

WHEN I SAW YOU

لَمَّا سَفْنَا

*a film by*  
ANNEMARIE JACIR

Karlsruhe  
63<sup>rd</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Forum

tiff. toronto  
international  
film festival  
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012





**SYNOPSIS**

*Jordan, 1967.*

*Some people follow the masses, others the sun.*

*Tarek, 11, eccentric and unbounded, runs away from home in this search for freedom.*

*A journey of the human spirit that knows no borders.*

The world is alive with change: brimming with reawakened energy, new styles, music and an infectious sense of hope. In Jordan, a different kind of change is underway as tens of thousands of refugees pour across the border from Palestine. Having been separated from his father in the chaos of war, Tarek, 11, and his mother Ghaydaa, are amongst this latest wave of refugees. Placed in »temporary« refugee camps made up of tents and prefab houses until they would be able to return, they wait, like the generation before them who arrived in 1948. With difficulties adjusting to life in Harir camp and a longing to be reunited with his father, Tarek searches a way out, and discovers a new hope emerging with the times. Eventually his free spirit and curious nature lead him to a group of people on a journey that will change their lives.

*When I Saw You* is the story of people affected by the times around them, in search of something more in their lives. A journey full of adventure, love, humor, and the desire to be free, but most of all this is a story about that moment in a person's life when he wakes up and finds the whole world is open and everything is possible – that moment you feel most alive.





**WRITER / DIRECTOR / PRODUCER**

*Annemarie Jacir* is an independent filmmaker and screenwriter living in Jordan. Named one of Filmmaker magazine's 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema, two of her films have premiered as Official Selections at the Cannes Film Festival, one as an Academy Award qualifier, and one in Venice. Her first feature film, *Salt of this Sea*, was Palestine's Official Oscar Entry for Best Foreign Language Film and was also noted as the first feature film directed by a Palestinian woman. *Salt of this Sea* won the prestigious FIPRESCI Critic's Prize, as well as Best Film in Milan, Best Film in Traverse City and the Special Jury Prizes at both the Osians Asian & Arab Film Festival and Oran Festival of Arab Cinema.

Jacir lived in Saudi Arabia until the age of sixteen, moving between Bethlehem and Riyadh. She then received her formal education in the United States. Her career in cinema began as an assistant on various sets, and learning to edit. She first worked in the film industry in Los Angeles and then as an editor and camerawoman before attending Columbia University in New York to obtain a MFA degree in Film. After years of shuttling back and forth between projects, Annemarie eventually returned to the Arab world.

Jacir co-founded Philistine Films, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Arab world and has been involved in numerous productions. Jacir also shot and produced the documentary *Until When*, an in-depth portrait of the lives of several families living in the Deheisha refugee camp as well as several other films. She collaborated with Algerian-French filmmaker Nassim Amouache on *A Few Crumbs for the Birds*, a documentary sketch of the lives of a handful of men and women eking out a living in the Jordanian town of Ruwayshed (Official Selection Venice International Film Festival, Best film Montpellier, Press prize Clermont Ferrand).

Annemarie teaches screenwriting and works as an editor as well as film curator, actively promoting independent cinema. In 2011, renown Chinese director Zhang Yimou selected her to be his first protégée as part of the Rolex Arts Initiative. *When I Saw You* is her second feature film. She lives in Amman.





FILMOGRAPHY

## **SALT OF THIS SEA**

(2008, 104 min, Color 35mm)

World Premiere, Cannes Film Festival, Official Selection, Un Certain Regard, 2008, Palestine's Official Oscar Entry, Foreign Language Film, 2008, First Prize – Best Film, Sguardi Altrove Film Festival Italy, 2008, Randa Chahal Award, Carthage International Film Festival, 2008, FIPRESCI Critics Award, Osians Arab & Asian Film Festival, 2008, Best First Film, Traverse City Film Festival, 2009, Special Jury Prize Oran International Festival of Arab Cinema, 2009, Audience Choice Award, New Orleans Int. Human Rights Film Festival, 2010, Best Screenplay Dubai International Film Festival, 2008, Jury Prize, Osians Arab & Asian Film Festival, 2008, Sopadin Finalist, Grand Prix du Meilleur Scenariste 2007, Audience Choice Award, Chicago Pali Film Festival 2009, Audience Choice Award, Houston Pali Film Festival, 2009, Winner of Gan Foundation Award 2007, Recipient of Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media 2007, Amiens Screenplay Development Pre-selection 2004, Berlinale Co-Production Market Selection 2005, Sundance Screenwriters Lab Selection 2005, Hubert Bals Development Award 2005, London BFI Film Festival, Official Selection, Pusan International Film Festival, Official Selection, Tribeca Film Festival, Official Selection.

## **LIKE TWENTY IMPOSSIBLES**

(2003, 17 min, Color, 35mm)

World Premiere, Cannes Film Festival, Official Selection, Cinefondation, 2003, Recipient of Jerome Foundation Media Arts Grant, 2003, Best Films of the Year list, 2003 – Film Comment Magazine, National Finalist – Academy of Motion Picture Arts, Student Academy Awards, Best Short Screenplay – Nantucket Film Festival, Best Short Film – Palm Springs International Short Film Festival, Best Short Film (Emerging Narrative) – IFP/New York, Silver Plaque – Chicago International Film Festival, Best Short Film – Institute Du Monde Arabe Bi-annual, Best Screenwriting – Lenola Film Festival, Italy, Best Short Film Second Prize – Lenola Film Festival, Italy, Audience Choice Award – Polo Ralph Lauren Columbia University Festival, Special Jury Prize – Ramallah International Film Festival, Audience Choice Award – San Diego Women Film Festival 2006, Luis Trenker Award for Best Short Film – 4Film Festival, Borderlands, 2006, Locarno Film Festival, Official Selection, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Official Selection, Telluride Film Festival, Official Selection, New York Film Festival, Official Selection





**DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**



Since I have not been able to return to Ramallah, my understanding of exile and of being torn from one's home has taken on more dimensions and deeper meanings. Being so close by living in Amman has not made it easier – only more difficult, more painful. A short drive and I can see Palestine from here. Over the valley I see the hills, even recognize cities. My friends, my family, my apartment in Ramallah is there – but I can no longer reach it. Palestine is becoming a memory and I struggle to hold the visuals, the reality of my life there, as close to me as I can.

This is how *When I Saw You* was born. The striking visual awareness of being so close to home and yet it being an impossible dream. The reality of seeing what you want but being unable to reach it. This film is about the depth of that landscape, its beauty and its cruelty. It's also about how hope keeps us alive. And an important time period in our history where regular, every day people felt they could do something to change their lives, an infectious feeling full of dreams and change.

Tarek can't understand the reality of borders and places being forbidden. But in actuality, the question is to be asked – who is really naïve? Tarek is a boy with such a beautiful sense of freedom, a desire to express himself, to live in a world where he is safe, and where he loves and is loved. He is different than other kids somehow and his mind tends towards logic and therefore the illogicality of borders is something he cannot comprehend.

For Ghaydaa, she has become serious and realistic in order to survive and protect herself and her loved ones, but there's still a small spark inside of her, that fire that was extinguished long ago, which remains. It takes Tarek's denial of all conventions, his own way of being and thinking, which brings her back to a place she once was.

*When I Saw You* is a portrait of hope – of that very specific moment in a person's life when the whole world opens up. It is brief, it is specific to time and circumstances ... maybe it's gone by morning. But it's there – it's there for that one moment where your heart feels like exploding and everything is possible.





**INTERVIEW WITH ANNEMARIE JACIR**

*You chose to set your new film »When I Saw You« in 1967. Can you tell us why we have never seen an Arab film dealing with this time period?*

I don't know because it's a tremendously important year for us. I never lived 1967 but I grew up hearing about it all my life. Although that year was a great tragedy for my family, it was also a time of great hope in the world. Like the late 60s everywhere, people were going through a kind of rebirth, an infectious sense of hope that they could change their own lives. Student movements, anti-colonial movements, civil rights, ... I wanted to tell a story about this important time, not to be nostalgic but rather because it is so relevant. I started writing the script at a time where I was in need of hope in my own life, and in what I saw going on around me, in my own generation.

*And why focus on a young boy and his mother?*

Because I like stories about regular people who are thrown into unusual circumstances. Tarek and his mother are exactly that, and because of a situation out of their control, they are thrown into a political condition they never asked for. And during this time period full of a spirit of resistance infused with great hope, I wanted to tell a personal story, that of a young mother trying to protect her son and a boy whose spirit has not been broken yet. They are also like anyone else in the world, where Tarek is looking for his own

independence from his mother, not to be treated as a child by her. At the same time, the adult world cannot offer him any answers to his questions.

*How much research do you do before writing?*

A lot. Research was key, especially as I did not live the time period. I collected hundreds of images and footage from people, organizations, news and film archives. Documentaries, archival photos and films were crucial to »see« the look of the refugee camp, the people, the fighters and their training sessions. My past work in locating the lost Palestinian film archives of the Palestinian revolutionary cinema was a big part of it too. Books like Genet's memoir, and also unrelated literature and films of the period, as there's also something of an homage to the period, one of the reasons for the freeze frame at the end. The research for each department, like art, wardrobe, and hair, was a lot of fun too. I also conducted several interviews, mostly in Jordan, with people who were involved in the resistance. Of course there were larger questions but also questions like, »What brand of cigarettes did you smoke?«, »What was your favorite song?«, »What did you wear at night?«....

*Would you say then your vision of the period is realistic?*

Absolutely not. This film is very much my fantasy, and the fantasy of a little boy, and how he sees the world from his





point of view. It's a romantic vision, not a documentary. It's also very much about feelings, a mother's obsession to protect her child in the face of war, and the moment in a boy's life between childhood and manhood, and finding his own personal independence.

*Music plays a large role in the film. Can you tell us more?*

In the late 1960's Palestinians were very much connected to what was happening all over the world – they were listening to Arabic classics, and also creating a new kind of music, influenced from both their east and their west, and pushing boundaries, as in their own lives. I worked with long-time collaborator Kamran Rastegar on the original track and also researched and discovered a lot of obscure musicians and bands of the time; Lebanese rock, Armenian fusion, Egyptian jazz, Moroccan avant-garde Gnawa, some really fun stuff, and that is what we hear on the radio most of the time in the film, other than the constant news broadcasts.

In terms of the film's live music, the first piece, around the fire, is an original song written for the film, sung by Ruba Shamshoum, a new jazz singer. There was certain magic in the time before TVs and computers and when people were together they would sing. I wanted to break the rhythm of the film with this unusually long sequence, to change the pace so we would linger on the faces of these young men and women, each with their own stories, depth, nostalgia,

madness; people so amously absent from the media normally. And finally coming back into Tarek with his half-scared, half-confused world starting to descend into images and feelings he cannot understand ...

The second piece which leads into the dancing is one of the most famous Palestinian resistance songs, »Akka's Prison«, written in 1930 against British rule, as a commemoration to three men who were hung, and a call to continue the struggle for freedom.

*Why did you use non-professional actors?*

I like finding people whose own lives are close to the role, I like the element of freshness they bring to the film and how together we create another reality. The casting process was intensive. We cast a wide net. But I also chose several professional actors like, for example, Tarek's mother, Ruba Blal. Ruba is amazing and I wanted to work with her for some time. As is Saleh Bakri who I cast for my first feature when he was still new. We have both changed so much since then and I like growing together.

*Is it true you made your actors go through actual military training?*

Of course! The film has a romantic vision of the fighters ... imagine how stupid they'd look if they couldn't shoot a Kalashnikov or climb the ropes? They went through weeks





of intense training. At the same time I was very easy on them because to be true, these men and women were not in an organized army and didn't have real training. They were young people from the refugee camps, volunteers, who chose this path to liberation. I also asked the cast to sleep in Dibeen forest; to listen to the sounds of the night, to develop relationships with each other and with nature, to become part of the landscape. In fact, I never showed them the script but rather worked on who they were and how they got there rather than the story itself.

*We don't hear about a lot of Arab films shot in Jordan. How was shooting there?*

Jordan is still far away from having a real independent cinema scene and shooting there is very difficult unless you are a big budget, commercial film. If you don't have money, the right last name or the right politics, unfortunately it's very difficult to find support as a low-budget, local film. We are trying to change that. For me, it's very important to work locally, and not bring in all your crew from abroad. It's part of what we need to do to build a self-reliant, independent cinema.

*One would imagine with a film with this subject you might have also encountered political problems in Jordan?*

Yes, although the film is not meant to be realistic and is

told from a child's point of view, we discovered it's still a very sensitive topic in Jordan, even after so many years. This »political« tension was felt by our crew and also our cast, who are made up of a lot of young people, some of them the children of fedayee, and who experience this tension often. We also faced occasional obstacles with the authorities during the production which caused set backs, but we also found a lot of support. Thanks to this support we persevered.

*Did you use only natural sets?*

We had two main locations for the film. The first was Harir Refugee camp, which is entirely constructed. Between 1967 and 1968, »emergency camps« as they were called, were set up all over Jordan and Syria in order to house the influx of refugees. Of course they were meant to be temporary and as we know the refugees were never allowed to return. So these camps today still exist but look nothing like they did then. So with a lot of visual research, we built the whole set.

The second major location is Dibeen forest, where the fighters live. This is the actual location of where the Palestinians hid and trained for years. Scouting there was an incredible experience. We found remnants of the time period everywhere; bullets, shell encasings, and canned food. The tunnels you see in the film, where they hide and where they store supplies, are the actual tunnels the fighters made. We dis-

covered the most intricate tunnels, connecting to each other, a whole underground world. We even found the tunnel where they built a hospital! Deep in the mountains, you enter a small hole to discover seven or eight large rooms, and inside all the remnants of the former hospital, including medicine, bottles, IV bags, and other supplies.

*Can you tell us about the title? Where does it come from?*

The film is about moments in person's life where things change. For me, the title is about when a person sees something or someone for the first time, whether they have seen them a million times already but this time they are truly seeing, as if for the first time. It could be a person or a place. It could be seeing your homeland across the border, or a loved one, or that realization of seeing your own life for what it is, or what it could be. It's the moment you understand something that you didn't before. Sometimes something is right in front of you but you don't see it. Or you don't see the possibilities.

*And also you've mentioned before your experience of seeing Palestine from Jordan...*

Exactly. All my life I had what I call »the privilege of Palestine« – that is the ability to be there, to live there, unlike 75% of my people, who are forbidden from that. For three decades I have been crossing the borders. When I was no longer allowed to return, and I could only see Palestine from across the Jordan valley, I understood something, or rather felt something, I had never known before. Like so many people who have been displaced, the hardest part is standing somewhere and actually seeing it; looking into the distance and seeing a land you recognize and know so intimately, which has now been denied to you. And trying to wrap your brain around the stupidity of borders, the illogicality of human beings being separated from each other because someone now says there is a line in the earth there called a »border« ...





**CAST & CREW**



**TAREK:** *Mahmoud Asfa*

Thirteen year old Mahmoud, lives with his family in Irbid refugee camp. His family is originally from Palestine and became refugees in Jordan, unable to cross the border where their homeland lies just across the valley. *When I Saw You* is his first acting role. He enjoys playing football and his pet birds.

**GHAYDAA:** *Ruba Blal*

Ruba Blal is a Palestinian actress living in Jaffa. Film credits include *Miral and Atash*, Cannes FIPRESCI winner. She has also been actively involved in the Palestinian theater scene with performances in »Al Jidareeya« (Hawawati Playhouse), and »Umm Daya« where she received the Best Actress award.

**LAYTH:** *Saleh Bakri*

Saleh Bakri is a Palestinian actor born in Bina village in the Galilee in 1977. His mother is from Jaffa and his father, the well known actor Mohammed Bakri, is from Bina. He has performed regularly in theater. *Salt of this Sea* (2008) was his debut performance in an Arab film. Other films include *The Band's Visit*, *The Time That Remains*, and *La Source des Femmes*.

**PRODUCER:** *Ossama Bawardi*

Ossama Bawardi is an independent producer based in Palestine and Jordan. Bawardi has been involved in various Palestinian productions and has been a guest participant of the Tribeca All

Access Program in New York, as well as the Thessaloniki Film Festival's Crossing Borders Film Market. He has been invited to speak on several panels regarding film production in the Middle East including with Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. He also directed and produced the short film *Haneen* (2010).

**CINEMATOGRAPHER:** *Helene Louwart*

Helene Louwart is the DOP of films by Sandrine Veysset, Marc Recha, Dominique Cabrera, Christian Vincent among many others). And most recently *Pina* – the latest film by Wim Wenders. *When I Saw You* is her first collaboration with Annemarie Jacir.

**PRODUCTION COMPANY:**

*Philistine Films aka Lamma Shoftak LLC.*

was founded in 1997, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Arab world. Productions include *like twenty impossibles* – which was an Academy awards qualifier and is cited as one of the most successful short Arab films to date, and which was an Official Selection of the Cannes International Film Festival winning more than 15 prizes at film festivals across the globe. Philistine Films co-produced the feature film *Salt of this Sea* making it their second film to debut as an Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival. The film won 17 international prizes and has since been sold to more than 30 countries and has been theatrically released across Europe, Asia and other parts of the world.





## CAST

Tarek *Mahmoud Asfa*  
 Ghaydaa (Um Tarek) *Ruba Blal*  
 Layth *Saleh Bakri*  
 Majed *Firas W. Taybeh*  
 Abu Akram *Ali Elayan*  
 Zain *Ruba Shamsoum*  
 Toussaint *Ahmad Srour*  
 Mr. Nasser *Anas Algaralleh*  
 Waleed *Waleed Ramabi*  
 Organization Recruiter *Jawhar Salim*  
 Jihan *Fadia Abu Ayash*  
 Jawad *Ossama Bawardi*  
 As'ad *Ahmad Massad*  
 Amal *Shereen Zoumot*  
 Imwas Refugee *Hamada Atallah*  
 Peasant Woman *Hala Shishany*  
 City Girl 1 *Nadine Zureikat*  
 City Girl 2 *Emna Ben Rejeb*  
 City Boy 1 *Mahmoud al Hayek*  
 City Boy 2 *Ahmad Almubeisan*  
 Hopeful Man *Rami Yasin*  
 George al Nabulsi *Yahya Alabdallah*  
 Abu Hadeed *Yazan al Rousan*  
 Abu Shibreyeh *Sushi Firas*

## CREW

Director *Annemarie Jacir*  
 Producer *Ossama Bawardi*  
 Screenplay *Annemarie Jacir*  
 Cinematographer *Helene Louwart*  
 Music *Kamran Rastegar*  
 Editor *Annemarie Jacir*  
*Panos Voutsaras*  
 Art Director *Hussein Baydoun*  
 Costumes *Hamada Atallah*  
 Sound *Kostas Varibopiotis*  
*Raja Dubayeh*  
 First Assistant Director *Rami Yasin*  
 Production Company *Philistine Films*  
 Executive Producers *Annemarie Jacir*  
*Christos V. Konstantakopoulos*  
 Coproducers *Rami Yasin*  
*Sawsan Asfari*  
*Maya Sanbar*  
*Tarek Al Ghussein*  
 Coproduction (Jordan/Greece/UAE)  
*Lamma Shoftak LLC*  
*Faliro House Productions*  
*Asfari Foundation, Cactus Films*

With the participation of  
*Abu Dhabi Int. Film Fest (Sanad)*  
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*Visions Sud Est*  
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*The Arab Fund for Arts & Culture*  
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PRTEL GROUP

landmark



THE MATCH FACTORY



## TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

English Title: *When I Saw You*

Language: *Arabic*

Genre: *Fiction*

Production Year: *2012*

Country of Production: *Palestine/Jordan*

Length: *93 min*

Format: *35mm, DCP, Color*

Shooting Location: *Jordan*

# WHEN I SAW YOU

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