

Normal

Director: Merzak Allouache

Writer: Merzak Allouache

Cast: Adila Bendimerad, Nouha Mathlouti, Nadjib Oulebsir, Nabil Asli, Samir el Hakim, Ahmed Bebaissa

Production: Kobal Productions

Running Time: 100 minutes

We often hear of directors jailed or banned from making movies, with Iran's Jafer Panahi being a recent and celebrated case in point. Algeria's Merzak Allouache talks precisely about this in his fiction feature "Normal", which won the Doha Tribeca Film Festival's top award.



Two years before Tunisia and Egypt were swamped by a political tsunami, Allouache was recording the frustrations of young men and women who could not channel their energy and enthusiasm into artistic avenues. At the time there

was little freedom for them to express themselves, especially through movies.

It is this theme that Allouache uses to tell the film's story, in which a group of artists meet in the house of a film director to watch footage of the Arab Spring, which the director hopes to use as a backdrop for a fiction film he had shot earlier with the same actors. The mix of their reaction to the rebellion itself and their performances in the film are beautifully crafted, as one might expect from the man who directed 1994's Bab el-Oued under similar trying conditions. That film went on to win the International Critic's Prize at Cannes and the Grand Prize at Paris' Arab Film Festival.

On the Road to Downtown

Director: Sherif el Bendary

Production: Zero Production

Running Time: 53 minutes

Political cinema can often be gripping, particularly when it's current. Predictably, the Doha Tribeca Film Festival programmers included several movies on the Arab Spring. Among the standouts was Sherif el-Bendary's documentary "On the Road to Downtown", a film that was easily among the festival's highlights

El-Bendary was one of the thousands

of people who marched the streets of Cairo in January demanding the removal of president Hosni Mubarak. While protesting, El-Bendary used his camcorder to capture the revolution occurring around him. The footage eventually became this documentary, which he had actually begun putting together four months before Mubarak finally stepped down.

"On the Road to Downtown" is a fearless expose of what people living among Cairo's neighbourhoods thought about Mubarak and his three decades in power, presenting an engaging exchange



with the everyday man on the street. Brutally frank and hard-hitting, the film captures the mood with absolute precision.

The Artist

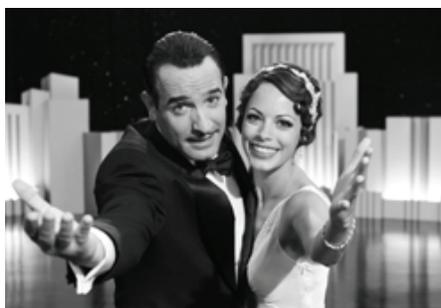
Director: Michel Hazanavicius

Writer: Michel Hazanavicius

Cast: Jean Dujardin, Berenice Bejo, John Goodman.

Production: Thomas Langmann

"The Artist" by Michel Hazanavicius, screened in the Contemporary World Cinema section at Doha, is a visually arresting black and white work that tells the story of Hollywood as it moves from silent films to talkies. The director contrasts the pain and pathos with the pleasure and joy of these two periods. While the arrival of sound signals the rise of a new breed of film stars, the passing of silence sees the decline of others. In "The Artist", the lives of two actors are examined: one a pretty actress



whose star is rising, and the other a seasoned veteran, whose time silently enthralled thousands through mimicry and exaggerated gestures is coming to an end.

A moustachioed Jean Dujardin engagingly plays George Valentin, an actor famed for his romantic films. When he takes a fancy to an attractive

Peppy Miller (Berenice Bejo), things begin to spiral out of control. Her pictures appear in the newspapers and she gets herself a small part in a Valentin production. But while she manages to keep up with times, effortlessly switching to talkies, Valentin adamantly rejects the new format, leading to financial ruin, divorce and almost death. In the end, Valentin is resurrected by Peppy (who never forgets the man who gave her the first break) in a movie aptly titled "Guardian Angel".

Through a series of captivating scenes (in particularly the one that signals the dawn of sound in films, when a glass is placed on a table with a thud) coupled by some very strong performances, "The Artist" is a wonderfully nostalgic triumph.