

Najwa Najjar



surrounded by havoc and destruction, she blinded herself to a situation that worsened daily and opened her eyes to the possibilities that lie in cinema.

With over ten award-winning films, including the 2015 Palestinian nomination for the Academy Awards Best Foreign Film (Oscars), Najjar has learned that films allow people to dream the same dream, share emotions, and ultimately have hope.

To further that hope, she worked with Arab filmmakers, first as a reader for and then as an adviser to the Rawi Sundance Screenwriters Lab. And by introducing Egyptian and Algerian superstars to the Palestinian screen, Najjar broke new ground for filmmakers, proving further how shared commonalities can cross borders and assert the power of cinema.

More doors were opened in *Pomegranates and Myrrh* and *Eyes of a Thief*, both shot exclusively in Palestine. She defies prevailing restrictions by bringing together Palestinians from throughout the country and the diaspora to work on her set that is generally equally divided between males and females. Another untested ground will be explored in her upcoming feature *Son of a Very Important Man*.

Representing Palestine at major international film festivals and serving as a festival jury member, Najjar highlights the need for alternative narratives far from the demonized and dehumanized stereotypes. While cinema is an integral part of her life and passions, the good things in her life are family (paramount!), friends, travel, arts and books, sports, adventures into the unknown, getting lost, cooking different foods, and meeting new people, to name a few.

Najwa Najjar grew up in exile. Her first glimpse of Palestine was through a fragmented history, pieced together from stories told to her and her brothers and accompanied by pictures that both her parents had hurriedly tucked away in 1948. A camera from her father who was a journalist at one point in his life and the music and books with which her mother filled their home in Saudi Arabia became Najjar's tools of expression.

At university in the United States, Najjar was confronted with horrific stereotypes of herself and Palestinians and a media determined not to see Arabs otherwise. Armed with an MA in cinema, she returned to the center of the conflict in the midst of the "peace process." Living between Ramallah and Jerusalem,

