ICA

Institute of Contemporary Arts & Third Text present
WINDS OF CHANGE: CINEMA FROM MUSLIM SOCIETIES
Wednesday 21 – Sunday 25 September 2011

The Arab Spring is the starting point for films selected for a festival at the Institute of Contemporary Arts from 21 September that, like this year's mass demonstrations for democracy across Arab regions, is concerned with civic freedom; human rights; gender and social equality; the challenges of modernity; and the place of religion within social structures.

From the internationally acclaimed feminist film *Les Silences du Palais* (1994) by Tunisian director Moufida Tlatli, which contradicts prevalent Western views that Muslims are anti-feminist, to the UK premiere of *The Green Wave,* about the 2009 Iranian revolution in which demonstrators used Twitter and Facebook to mobilise and communicate between themselves and the outside world, *Winds of Change: Cinema from Muslim Societies* includes new and seminal films that are prophetic in their relationship to the Arab Spring and act as a springboard for in-depth discussion and debate. The completion of *Microphone* (2010) coincided with the start of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt and sees its young protagonist return to Egypt from the US and join the youth movement for change.

Filmmaking, a quintessentially modern technology and art form, has a long and rich history in Muslim societies. The energy and urgency of these films and their filmmakers, some of whom, such as the renowned Jaffar Panahi, risk imprisonment for showing their work in their own countries, reflect the actions of those societies who have fought and continue to fight for democracy, despite the obvious dangers.

While the West continues to obsess about the "War on Terror" and Muslims are portrayed as either terrorists or refugees, ordinary people in the Arab world are concerned with civil rights, women's rights, establishing democracy and overthrowing the brutal dictatorships that they have lived under for decades. Strong cinematic imagery and storytelling from and about Muslim societies can disrupt the highly distortive stereotypes often seen in Western news journalism while the medium itself is successful in communicating complex ideas and arguments to diverse and broad audiences.

The programme includes films that address the impact of colonialism and occupation, which is still felt throughout the Arab world. In *Salt of This Sea,* a young Palestinian makes a fatal return from exile in New York to her homeland. The film demonstrates that just as in South Africa, Palestinians need global support to effect change and, just as apartheid was not simply a problem for black South Africans so too Palestine is a global issue. And *Ceddo* (1977) by Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène, maps out the struggle of an African indigenous culture against the double onslaught of Christianity and Islam.

The festival opens with a debate that questions whether it is possible to talk about one Muslim culture given the many readings of the Qur'an, interpretations of Shariah law and competing Muslim groups, as well as the great social differences between the countries. The speakers themselves are representative of today's multifaceted Muslim viewpoints and multicultural Islam - Merryl Wyn Davies, Robin Yassin-Kassab, Ziauddin Sardar, Ali Nobil Ahmad and Hamid Dabashi.

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A second panel discussion, Winds of Change in the Arab Territories, includes Issandr Al Amrani, Haim Bresheeth, Nadje Al-Ali and Ali Nobil Ahmad in the Chair. A specialist introduces each film with an overview of the general regional and historical background in which it is set enabling audiences to fully understand its context.

Winds of Change: Cinema from Muslim Societies is a collaboration between the ICA and the academic journal *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture.* The programme is supported by Visiting Arts and curated by Ali Nobil Ahmad, Haim Bresheeth & Richard Appignanesi. *Cinema in Muslim Societies* a special issue of *Third Text* was published in January 2010 (Issue 102, Volume 24, Routledge, ISSN 052-8822).

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Listings information
Normal cinema prices £10 / £8 Concessions / £7 ICA Members
Booking fees for non ICA Members: £1 per ticket or maximum free per transaction £2.80
Book online at www.ica.org.uk **Call Box Office** 020 7930 3647 **Textphone** 020 7839 0737
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CURATOR BIOGRAPHIES
Richard Appignanesi, editor of Third Text, is an art historian, novelist (*Yukio Mishima's Report to the Emperor*, 2002) and curator ('Raising Dust: Encounters in Relational Geography', Calvert 22 Gallery, 2010/2011), and recently compiled and edited *Beyond Cultural Diversity: The Case for Creativity, A Third Text Report*, ThirdText Publications, 2010, commissioned by Arts Council England.
Ali Nobil Ahmad teaches History and Cinema at LUMS University of Lahore. His research interests include Pakistani film and media. He was recipient of *The Guardian*'s Scott Trust Bursary for journalists in 2009. His documentary on the 2010 floods in Southern Punjab is in production and his book on human smuggling from Pakistan will be published by Ashgate in 2011. He was guest editor of the *Third Text* special issue, *Cinema in Muslim Societies*, no. 102, January 2010.
Haim Bresheeth is Professor of Film Studies, Chair of Media and Cultural Studies, university of East London, and co-editor of *The Conflict and Contemporary Visual Culture in Palestine and Israel*, *Third Text*, special double issue, Vol.20, 80 – 81, May - June 2006.

FULL PROGRAMME
Wednesday 21 September, 6.45pm
'Is There a Muslim World?'
This debate asks whether there is such a thing as a singular, homogeneous Muslim global phenomenon; is current international foreign policy and reporting on the recent 'Arab Spring' representative of the diversity of the Muslim world; and are Muslim filmmakers and artists understood outside of their home countries? The panel is representative of today's multifaceted Muslim viewpoints and multicultural Islam. **Merryl Wyn Davies** is a writer, anthropologist, broadcaster and a Muslim Welsh woman. She worked in television production at the BBC and for TV3 in Malaysia. She has written extensively on Islam and contemporary Muslim issues as well as on stereotypes of Islam and Muslims in film. Currently she is the Director of the Muslim Institute in London. **Ziauddin Sardar**

is a writer, broadcaster and cultural critic. His books include the widely acclaimed *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* and *Balti Britain: A Provocative Journey Through Asian Britain*. A former columnist on the *New Statesman,* and Commissioner on the Equality and Human Rights Commission, he is the editor of *Futures*, the monthly journal of policy, planning and futures studies. His latest book is *Reading the Qur'an*. **Ali Nobil Ahmad** – biog above. **Hamid Dabashi**, Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, New York, has written 20 books, including *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*; *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, and recently, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting Empire* and *Iran* (2008); *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox* (2010). **Robin Yassin-Kassab**, born in London, raised in England and Scotland, has travelled widely as an English teacher and journalist around the Arab world and other Muslim countries. He is the author of widely acclaimed novel *The Road from Damascus*, maintains his blog site qunfuz and co-edits pulsemedia.org.

Friday 23 September, 6.15pm
Film: *The Long Night* + Intro by Robin Yassin-Kassab
Dir Hatem Ali Syria, 2009, 93 mins
Director Hatem Ali has crafted a debut film about political dissent, all the more topical in the light of the recent Arab Spring and the butchery of Syrian civil rights demonstrators by the Assad regime. The film tells the story of four political prisoners, freed after a long time in prison, who return to face the society they no longer recognise. Their family relationships have become painful and complex while in prison, and they find themselves alienated from life outside the prison cell. While *The Long Night* was screened widely outside Syria, and has won prizes in New Delhi and Cairo film festivals, it is still unseen in Syria, and less likely to be released now than at any time since it was made. **Robin Yassin-Kassab** – biog above.

Friday 23 September, 8.45pm
Film: *Salt of This Sea* + Intro by Haim Bresheeth
Dir Annemarie Jacir, Palestine, 2008, 109 mins
Salt of This Sea, is a cinematic rendering of the pain of return to the lost homeland. It tells the story of Soraya, a young Palestinian born in New York to exiled parents who were ejected from their homeland during the Nakba in 1948. On her return to Palestine in order to claim her grandfather's deposit before 1948, she finds much to make her bitter, but that is not her inclination. Both Israel's brutal occupation and the Palestinian Authority's empty gestures combine to move her and her new-found friend, Emad, to some unusual action – a return to the lost country, on the Israeli side – which will end up fatally. Almost two decades after the failed 'peace-process', the deep disenchantment in this film is typical of the new generation of filmmakers who are no longer prepared to wait for political machinations over their future. **Haim Bresheeth** – biog above.

Saturday 24 September, 1.15pm
Film: *Les Silences du Palais* + Intro by Ros Gray
Dir Moufida Tlatli, Tunisia, 1994, 127 mins
In this beautiful film by director Moufida Tlatli (herself a film actress), set in a large labyrinthine country palace at the end of the colonial era, the young Alia realises, on her return to the palace where her mother Khedija has worked all her life, that the women working there, including her mother, have been exposed to the old code of *droit du seigneur* – and she is unable to affect any change in the situation. One of the most distinguished feminist films from the Arab world, the

questions raised in Tlatli's film have lost none of their potency or urgency in almost two decades since its release, and the Arab Spring has refocused the tension around the role of women in society, as Egyptian and Tunisian women were at the forefront of the revolutions still ongoing. **Ros Gray** is Lecturer in Art Practice in the Department of Art, Goldsmiths College, University of London, and Tutor for Research in the Department of Curating Contemporary Art, Royal College of Art. She has written extensively on African cinema and was co-editor with Kodwo Eshun of the *Third Text* special issue, *The Militant Image: a Ciné-Geography*, no. 108, January 2011.

Saturday 24 September, 4 – 5.45pm
Talk: 'Winds of Change in the Arab Territories'
The arrival of the Arab Spring surprised everyone. Mass protests during the first months of 2011 succeeded to topple the autocratic regimes of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. These popular uprisings were spontaneous, swift and relatively peaceful, and promised sweeping democratic change across the Arab regions. But since February the 'velvet revolution' has met intractable military resistance from the regimes in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain, and become vicious civil wars. And yet, despite mounting casualties, the people of Syria and elsewhere are still demonstrating in the streets. The lesson of the past six months is that peaceful protest must turn into armed struggle, an option which would depend on gaining foreign military intervention, as in Libya. Spring might be over but we haven't heard the end of this story.

'The Winds of Change in the Arab Territories' is a panel and public discussion exploring the issues, history and longer term complexities of the Arab Spring. The Arab nations have endured 'stable' dictatorships for some 30 years or more. Why now this sudden and virtually simultaneous mass movement for democracy? Does it mean that authoritarian regimes can no longer rely on European and especially US support? Patrick Cockburn in *The Independent* remarks that it was precisely this fear in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies "that panicked them into their violent onslaught on protesters in Bahrain".

What effects will change in North Africa have on the geo-politics of the Mediterranean, the EU and Turkey? What position will Iran manoeuvre? What unforeseen outcomes will civil unrest have in the Middle East, Israel and Palestine?

The panel includes **Issandr El Amrani,** a Cairo-based writer and consultant. His reporting and commentary on the Middle East and North Africa has appeared in *The Economist*, *London Review of Books*, *Financial Times*, *The National*, *The Guardian*, *Time* and other publications. He also publishes one of the longest running blogs in the region, www.arabist.net. **Haim Bresheeth** - biog above. **Nadje Al-Ali** is Professor of Gender Studies at the Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. She is the author of *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (University of California Press, 2009) co-authored with Nicola Pratt, and *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (Zed Books, 2007), amongst many other publications. **Hamid Dabashi** – biog above. Ali Nobil Ahmad is in the Chair.

Saturday 24 September, 6.30pm
Film: *Takva* + Intro by Vedide Kaymak
Dir Özer Kiziltan, Turkey, 2006, 93 mins.
Takva, directed by Özer Kiziltan, tells the story of an introverted and private man, deeply devout, whose world collapses as a result of success. The shy Muharrem lives a solitary and simple life of a hermit, that of religious devotion and sexual abstinence, adhering to strict Islamic traditions. It is his devotion which brings him to the attention of a powerful Muslim businessman who is also a religious sect leader in Istanbul, landing him with the job of rent collector for the sect's properties. This position brings Muharrem into touch with the outside world and radically changes his views and values. A series of temptations afflict him, from alcohol to an attractive woman who seduces him through dreams. Muharrem, in his deep fear of God, is faced with losing his life-long identity, now slipping away from him. The film is of special interest in the current Turkish socio-political juncture, beyond its universal questions about belief, value-systems and modernity. **Vedide Kaymak** worked in a variety of Turkish media organisations before moving to London where she served in various arts and cultural organisations promoting Turkish culture in the UK, programming for MTV's Turkish channel and co-producing short films. Her work at the Rio cinema in East London led to the creation of the London Turkish Film Festival, which has grown from a three-day event to an internationally renowned festival.

Saturday 24 September, 8.45pm
Film: *Ceddo* + Intro by Imruh Bakari
Dir Ousmane Sembène, Senegal, 1977, **120 mins**
This seminal masterpiece by the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène maps the period of the struggle of African indigenous culture against the double onslaught of Christianity and Islam, bringing about European Colonialism and the slave trade, and destroying the long tradition of the Ceddo, the village council. In a film of Shakespearean dimensions, Sembène brings to life the disappearing world of the period before the double incursion which erased African history and enslaved its myriad societies. As the Arab Spring has raised the expectations as well as the risks of political activism in Arab North Africa, the struggle for social and political freedom in most of the continent is still in a parlous and fragile state. **Imruh Bakari** is a filmmaker and writer, former director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival (1999 – 2004). Published work includes *Experiences of Cinema*, co-editor, British Film Institute, 1996, and 'African Cinema in the Emergent Africa', in *Symbolic Narratives – African Cinema*, ed. June Givanni, British Film Institute, 2000. He lectures in Film & Media Studies at the University of Winchester.

Sunday 25 September, 1.30pm
New Artist Moving Image from the Arab World selected by Visiting Arts
Visiting Arts select new artist moving image from the Arab world. From Afghanistan to Zanzibar, Visiting Arts work with the most exciting next generation of artists and cultural players, inviting them to the UK, linking them with UK artists and organisations expanding knowledge and horizons, and championing intercultural working.

Sunday 25 September, 3.30pm
Film*: Microphone* + Intro by Issandr El Amrani
Dir Ahmad Abdala, Egypt, 2010, 120 mins
In his second feature, Ahmad Abdala takes us to the cultural underbelly of Alexandria, a centre of cultural production for two millennia. In what now seems to be a prophetic script, he examines the changing cultures of Egypt through Khaled, who returns from the USA to attend his mother's funeral. It is too late to mend his other relationships – his father is now too remote for him to reach, and his old love is herself preparing to emigrate, the relationship broken after years of his living abroad. In a contemplative mood, he rediscovers Alexandria – now a changed city: hip-hop singers performing on sidewalks, female rock musicians on rooftops, skateboarders cruising the city, graffiti artists working in the dead of night and adorning the walls with shocking images. This discovered reality changes Khaled's life – he is now intermingling with the new youth movement for change in Egypt. All is about to change. As the film was released, the changes were indeed underway in Cairo, Alexandria, and many other cities and towns across Egypt, in reaction to events in Tunisia, but also as a result of longstanding developments in Egypt itself. **Issandr El Amrani** is a Cairo-based writer and consultant. His reporting and commentary on the Middle East and North Africa has appeared in *The Economist*, *London Review of Books*, *Financial Times*, *The National*, *The Guardian*, *Time* and other publications. He also publishes one of the longest running blogs in the region, www.arabist.net.

Sunday 25 September, 6.30pm
Film: Preview *The Green Wave* + Intro by Gholam Khiabany
Dir Ali Samadi Ahadi, Iran, 2010, 80 mins
Ali Samadi Ahadi's *The Green Wave* is a moving account of Iran's 2010 Green Revolution, The film uses collage and illustration to tell the stories of the demonstrators as they bravely fought for change and reform under ultra-conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In addition, the filmmakers incorporated the new devices – mobiles, Twitter, Facebook, blogs – that the protestors used to illustrate how uprisings and revolutions are new being fought and mobilised in this new wave of revolution. www.thegreenwave-film.com
Gholam Khiabany teaches in the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. He is the author of *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity* (Routledge, 2010), and co-author of *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran* (IB Tauris, 2010).
Opens at the ICA on 30 September.