

PRODUCTION
GOLDEN GIRLS FILM

A FILM BY
NICOLA VON LEFFERN & JAKOB CARL SAUER

MUSIC
HVOB

TO CLOSE
YOUR EYES
أن ببصرنا
AND SEE FIRE

ORF
Film/Fernseh-
Abkommen

Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Arts, Culture,
Civil Service and Sport

Stadt
Wien

script
LAB

TASKOVSKI
FILMS LTD.

LOGLINE



In the aftermath of the Beirut explosion, the city faces the challenge of healing while new crises inflict further wounds. Who will leave the country and at what cost?

SYNOPSIS

Beirut lies in ruins. After the explosion in the city's port collective trauma rises to the surface. How can life succeed after such a tragedy? The film carefully observes the following three years and zooms in on the lives of Aya - a Syrian refugee girl, Selim - an activist and painter, the Aladdin family - mourning a tragic loss, Yasmin - picking up calls at a suicide prevention hotline and Andrea - who still believes in the city's spark for change. Meanwhile, a smoldering fire keeps on lingering in the port's silos like a cautionary tale. Is it time to leave?

A man in a patterned shirt and dark pants stands on a rooftop construction site at sunset. He is looking out over a city and a body of water. The scene is filled with scaffolding, concrete walls, and air conditioning units. The sky is a mix of orange and blue.

NO EXPLOSIONS

**TO ENJOY
FIREWORKS
YOU WOULD HAVE
TO HAVE LIVED
A DIFFERENT KIND
OF LIFE**

poem by Naomi Shihab Nye

PROTAGONISTS

Yasmin works as a phone operator at the only suicide prevention hotline in Lebanon, called 'Embrace'.

„The early morning hours are the darkest ones“

The calls that reach her at that time, carry the gloomiest thoughts. With incredible empathy and wisdom, Yasmin guides and helps her callers to bring back some light that has been swallowed.

„Talking saves lives“

Although the trauma being discussed is also her own, her gift of listening and comforting shows: Where a state fails, humans rise to the occasion.

A woman wearing a red hijab is seen from the side, looking out of a window. The window has red metal bars. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an early morning or late evening setting. The woman's hands are clasped in front of her.

YASMIN



„We are a ‘What will happen next’ country. Every emergency reverts our brain and body into shutdown mode in attempt to find safety.

With a chronic hyper-activation of our nervous system, we resume functioning the next day.

But don’t let this trauma response fool you to think we are ok when we are not.”

embrace



AYA

Aya and her family live in an underground garage between cars and concrete.
She keeps waking up from nightmares while her brothers tease her for being scared. Still under shock,
Aya fears another explosion. Her parents, Syrian refugees, consider human trafficking to escape the country.
Aya wishes herself away with the paper planes that she throws towards Beirut's harbor.
Will they be able to leave?



ANDREA

Andrea spent a whole year on the streets of Beirut in the 2019 uprising, protesting for change and fighting for a better future. But the explosion took her fire into a different direction.

Dance and movement stayed a secondary part of her life until the Beirut port explosion.

Afterwards, dance became her solace. In a city where movement is woven into the fabric of every social life as a way of feeling and healing, she embarks on the journey of movement therapy. To dance, like her father did.

Andrea is now the co-founder of Beirut Physical Lab, a hub for contemporary dance and physical theater in Beirut, which creates educational and professional opportunities for performers in Beirut.

„I want to feel, I want to be able to be vulnerable, I want to be able to feel the pain.“

بيروت فيزيكال لاب
BEIRUT PHYSICAL LAB

*„Here, when you close your eyes you see fire.
The fire of the people, the fire for change, that makes you want to stay.
But also the fire, that burns everything to the ground.“*



JAMAL'S FAMILY


Jamal burns tires in front of government buildings, together with his pregnant sister Nabila and his mother. Their younger brother, Mohammad, died in the explosion. Betrayed by the ruling class and left to deal with this fate: „***Our government did this***“ is what they keep saying.



Jamal and his family live in humble circumstances. Beekeeping and growing their own vegetables gets them by, but the ongoing economic crisis threatens to suffocate even this.

As the entire family experiences heavy beating during a protest by the military, no medicine can be found to ease their pain.

The only remedy against all this agony is their strong family bond and their faith.




Selim chooses colors instead of fire. He surrenders to his pain while maltreating the canvas in the process.

His paintings tell the story of the struggle for justice: „**We turned you into a mass grave for truth, oh Beirut**“ reads one of them, covered in scratches and tears from the explosion.

He works next to countless blister packs of anti-anxiety medication, cigarette butts and empty beer bottles. Trying to self medicate to make it through the day.

SELIM

A man with dark, curly hair and a beard, wearing a white t-shirt, is seen from the side, focused on painting a portrait on a canvas. The portrait is of a man with glasses, rendered in a style with bold outlines and a mix of colors like orange, red, and black. The background of the canvas is dark and textured. The scene is lit from the right, suggesting a window or light source.

Selim dedicates his life to political activism, not only through art, but also as a human rights advisor.

Working in areas of crisis he supports the people with his knowledge and experience of previous wars.

While filming he expresses the wish to leave for the Ukraine as he would rather work in a war zone, than a minute longer in Lebanon.

„I've seen wars before. I lived under the F-16's fighter jets, bombing Beirut. But the explosion was something totally different - it took us by surprise.“

VISUAL LANGUAGE



Each story line, protagonist and their world has an assigned frame in this poetic mosaic of a city. The camera observes in mostly static tableaux. The immobility of the image reinforces the feeling of captivity in an unbearable situation and lack of political development.

As the protagonists manage to escape their dissociative state and the paralysis gives way to new vitality, the visual language also changes. These liberating moments become an ode to resilience and resistance. The camera breaks away, frees itself from the tripod and accompanies Aya, Andrea, Selim, Jamal & Nabila energetically, intimately and fiercely on their path of transformation.

Filming real life as it happens, bit by bit, over the course of three years was crucial for this project. Giving the time to become invisible as a team, to let the camera disappear. By always being there, for the morning coffee equally as for the hardest moments.

ORIGINAL SCORE - HVOB

The electronic music duo HVOB composed a remarkably tender score for *To Close Your Eyes And See Fire*.

Famous around the globe for their significant sound of the hardest and yet the softest kind, HVOB has played plenty shows in Lebanon, over many years.

Through their strong bond to Beirut and its people, they did not only compose the original score to the film, but also became part of the filming process.

HVOB were one of the first international artist to return their live show to the country, as the clubs started opening up again post explosion. One of their concerts is now part of the film. Andrea loses herself to their music before everything takes a sudden turn.

The title track to *To Close Your Eyes And See Fire* is called '**Home**' and will be released by HVOB in March 2025.
www.hvob-music.com

HVOB



TITLE To Close Your Eyes And See Fire

DIRECTORS Nicola von Leffern & Jakob Carl Sauer

DOP Jakob Carl Sauer

EDITOR Matthias Writze

MUSIC HVOB

SOUND DESIGN Karim Weth

COLORIST Bernhard Schlick

PRODUCED BY Golden Girls Film & Jakob Carl Sauer | Nicola von Leffern

SUPPORTED BY ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen, Federal Ministry For Arts And Culture (BMKÖS)
City of Vienna - Cultural Department (MA7), Screenwriters Forum Vienna/Scriptlab

PRODUCERS Peter Drössler, Jakob Carl Sauer, Nicola von Leffern, Arash T. Riahi, Sabine Gruber

WORLD SALES Taskovski Film

FEATURING Andrea Fahed, Aya Al Mustafa, Jamal Aladdin, Nabila Aladdin Hamada
Selim Mawad, Fatima Al Dirani

GENRE Feature documentary

LENGTH 98 min

LANGUAGE Arabic, English, French

SHOOTING LOCATION Beirut, Lebanon

CREDITS

DIRECTORS

NICOLA VON LEFFERN
[instagram.com/nicolavonleffern](https://www.instagram.com/nicolavonleffern)

JAKOB CARL SAUER
www.jakobcarlsauer.com

BIOGRAPHY

Nicola von Leffern, born 1986 in Hamburg, Germany & Jakob Carl Sauer, born 1989 in Klagenfurt, Austria, met during their student days at the Film Academy in Vienna and developed their directing style and audiovisual language, over the past decade. Previous short films have garnered international attention, won at multiple festivals, including being nominated for the Austrian Film Award and led to this first feature length project. Their hearts beat for courageous rebels, poetic cinema and intimate portraits.

STATEMENT

First coming to the region over twelve years ago through NGO work, Lebanon stayed dear to our hearts ever since. In 2015 we produced & directed the short documentary „Mafi Kahraba“ (Winner Vienna Shorts) focussing on the electricity crisis in Beirut and the many refugee camps who suffer from this ongoing issue. In recent years we followed the Lebanon revolution with great hope and the Beirut blast with great horror.

„To close your eyes and see fire“ started as an exploration on resilience right in the middle of a spiral of disasters. This film amplifies the voices of those who never stop pushing forward, for justice, for a future, for a safe place to live. Residing under the same roof as our protagonists became crucial for telling their stories in a gentle rhythm. Part-taking as a fly on the wall in their domesticity, portraying the personal as political and creating cinéma vérité during the past three years of filming.

FILMOGRAPHY (Selection)

MAFI KAHRABA (Director)

Documentary / LBN, AT 2015 / 4 min / HD / Color

Vienna Shorts Film Festival - Winner '15

BLOOM (Director)

Documentary / UGA, AT 2019 / 7 min / HD / Color

K3 Film Festival - Winner Audience Award '19

Berlin Commercial - Winner Social Impact Award '20

Diagonale Film Festival - Official Selection '20

Vienna Shorts - Official Selection '20

Fünf Seen Film Festival - Official Selection '20

Short Waves - Official Selection '21

PUNKS IN MYANMAR (Director)

Documentary / MMR, DE 2016 / 20 min / HD / Color

TV Reportage

SAFARI IN TEXAS (Director)

Documentary / USA, DE 2016 / 20min / HD / Color

TV Reportage

NICOLA VON LEFFERN

TRACES IN THE FORREST (Co-Director, Cinematographer)

Documentary / BIH, AT 2020 / 52 min / HD / Color

Sarajevo Film Festival - Official Selection '22

Fipadoc, Int. Documentary Film Festival '23

Diagonale - Official Selection '23

Ethnocineca - Nominee for ADA-Award '23

BLOOM (Co-Director, Cinematographer)

Documentary / UGA, AT 2019 / 7 min / HD / Color

K3 Film Festival - Winner Audience Award '19

Berlin Commercial - Winner Social Impact Award '20

Diagonale Film Festival - Official Selection '20

VIRGIN WOODS (Cinematographer)

Fiction / PL, AT 2017 / 35 min / S16mm / Color

Austrian Film Awards - Nomination '19

Diagonale - Official Selection '18

Warsaw Film Festival - Official Selection '17

JAKOB CARL SAUER



GOLDEN GIRLS FILM

Golden Girls Film is an award-winning creative collective of writers, directors and producers. The fiction and documentary films are focusing on timeless social and political issues and have won more than 100 international awards. The creative team around Arash & Arman T. Riahi, Sabine Gruber and Peter Drössler is the core of the company, combining artistic and technical skills developed through 20 years of experience.

www.goldengirls.at

PRODUCTION




TEASER

<https://vimeopro.com/goldengirlsfilm/beirut-teaser>



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