

Agat Films & cie and Alma Films present



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VENICE DAYS

INHERITANCE

A film by Hiam Abbass



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INHERITANCE

A film by Hiam Abbass

France, Israel, Turkey, Palestine - 88 minutes
Scope 2.35 - color - Dolby SRD - Arabic, Hebrew, English

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SYNOPSIS

A Palestinian family living in the north of Galilee gathers to celebrate the wedding of one of their daughters, in a climate of war. Internal conflicts explode between the different members of the family. The tension grows bigger once their father falls into a coma and inches toward death.





INTERVIEW WITH HIAM ABBASS

This is your first feature film as a director, yet aside from directing two shorts, it isn't the first time you've worked behind the camera. I'm thinking of your cooperation with Yousri Nasrallah on THE GATE OF SUN (2004), with Spielberg on MUNICH (2006), and with Inarritu on BABEL (2006). What have you drawn from these experiences?

It's mainly while working as an actress that I gleaned, over the years, what I needed to be able to go behind the camera. However, with Nasrallah and Shbeilberg I had to coach actors with their language skills. Having the headset on my ears, and thus hearing the directors' instructions to the actors, seeing them control the staging on the combo and then orchestrate the editing, gave me the confidence necessary for making my first film. Babel, too, was a crucial experience. My job was to prepare non-professional actors to play in front of the camera. That's when I realized how attached I was to directing actors. I understood that it's not because you know how to stage that you know how to work with an actor. It's psychological work! It is by understanding the actor that you can bring him or her to play what you expect from the character and what you want him or

her to express. You therefore don't work with all actors the same way; to each his or her own method. Characters don't belong to you either; it takes two to find the necessary energy to make a character fit into a story.

When did your story take place, and within what context?

I don't want to link this story to a specific date. I don't want it to be set during the 2006 war, as some would be tempted to do. Yes, it is a war between Israel and Lebanon, but it's a fictitious war. What I am evoking is more the memory of sounds. What I am talking about is something that maleates one's identity once and for all: being born as a Palestinian of Israel, living in a country while at the same time being connected to those who live across the border and who are a part of my culture. The Palestinians of Israel are torn between tradition and modernism. They feel partially excluded from Israel, the country to which they are supposed to belong and they therefore try to preserve what is left of their tradition in order to protect their threatened identity. They embrace the traditions in a strong family structure that gives them the impression of creating

a "Home". I was seven years old at the outbreak of the first war, and I thus had, at a very young age, to start wondering about life, existence, commitment, and responsibility. There weren't any bombs that fell directly on me, but I lived with the rumbling of planes above my head and the thundering of bombardments in the distance. Living in a situation of war alters your perception of life. Under this threat, which is overwhelming and can destroy you suddenly; you only think of your survival, you cling on to your own small personal hang-ups. It's a trivial behavior that saves you sometimes. In the film, everyone bustles about in preparation for the wedding festivities, yet it only takes a bomb falling nearby for everything to stop. That's the reason why I transformed the group photo, the entire family together, into a freeze-frame: it is all so fragile, so ephemeral. Living in such a context brings you an attachment to life that borders on madness.

There is indeed a threatening sound backdrop in Inheritance. It must have required a specific kind of work.

The co-production with Turkey specified that the sound work was to take place over there, with a sound designer who was in charge of both the sound editing and mixing for the film. He is the one with whom I chose my airplane sounds, my village atmospheres... based on recordings made here and there, because I didn't want to use any archive or stock sounds. It's a mental war that haunts people's minds. It's a dramatic backdrop that hounds you.

What were your music choices?

I didn't want oriental music. I wanted the score to accompany the emotion without emphasizing it. Just as in the tracking shot in the darkness through the village, after the wedding, when the harp brings a fragile and somewhat playful tone. I also like the cello's vibration as Ahmad beats his wife,

while the camera brushes past his skin, the nape of his neck, and then opens onto the seascape. The instrument mirrors the turmoil experienced by this man, at that moment. I worked with Loïc Dury, whom I'd known for a while. I wanted him to compose everything, aside, obviously, from the songs that are heard on the radio sets and the bride's song, which is a traditional song that adds a romantic flair.

The film was shot in Israel...

... In my native Galilee, whose beauty I truly wanted to show. I could have filmed in the village where I grew up, which is hardly twenty minutes away, but I thought that this place, near the Lebanese border, was a superb location for the outdoors scenes. There is a majesty that has always awed me, with the vast expanses of green, the mountains. This site stirs a lot of emotion in me. What's more, I've always dreamed of breaking this border... this imaginary border. The indoors scenes were shot in two villages near Haifa.

How was the screenplay written?

Ala Hlehel, a Palestinian author from Israel, sent me the screenplay, which he wanted me to direct. He had started getting the project under way with two Israeli producers. I liked the structure of the story as Ala Hlehel had written it, centered on the family, but I wanted us to rewrite it together in order to better grasp the subject. I had the producer Nicolas Blanc, of Agat Films, read the script: we had promised each other to work together. He found the right questions to ask in order to make the narrative clearer. Then I reworked a new version with Nadine Naous, a Palestino-Lebanese film director whose modernism and wit I particularly appreciate. Then I worked on a final version with G.A. Wasi, who plays Cousin Ali in the film: a young American film maker whose humor helped me bring a bit of lightness into the story.

Does this story contain autobiographical fragments?

This isn't really my story, even if the path followed by Hajar – who has to leave her country to assert her difference – is similar to mine. She struggles against the overbearing social order and refuses to take the path established for her to decide on her own life instead. This character is the link between my past and my present. She evokes memories of my childhood and teenage years. Each character in the film corresponds to a person I have known.

So, there is a fictitious Israeli-Lebanese war and a family conflict as a backdrop. In which way does this accentuate the characters' inner conflicts, the struggle between tradition and modernism?

This war adds a dramatic element to these people's daily lives. When I think back to my childhood in Palestine, what comes to the surface isn't the war itself but the fact that this war reveals a form of identity crisis. War forces everyone to

wonder about their place in society and family, it forces you to take a stance in relation to the legacies, memories and traditions that are being imposed upon you. For my part, I felt as though I was on the fringes of the Israeli society, foreign to its traditions and its way of functioning. But I felt just as alienated from the traditional Palestinian society laden with conservative values.

Hajar fights this battle at the price of blackmail, rejection, blows... and a certain amount of guilt.

I don't know how you could go through life loving your parents, your siblings and wanting to be different without feeling guilty. When I started imposing my difference, it entailed sleepless nights for me. I was young, and fragile psychologically. You feel a burden; you hesitate with each new step towards freedom, because you don't want to hurt those who are dear to you. You take one step forward and three backwards. You sink, you drown, and at times, you tell yourself that you're going to drop the whole thing, destroy it all.



INHERITANCE is a choral film. What do the other characters represent? Doesn't the "family" mirror a social group, a nation?

Indeed! Hence my wish not to centre my story on Hajar or on the father. I wanted to encompass all the characters who filled my childhood and who form the society of Palestinians of Israel today. I'm seeking to suggest, without being too heavy-handed, this identity dilemma. What does it mean, being a Palestinian of Israel? Why are we attached to this identity? I tried to broach the subject without judging the characters, or their actions. In order to go forward in my own life, I decided to embrace my past, and love these people...

A group portrait in which you played the character that resembles you the least...

The production wanted me to play one of the

characters, which is something I hadn't wanted at first. They asked me to play Zeinab, the older sister, but I really wanted to work with Ula Tabari, whom I had seen in Elia Suleiman's first film, and whom I've learned to appreciate as a person. So, I decided to play the role of the embittered, sophisticated, upper-crust mother, who is the most traditional of all the characters.

Why did you choose Hafsia Herzi to play Hajar?

What she is in real life corresponds to what I wanted for the character: this carefree side of her, with this inner sadness, and something that is slightly "off". She has a way of being that is beyond commitment or non-commitment, a way of making people feel that she'll do what she wants, in spite of you, no matter what! Far from the cliché of the young Palestinian as a victim and a rebel.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Hiam Abbass was born in Nazareth and grew up in a Palestinian village in north of Galilee. She started acting on stage at the age of 10, but decided to go to a photography school in Haifa. After graduating, she joined El-Hakawati Theatre in Jerusalem as an actress and then worked in a theatre for children in Haifa. In 1987, she moved to London, and then settled in Paris where she started her career in movies.

Her feature films have since included Rashid Masharawi's HAÏFA; Raja Amari's SATIN ROUGE; Yousry Nasrallah's THE GATE OF THE SUN; Hany Abu-Assad's Academy Award-nominated PARADISE NOW; Amos Gitai's FREE ZONE; Steven Spielberg's MUNICH. Additionally, on "Munich" as well as Alejandro González Iñárritu's BABEL, she worked as creative consultant and acting coach to first-time actors. Hiam Abbass has performed in two films by the Israeli director Eran Riklis, THE SYRIAN BRIDE and LEMON TREE. The latter won the Audience Award at the Berlin Inter-

national Film Festival as well as numerous acting awards for Hiam Abbass, including both a European Film Award nomination and an Israeli Film Academy Award for Best Actress. She was acclaimed for her performance opposite Academy Award nominee Richard Jenkins in Thomas McCarthy's THE VISITOR.

She also acted in Cherien Dabis' AMREEKA, Dima El-Horr EVERY DAY IS A HOLIDAY, Jim Jarmush's THE LIMITS OF CONTROL and Radu Mihaileanu's THE SOURCE.

Hiam Abbass has written and directed two short films, "Le pain" (in which she also starred) and "La Danse Eternelle".

Julian Schnabel's MIRAL, where she stars in the lead role of real-life heroine Hind Hussein, world-premiered at the Venice Film Festival on 2010.

She has just completed the shooting of two new features, Laïla Marrakchi's ROCK THE CASBAH and Cherien Dabis' MAY IN THE SUMMER.

INHERITANCE is Hiam Abbass' first feature.

FILMOGRAPHY

ACTRESS

MAY IN THE SUMMER by Cherien DABIS (on post production)
ROCK THE CASBAH by Laila MARRAKCHI (on post production)
THE SOURCE / LA SOURCE DES FEMMES by Radu MIHAILEANU
UNE BOUTEILLE A LA MER by Thierry BINISTI
MIRAL by Julian SCHNABEL
EVERY DAY IS A HOLIDAY by Dima EL- HARR
PERSECUTION by Patrice CHEREAU
ESPIONS by Nicolas SAADA
THE LIMITS OF CONTROL by Jim JARMUSCH
HUMAN ZOO by Rie RASMUSSEN
THE VISITOR by Tom MCCARTHY
KANDISHA by Jérôme COHEN-OLIVAR
GRENADES AND MYRRHE by Najwa NAJJAR
AMREEKA by Cherien DABIS
L'AUBE DU MONDE by Abbas FAHDEL
LEMON TREE by Eran RICKLIS
UN ROMAN POLICIER by Stéphanie DUVIVIER
LA FABRIQUE DES SENTIMENTS by Jean-Marc MONTOUT
DESENGAGEMENT by Amos GITAI
DIALOGUE AVEC MON JARDINIER by Jean BECKER
THE NATIVITY STORY by Catherine HARDWICKE
MUNICH by Steven SPIELBERG
FREE ZONE by Amos GITAI
PARADISE NOW by Abu-Assad HANY
THE SYRIAN BRIDE by Eran RICKLIS
AZUR ET ASMAR (Voice) by Michel OCELOT
THE GATE OF SUN by Yousry NASRALLAH
LE DEMON DE MIDI by Marie-Pascal OSTERRIETH
L'ANGE DE GOUDRON by Denis CHOUINARD
SATIN ROUGE by Raja AMARI
FAIS-MOI DES VACANCES by Didier BIVEL
ALI, RABIA ET LES AUTRES by Ahmed BOULANE
AIME TON PÈRE by Jacob BERGER
VIVRE AU PARADIS by Bourlem GUERDJOU
HAIFA by Rashid MASHARAWI

WRITER – DIRECTOR

2011 INHERITANCE / HERITAGE
2003 LA DANSE ETERNELLE (short feature)
2001 LE PAIN (short feature)





CAST

Hafsia Herzi	Hajar
Hiam Abbass	Samira
Yussef Abu Warda	Khalil
Ashraf Barhoum	Ahmad
Ruba Blal	Saada
Clara Houry	Salma
Makram Houry	Abu Majd
Khalifa Natour	Majd
Tom Payne	Matthew
Lina Soualem	Alya
Mouna Soualem	Lana
Ali Suleiman	Marwan
Ula Tabari	Zeinab
G.A. Wasi	Cousin Ali



CREW

Director	Hiam Abbass
Screenplay	Hiam Abbass, Ala Hlehel
Co-authors	Nadine Naous, G.A. Wasi
Based on an original script by	Ala Hlehel
Cinematography	Antoine Heberlé
Editing	Guy Lecorne
Sound	Ashi Milo, Ulas Agce
Production designer	Nael Kanj
Music	Loik Dury
Producers	Nicolas Blanc, AGAT Films & cie (France) Arik Bernstein & David Silber, Alma Films (Israël) Ender Sevim & Faruk Özerten, Depo Film (Turkey)
Co-producers	Arte France Cinema, Appaloosa Films, Metro communications, United King Films
Executive producer	Mozer Films Ltd
In association with	Fonds sud, Israël Film Fund
With the participation of	ARTE / Canal +
French distribution	Diaphana



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