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Northwestern University in Qatar students shine at Ajyal Film Festival

The spotlight shined especially brightly on two students from Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) at the Ajyal Film Festival. Amal Al-Muftah, who has been called “the rising star of Qatari cinema,” received the Made in Qatar’s Best Narrative Film Award, while Mariam Al-Dhubhani, who was making her directorial debut, won Made in Qatar’s Best Documentary Award.

“NU-Q recognizes that these awards reflect on the quality of education our students receive, as well as the support they have from faculty, the administration, and student clubs,” said Everette E. Dennis, dean and CEO of NU-Q. “Over the past 10 years, we have been proud to see our students and alumni continue to shine at festivals from Ajyal to Cannes with films and documentaries that include powerful messages on social justices and incorporate creative storytelling techniques.”

Al-Muftah’s film “Sh’hab” (Shooting Star) was inspired by a myth her grandmother used to tell her about stars falling into the sea at night and new stars coming forth each new day. The film follows the perspective of a young girl in the village of Al Wakrah in eastern Qatar, who longs to spend time with her father and older brother at sea but is not allowed to join them. While at home, the girl’s mother tells her stories about the stars, which only fuels her imagination further, and she ultimately decides to set out one night and search for falling stars.

Al-Muftah believes the award for this film, which was funded by the Doha Film Institute (DFI), was an affirmation of all the hard work she and her team involved put into it, and she credits NU-Q Professor Rana Kazkaz with providing critical encouragement throughout the process. “While I was working on this film, I was taking the class Director’s Vision with Professor Kazkaz, who is also a director, and she gave me a lot of guidance and feedback on this film,” said Al-Muftah. “It was incredibly beneficial to go to class and learn about the filmmaking process while I was literally experiencing it as real-world application.”

Al-Dhubhani’s film “Just Another Memory” came from a personal experience as well. A Yemini citizen, she fled that country’s war in 2015 but found that escaping did not liberate her from the emotional and psychological effects. Feeling stuck in the past, unable to enjoy the present, or positively build her own future, Al-Dhubhani described

the film as the first step toward healing and processing everything that is taking place in her home-country.

“This personal documentary is a piece of me that tells not only a part of my life but also highlights an important humanitarian crisis that is not fairly covered by the media,” said Al-Dhubhani. “If it were not for Northwestern University in Qatar, I would not have been able to have the chance to follow my passion for media.”

Al-Dhubhani made the film as part of the DFI’s annual Documentary Lab. She also received grants from NU-Q through Studio 20Q and the Media Innovations Lab (MIL).

Studio 20Q is a student-run organization, which presents opportunities for students to experience filmmaking outside of the classroom by providing grants for student films, filmmaking workshops, and access to a network of professional filmmakers in Qatar and around the world. In addition to providing grants, the MIL has dedicated space in NU-Q’s building that offers students the opportunity to explore and experiment with new technologies, as well as attend workshops with communication professionals who share their experiences with NU-Q students.

In addition to these awards, recent NU-Q graduate Nouf Al Sulaiti was awarded Best Short Film in the Mohaq category for her film “Gubgub,” which is about a young girl who is discouraged when her father values her brother’s accomplishments over hers and sets out to win his approval.

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About Northwestern University in Qatar

Northwestern University in Qatar draws from its parent organization, [Northwestern University](#) (Evanston, Illinois), a distinguished history, famous programs, and an exceptional faculty. Founded in partnership with Qatar Foundation, NU-Q provides a framework through which students explore the world and, ultimately, shape its future through its distinguished schools of [communication](#), [journalism and strategic communication](#), and [liberal arts](#).