision of this reality, or rather make it mine. When these moments were unveiling, my team and I were reacting to them. I stepped out and I started filming. While I was in the act of filming, I kept on reframing that moment within the universe of the film. I was going back and forth, trying to make sense and create a meaning without falling into any traps of romanticising what I yet couldn't fully understand. During the revolution, I was a filmmaker,

a citizen, a daughter... I was experiencing many emotions all at once, and it wasn't easy to remain conscious and calculated in how and why I was filming.

Meanwhile your father's health was getting trickier. The state of the country was also getting bleaker. It felt like you were witnessing two very different forms of collapse, that of your father, but that of your country. How was it in the editing process to experience this mirroring effect between your father's health and the situation around you in the country?

We started editing before we finished filming. But the bigger portion of the edit took place after the end of the production and the passing of my father, early 2021. It was difficult for me to revisit the rushes and understand that I was not only saying goodbye to my dad while making this film, but also to my country. My father was the embodiment of the country itself. And whenever I would go back to visit him, it felt like visiting the remains of that place to which I belong. So it felt like bidding farewell to him and to that place in which I grew up and that I had to eventually leave.

Speaking of time, Nana is a very pivotal figure in the film. She has been living in your house for over 27 years, even longer than you lived there. How was it for you to include Nana in your narrative?

For me, it was essential to have Nana in the film. Nana is family, not simply my father's carer. When she came to live with us, I was seven years old. And then she witnessed the passing of my mother. She witnessed the degradation of my father. She was there for him in his most difficult moments. My brother and I were not there all the time. Nana gives one the impression that she is on the periphery, but she's not. She is at the core of things. Nana is the one who picked up the loss of each family member and created some sort of continuity for us to exist within our home. She relates to each one of us differently. At the end of the film, she is the one telling you the deep truth of what my father lived. She is the secret holder, the "truth" holder. But she is also lost in time and space, like all of us.

As such, the film is very much about transmission. And at the end of the film, your father speaks about memories, forgetting some and keeping others. We live in a country that wants to eradicate all of its memories, that does not want to remember its past. How do you feel about this transmission process, about saving memories, but also sharing these memories?

The poets of the Tripoli poetry club are no longer meeting today. One of the reasons why I made this film was to keep traces of my father and his generation. I needed to archive and they wanted to be remembered. The film is trying to tackle this schism between generations. On one hand, my generation deciding what to take from the former one, what to keep aside while trying to negotiate the deal of that transmission. On the other side, my father's generation pondering what narrative, what history, what ideologies they were leaving us.

My dad revealed to me how to look at time: the past is 60%, the present is 10%, and then the future is 20%. The film is at the end of the day about temporality. It is about remembering, forgetting, about allowing things to pass us by. We hold on to some memories for us to survive. And as we survive, some parts of our memories will survive with us and others will just decay. And such is life.



Biography of the director, Farah Kassem.

Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, Farah Kassem graduated from ALBA University with a Bachelor's degree in Audio Visual Studies and completed a Masters of Fine Arts in documentary filmmaking at DocNomads. Farah is both a director and an editor and is currently doing doctoral research in the Arts at KU Leuven and LUCA in Belgium. She is also a film workshop trainer. She has directed several award winning short documentary films that have screened at various international film festivals including Visions du Réel, Warsaw Film Festival, DOK Leipzig, Dubai International Film Festival, and many others. *We Are Inside* is her debut feature.

Essential Filmography

As director

We Are Inside, 2024

You Make a Better Window Than You Do a Door, 2017

Nettoyer Schaerbeek, 2017

My Father Looks Like Abdel Nasser, 2012

As co-director

T(w)o Work, "Marianna", one episode of a documentary series , 2022

As Editor

Discount Workers by Christopher Patz and Ammar Aziz 2021

Counting Tiles by Cynthia Choucair 2018

Powerless by Cynthia Choucair 2012

Biography of the producer, Cynthia Choucair.

Born in Lebanon, Cynthia Choucair graduated from ALBA University in 1998 and obtained a Maîtrise in Film Directing from Iesav-USJ in 2002. She has directed nine fiction and documentary films of different lengths. Her last documentary "*Counting Tiles*" premiered at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 2018, in the Bright Future Competition and participated at various festivals around the world. It received the UNHCR Award at Cinemigrante film festival and the jury's special mention at the Aswan International Women Film Festival. In 2007, she founded her own production company, Road2films, producing documentaries, fiction films and TV programs. She has produced and co-produced documentaries that have competed in prestigious international film festivals such as the International Film Festival of Rotterdam, Sheffield DocFest, RIDM, FidMarseille and others. Cynthia has been a member of the Lebanese Cultural Association Aflamuna (Beirut DC) since 2001 and for 8 years she taught documentary filmmaking at ALBA university, Beirut Lebanon.



We Are Inside was developed within the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung 2018.

It participated in: ZagrebDox Pro Platform, 2018 / DOK Leipzig Co-Pro market 2018, where it was awarded the DOK Leipzig and EWA Development award for the best female driven documentary / Beirut Cinema Platform, 2018 / Cairo Film Connection, Cairo International Film Festival 2018, where it was awarded the New Century Production Award / Berlinale Talents Doc Station, 2019 / Qumra, Doha Film Institute 2019 / Sheffield Doc/Fest Marketplace, part of the Chicken and Egg Pictures, (Egg)celebrator Lab pitch, 2019 / Tripoli Film Festival Forum, 2019 / Visions du Réel, 2020 Vdr-Work in Progress, where it received the asterisk* Marketing Award / IDFA Forum 2020, where it was awarded the Best Rough Cut Project / Atelier TAKMIL - Journées cinématographiques de Carthage 2020, where it was awarded the prize of l'Institut Français de Tunisie.

We Are Inside took part in the 2023 Naanu creative retreat in Denmark and was supported by the Hammana Artist House in Lebanon.

Recipient of a production grant from Doha Film Institute.

In Association with Chicken & Egg Pictures.

Recipient of a grant provided by the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with support from Open Society Foundations.

With the support of AFAC Arab Fund Arts And Culture, IMS, International Media Support, SFFILM Documentary Film Fund, Centre National Du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Flies Collective Film Grant, IDFA Bertha Fund.

Recipient of a distribution Grant, "Coup de Coeur" from Fondation Boghossian in collaboration with Fondation Liban Cinema.

We Are Inside has been developed with the support of the dok.incubator workshop.

Special Thank you to the Jacob Burns Film Center.

Team And Funders

Written and Directed by Farah Kassem **Assistant Directors** Angie Obeid, Nicola Sangs **Produced by** Road2films

Producer Cynthia Choucair **Co-Producer** Farah Kassem **Co-produced by** Al Jazeera Documentary Channel

Commissioning Editor Mehdi Bekkar **Co-produced by** Good Company Pictures **Co-producer** Patricia Drati

Director of Photography Tebbe Schöningh **Editing** Anders Skovbjerg Jepsen **Editing Consultant** Isabella Rinaldi

Sound Recording Joelle Abou Chabké **Sound Design** Cedric Kayem

Music by Jon Sensmeier **Color Grading** Maxime Demartin

Graphic Design Guillermo Gomez Moreno **Poster Design** Antonio Camargo



