

XOFTEX

a film by Noaz Deshe

a production of ARDEN FILM in co-production with THE CUP OF TEA and executive producer WHITE FLUX PRODUCTIONS in association with WESTWARD PRODUCTIONS
starring ABDULRAHMAN DIAB, OSAMA HAFIRY & JALAL ALBAROUDI, HAZEM SALEH, MOUATAZ ALSHALTOUH, MOHAMAD AL RASHI, AMAL OMRAN, LUJAIN MUSTAFA, RAMADAN HAMOUD, MOHAMMAD DIBO, YASIN EL HAROUK
casting directors MAJD HAFIRY, OSAMA HAFIRY music THOMAS MOKED BLUM, NOAZ DESHE sound design OLIVER ACHATZ, LARS GINZEL, LUISE HOFMANN make-up LAILA BAYAZEED sfx make-up ANNA JÜNGLING
editors FELIPE GUERRERO, NOAZ DESHE production design MARITA GÖTZ, LEA WALLOSCHKE costume LAILA BAYAZEED, GRETA ENGELHARDT, TATTJANA JUNG, GIBRAN MACIAS cinematography NOAZ DESHE
executive producers MAJD HAFIRY, OSAMA HAFIRY, BABAK JALALI, PATRICK SCHORN, GRISCHA SAUTTER, GABRIEL STAVENHAGEN, ZACHARY GUGLIN, JULIAN CHAVEZ, EVE GABEREAU, MARIA DRANDAKI,
DIDAR DOMEHRI chief editor ZDF LUCIA HASLAUER co-producer CHRISTOPHE AUDEGUIS producers JORDAN TAPPIS, BEAU WILLIMON produced by ANDRO STEINBORN, NOAZ DESHE
inspired by ALI ABBAS, MOHAMMAD ABBAS, MAHMUD ABBAS, MOHAMMAD ABDULRAHMAN written by NOAZ DESHE, BABAK JALALI directed by NOAZ DESHE

DIRECTOR: NOAZ DESHE
COUNTRY: GERMANY, FRANCE
YEAR: 2024
LANGUAGE: ARABIC
DURATION: 99 MIN.

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Palestinian-Syrian teenager Nasser and his older brother Yassin have been living in a Greek refugee camp, awaiting a decision on their asylum application. They pass the time recording comedy sketches, fantasizing of making zombie films and moving to Sweden. Nasser, however, feels increasingly trapped in this no-man's-land. With nowhere to escape, Boiling tensions in the camp push Nasser to another world.

ABOUT NOAZ DESHE:



Noaz Deshe works as a director, DOP and musician.

He composed the soundtrack of Babak Jalali's *Frontier Blues*, And was the cinematographer of the Tiger winner - *Radio Dreams*.

His debut feature film *White Shadow* about the hunting of a young Albino won the Lion of the Future Award at Venice Film Festival and was showcased at Sundance Film Festival.

XOFTEX is his second feature film.

In addition to his artistic work, he has worked as a volunteer on sea rescue missions and in refugee camps.

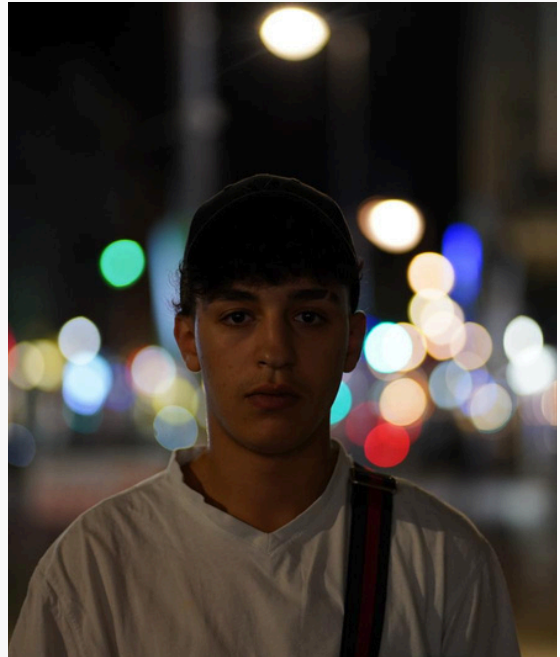
KEY CAST:

Abdulrahman Diab (Nasser):

Abdulrahman Diab, a 19-year-old Palestinian Syrian, is a first time actor and a rapper who began his musical journey at the age of eight. Now based in Berlin, his rap lyrics often reflect his life experiences as an asylum seeker in Germany.

Diab is passionate about both acting and writing, with a dream of starring in his films.

At 17, while still living in a refugee camp in Berlin with his mother and siblings, he took on the role of Nasser in "Xoftex".



Osama Hafiry (Yassin):

Osama Hafiry is a Syrian actor and director based in Berlin.

He studied acting at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus and earned a master's in visual arts and cinema from USEK in Lebanon.

In 2015, he co-founded White Flux Productions in Berlin with his brother Majd.

Osama worked as a guest actor at Gorki Theater in Berlin. He wrote and directed the short film "Amygdala" and the award-winning play "Hot Summer Night in a Forgotten City."

"Xoftex" marks his debut feature film as a lead actor, casting director, and executive producer.



KEY CAST:

Jalal Albaroudi (Tawattor):

Jalal Albaroudi, an actor and theatre-maker from Damascus, Syria, began his artistic journey in 2012 leading in the short film "One Day Calendar."

In 2016, Jalal traveled to Southeast Asia to pursue professional studies in both contemporary and traditional Asian theatre. His training encompasses the principles of Kutiyattam, Beijing Opera, Japanese Noh, and Wayang Wong, which he integrates into his film and theatre work.

In 2022, Jalal returned to Berlin, continuing his work in films. His most recent participation, "Amygdala," premiered at the Max Ophüls Preis Film Festival and was featured in several other festivals.

Mouataz Alshaltouh (Koksi):

Mouataz Alshaltouh is a Syrian-German actor. He was born in Syria and fled to Germany at the age of 17. He studies at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts.

His first experience in front of the camera was in the film "Xoftex" by Noaz Deshe.

He played a supporting role in the Sky series "Munich Games" by Philipp Kadelbach and next he was in the movie "Ein Fest fürs Leben".

Internationally, he starred in the film "To a land Unknown" by Mahdi Fleifel, which premiered at Cannes 2024.

Mouataz Alshaltouh plays one of the main roles in the new Disney series "City Of Blood" also directed by Philipp Kadelbach.

Amal Omran (Om Abdo):

Amal Omran is regarded one of the most accomplished actresses in the Arabic world. She graduated from The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus in 1989 and is highly demanded in theatre as well as TV and Film. She worked with Ariane Mnouchkine from 2004 to 2006, i.a. on the play „Gilgamesh“. Furthermore did she work with Kuwaiti-English director Sulayman al Bassam and performed in "Richard III - an Arab Tragedy" (2007) and "The Speaker's Progress" (2011), which were presented at several renowned Arabic speaking and international festivals. She worked with English director Tim Supple in the project "One Thousand and One Nights", which was presented at Edinburgh Festival a.o.. In 2014 her Monodrama "Hak" premiered at Kumbaraci 50 Theater in Istanbul. Her latest work includes "While I was waiting" by Mohammad Alaar, directed by Omar Abusaada. Since 2017 she is the artistic director of COLLECTIVE MA'LOUBA.

KEY CAST:

Mohamad Al Rashi (Imam):

Mohamad Al Rashi is a Syrian distinguished actor, director, and musician. A graduate of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts of Damascus, he has worked extensively in theater, cinema, and television. Since 2014, he has resided in Marseille, France. Al Rashi's latest film is "The Green Border" which premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2023

Lujain Mustafa (Souad):

Lujain Mustafa is a dancer, actor, and performer. She studied dance at the Folkwang University of the Arts. During her studies, she received a scholarship (Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes).

In September 2023, she completed an M.A. in dance theater interpretation at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen.

She danced in various projects and worked with many choreographers such as Ben j. Riepe, Nicola Hümpel, Jill Crovisier.

She works as a guest at the Maxim Gorki Theater and has done several short films. XOFTEX is her first feature film.

Yasin El Harouk aka Yonii (Rafiq)

Yonii, deeply rooted in Germany's music and acting scenes, intertwines rap with cinematic narratives that mirror his urban upbringing. Beyond his music, Yonii has explored acting, featuring in the film "Cortex" (2020), where he brought his unique charisma to roles that resonate with contemporary urban themes.

On television, he contributed to "4 Blocks" (2017-2019), a gritty drama set in Berlin's underworld, enriching the series with nuanced performances that added depth to its character-driven storyline.

Yonii's stage presence extends to theatrical productions, where he explores societal issues and personal narratives, showcasing his versatility as a performer and storyteller.

Throughout his journey, Yonii continues to push artistic boundaries, engaging audiences with authenticity and cultural relevance in both his music and acting careers within the German entertainment landscape.



WHAT EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS LED YOU TO CREATE THE FILM "XOFTEX"?

Between 2015-2018, the news and Neukölln, the neighborhood I've been living in Berlin, was dominated by the daily horrors of the Syrian war, which put a spotlight on the existing migration routes from North Africa and Turkey across land and the Mediterranean. I've been a long-time contributor to Fairplanet.org, a humanitarian news blog based in Berlin, and a supporter of XOFTEX, occasionally making videos or short documentaries as part of my contribution.

A mutual friend introduced me to CADUS, a grassroots Berlin-based NGO that travels to conflict zones to deploy field hospitals and teach people how to treat themselves. They were planning a mission to help save people from drowning off the coast of Libya and invited me to volunteer to help and document, with the idea that it could assist with funding. In close collaboration with Sea-Watch, we launched from Malta to encounter families from Eritrea, Gaza, Syria, and Gabon, struggling to stay afloat in the middle of the ocean. It was one of the most shocking and surreal experiences I've witnessed.

After the missions at sea, an incredible humanitarian operator, Amed Khan, urged me to see an exemplary refugee camp in Greece. Elpida Home was a safe camp with rooms, doors, classes, and spaces for children. It did not reflect the norm, but it served as a launchpad to explore the conditions of camps in Greece, which at the time, in most cases, were rife with corruption and abuse. From the Yazidi camp on the top of Mount Olympus freezing to death in tents to camps run by a local mayor's 18-year-old daughter just so they could slice off 7 euros from the 9-euro allowance for food per person.

After joining the deliveries of food and warm clothing to several camps in the north of Greece, I asked my friends which camp was the most difficult. Unanimously, the answer was Softex. A former burnt-out toilet paper factory in a toxic wasteland that was embroiled in a very public scandal involving the then Greek Minister of Migration and missing funds. Softex was located behind an industrial train yard, which meant that trains traversing the Balkans to Western Europe parked there at night, and criminal gangs ran a business of smuggling people at the bottom of the trains, the same gangs that would have violent conflicts with the Syrian population of the camp. Even more marginalized was a population of refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, Algiers, and Eritrea that the asylum system does not recognize that are forced to live outside the camp.

I arrived at Softex one night, parked outside, and spoke to people smoking cigarettes outside a hole in the fence. They were warm and welcoming and wanted to tell their stories. I felt emboldened to enter the camp and look for a space to talk to more people. The Red Cross tent was a place to gather, and very quickly, we found ourselves that night telling ghost stories to each other and filming some kind of short film. We made friends, and it was clear that whatever this was, we should keep doing it. We discussed setting up an official workshop in the camp.

The people I met that night introduced me to a small NGO called Intervolve, run by a handful of people, one of whom was managing the complex social work, conflict management, and donated food deliveries. In particular, a very inspiring Lebanese woman called Lamyia Karkour was miraculously managing the difficult task of balancing people's needs and contact with the military that oversaw the camp, police, and asylum services.

I participated in a week-long Italian workshop from Theatre of the Oppressed and was so inspired that I decided to take on a regular position of doing a weekly workshop, together with Nassos Chatzopoulos, a long-time collaborator who joined me from Athens. During that time, I met Ali Abbas, his brother, and friends, who wanted to make a zombie film in the camp. Throughout all this time from the boats to the camp, I've been documenting and archiving the process, not knowing what it might become. Ali is the inspiration for XOFTEX. He shares an additional writing credit on the film and is the protagonist of a documentary that is a mirror of XOFTEX and will be completed next year.

YOU CHOSE AN ABSTRACT AND EXPERIMENTAL STYLE INSTEAD OF THE USUAL REALISTIC AND STRAIGHTFORWARD STORYTELLING SEEN IN 'REFUGEE NARRATIVE' FILMS. HOW DOES IT BENEFIT THE FILM?

You cannot meet someone in reality without imagining it first. If you are to document that moment, what is it? Fiction?

We live in a current world where there is no shared version of reality. News is arguably only delivered by either actors or, in the best case, comedians who struggle to joke in order to make sense and draw attention to issues. There are a handful of real brave journalists who are often demonized. The mainstream fast-food media tends to dehumanize people rather than bring the audience closer, and images of victims, especially with an ongoing genocide not just in Gaza but predominantly in African nations or locations with severe human rights abuses, the norm is not to dive deep; it is to make you angry. Even the well-intentioned sometimes create a distance by not balancing the overly saturated images of horror.

Fiction or hybrid fiction allows us to document the unseen. The dream, the fantasy, the music in the head are no less a part of gravity reality than the surface. They are, in effect, our only way to process reality. It is also the key to making us feel seen and connected.

The technical tools we have today to make films allow us to enter more intimate spaces without the heaviness of a huge production, and those methods demand going into personal unknowns and exploring what cinema can attempt to touch. If the weight is removed from production, can it reach further in? Both in terms of form, languages, and beyond the cultural divides, and maybe to collect the little mirrors that we reflect in with each other. It could also be that I do not know how to tell this differently.

HOW DID THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS AND IMMERSIVE RESEARCH SHAPE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FILM?

The film is born, especially in this case, from a long learning and immersive research process in which the back and forth between protagonists and collaborators keeps testing the material by workshopping and inventing together. Some scenes and ideas were directly picked from documentary work and some from the joy of trying and failing better.

Once we arrive at the actual shooting days of a fiction film, we have already rehearsed, discussed, and corrected. The majority of the film was cast by Majd Hafiry and Osama, who plays Yassin in the film. They have brought their knowledge and community and with that a lot of luck and energy.

We spent a long period filming scenes and doing screen tests for the film, and through that process also discovered who should play what part. Meeting the Hafiry brothers early on, as well as going to Sweden together to film documentary footage of Ali Abbas and the original Softex protagonists, who have received asylum close to Malmö, was a process that bonded our ambitions to make the film together. And of course, it has been a lot of fun. Their input creatively is part of what checks the film's reflection.

The most inspiring works of film, like *The Battle of Algiers*, *Germany Year Zero*, *Dersu Uzala*, *La Terra Trema*, would not exist if film was made only in one's comfort zone or only in their backyard. It seems like in documentary it is more acceptable to look far beyond, but I believe there is no difference anymore. Cinema has limitless forms and a very beautiful one demands and allows you to share beyond geography, religion, or state.

As for the performances, on set, when we improvise, we have already defined the character objectives well enough to have that freedom within. The actors often comment on what feels right to them and if they want more takes. "That was great, let's do one more" is an on-set running joke.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?

Several things, firstly to complete the edit of *Ghost In Radar*, the documentary mirror of XOFTEX. It follows Ali Abbas, who is a Palestinian Syrian from Softex in Greece to Sweden, over the course of several years. Since March 2022, I've spent the past two years in and out of Ukraine filming a documentary together with Beau Willimon and Peter Verzilov. We have been working hard on the edit; it is a particularly intimate look at relationships during the war. Thomas and I are preparing a soundtrack for a beautiful Italian film, and what I look forward to most is perhaps to make comedy. Let's see.

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Starring: Abdulrahman Diab, Osama Hafiry
& Jalal Albaroudi, Hazem Saleh, Mouataz Alshaltouh, Mohamad Al Rashi, Amal Omran, Lujain Mustafa, Ramadan Hamoud, Mohammad Dibo, Yasin El Harouk
Casting Directors: Majd Hafiry, Osama Hafiry
Music: Thomas Moked Blum, Noaz Deshe
Sound Design: Oliver Achatz, Lars Ginzell, Luise Homann
Makeup: Laila Bayazeed
SFX Makeup: Anna Jüngling
Editors: Felipe Guerrero, Noaz Deshe
Production Design: Marita Götz, Lea Walloschke
Costume design: Laila Bayazed, Greta Engelhardt, Tattiana Jung, Gibran Macias
Cinematography: Noaz Deshe
Executive Producers: Majd Hafiry, Osama Hafiry, Babak Jalali, Patrick Schorn, Grischa Sautter, Gabriel Stavenhagen, Zachary Guglin, Julian Chavez, Eve Gabereau, Maria Drandaki, Didar Domehri
Chief Editor ZDF: Lucia Haslauer
Co-producer: Christophe Audeguis
Producers: Jordan Tappis, Beau Willimon
Produced by: Andro Steinborn, Noaz Deshe
Inspired by: Ali Abbas, Mohammad Abbas, Mahmud Abbas, Mohammad Abdulrahman
Written by: Noaz Deshe, Babak Jalali
Directed by: Noaz Deshe

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