

# Return of the Prodigal Son

WORDS Jackie Oweis Sawiris



Mahmoud Al Massad has made more than ten short films and documentaries; he has been selected as one of the six most important artists in Utrecht, Holland; a documentary about his life and work will be premiered at the 2004 Netherlands Film Festival; he recently served on the jury of the 2004 Arab Film Festival in Rotterdam; his award-winning film *Shatter Hassan* was named one of the best foreign films in the Dutch film industry. He is a globally acclaimed Jordanian filmmaker who has yet to be recognized in his own country.

"I thought Jordan would be the second destination [after Holland] for *Shatter Hassan* to be premiered. I was proud to have made a film that carried the name of Jordan and a

Jordanian filmmaker. It never happened. I've been disappointed for a long time."

Part of the frustration Zarqaborn Mahmoud feels stems from the lack of support the Jordanian media has given him despite his efforts and successes. "I, and others I know and work with, go unnoticed. Why? We need to be held in higher regard, as I have been in Holland, as other filmmakers in their own countries are. As other non-Jordanian filmmakers in Jordan are."

Mahmoud has experienced firsthand the consequences of this disregard for Jordanian efforts and the celebration of foreigner filmmakers that riddles the Jordanian artistic psyche. He doesn't want to see any other filmmakers sub-

jected to it. "We need moral support as well as financial and logistical. There is too much talent that goes unnoticed and, more importantly, unsupported in Jordan. We are a dynamic, creative people that must become part of the global filmmaking community. And the only way we can do this is if we are backed by those in Jordan who have the power and means to make this happen."

After three years of effort by Mahmoud and a few individuals working on his behalf, *Shatter Hassan* will finally be premiered in Jordan during the Jerash Festival. The film, narrated by Nadim Sawalha, tells the story of the real-life Hassan, a Moroccan musician who followed his dreams to Holland and found instead a nightmare of homelessness, drug-addiction and the disenfranchisement of living between different worlds.

Mahmoud's excitement about returning to Jordan with *Shatter Hassan* is potent. "I really feel so happy and I am looking forward to hearing and seeing what people think about it."

For Utrecht-based Mahmoud, coming home to Jordan will be a provocative experience. He brings with him his film accolades, a new family and hope for local support for his

newest project, *DNA*, a documentary to be shot in Jordan which addresses the misrepresentation of Islamic revenge and forgiveness that is often misunderstood and overlooked by the West. "Revenge has a strong relationship with forgiveness in Islamic culture. It's like *DNA* in the blood of its believers. But no one talks about it, the West knows nothing about it, and the consequences of all this are enormous."

Mahmoud may never have been able to realize his dream of attending film school in America, but the education he garnered by working and living hand to mouth in Italy, Germany and Holland, as he pursued his dream of one day making a film in Jordan, is paying off. His Utrecht-based production company, Basha Film Production, has several projects in development, including a feature film that he hopes to one day shoot in Jordan. "It is something I would love to do. It would be unique. It needs to happen."

Check out Mahmoud Massad at [www.bashafilmm.com](http://www.bashafilmm.com). For *Shatter Hassan* screening details and other festival events, contact the Jerash Festival office at (06) 567 5199. **10**