

# Whale Belly

a film by Sameh Alaa



cinéfondation  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

## Sameh Alaa

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Since 2000, the Festival Residence has provided each year accommodation and support to twelve selected young directors in order to help them prepare their first or second feature film. A jury presided by a film director sits twice a year, selecting these young filmmakers on the basis of their short films, or

even first feature film, and the merits of their feature film project. During their 4-and-a-half-month stay in Paris, they work on the writing of their feature film project, have meetings with professionals and try, with the support of the Cannes Film Festival, to bring their project to co-production status.

## Technical Information

**Working Title:** Whale Belly

**Director:** Sameh Alaa

**Screenplay:** Sameh Alaa

**Nationality:** Egypt

**Genre:** Drama

**Shooting location:** Cairo, Egypt

**Duration:** 90 min

**Production:** CG Cinema

## Director's Information

Sameh Alaa is an Egyptian director, producer and screenwriter.

His first short film **Fifteen** premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival 2017 and won several awards in festivals around the world.

His last short film **I am Afraid to Forget your Face** became the first Egyptian film to be awarded Palme d'Or in the Cannes Film Festival Short Film Competition 2020. The film continues its festival run at San Sebastian Film Festival, Cairo Film Festival, Cleremont-Ferrand International, Palm Springs Film Festival, Moscow International Film Festival and many others.

His films have been showcased at the MOMA and also broadcasted on different TV channels, such as Canal +, Arte and Shahid.

Sameh is currently developing his debut feature film 'Whale Belly' at the Cinéfondation Résidence 2021 in Paris.

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## Synopsis

One night in a small seaside town in Egypt, the sound of a whale keeps coming from the sea but no one sees it. As the hospitals are full, Rim (17) is alone taking care of her sick father when his condition rapidly deteriorates. Seeing no other way out, Rim steals her father's motorbike and embarks alone after midnight. Her journey takes her through the darkest recesses of shady underworld deals and dreamy encounters with strange characters. As her night precariously balances between the real and the magical, will she be able to keep her father alive?

## Statement of Intent

The conflict between the younger generation with the older generation in Egypt has always been a subject of great personal interest to me. The clash of ideologies gives rise to pertinent questions like "Who will lead – Who should lead – Who is capable to lead and make a change?" and I want to explore that in my film. I believe it is not easy for the younger generation to express their feelings and opinions because of fear of judgment/punishment in general; but for a girl it is astronomically harder in a highly patriarchal society.

Rim goes on a journey alone to save her father, and it turns out to be a journey of self-discovery because for the first time in her life she gets to make decisions all by herself and they are difficult ones. The fears and hopes of this young Egyptian girl, who has been mourning freedom all her life, come to life in her journey through a strange night.

Using the trope of magical realism, *Whale Belly* tries to examine Rim's suppressed psyche and its subsequent transformation.

## Synopsis

Une nuit, dans une petite ville côtière d'Égypte, le son d'une baleine ne cesse de venir de la mer mais personne ne la voit. Les hôpitaux sont pleins, Rim (17 ans) est donc seule à s'occuper de son père malade lorsque son état se détériore rapidement. Ne voyant aucune autre issue pour s'évader, Rim vole la moto de son père et part seule après minuit. Son voyage l'entraîne dans les recoins les plus sombres de la pègre et dans des rencontres rêvées avec d'étranges personnages. Alors que sa nuit oscille entre le réel et le magique, parviendra-t-elle à garder son père en vie ?

## Note d'intention

Le conflit entre la vieille et la jeune génération en Égypte a toujours été un sujet de grand intérêt personnel. Le choc des idéologies donne lieu à des questions pertinentes comme « Qui va diriger – Qui devrait diriger – Qui est capable de diriger et d'apporter un changement ? » et je veux explorer cela dans mon film. Je crois qu'il n'est pas facile pour la jeune génération d'exprimer ses sentiments et ses opinions par peur du jugement et de la punition en général, mais pour une fille, c'est beaucoup plus difficile dans une société hautement patriarcale.

Rim entreprend un voyage en solitaire pour sauver son père, et ce voyage s'avère être un voyage à la découverte de soi car, pour la première fois de sa vie, elle doit prendre des décisions toute seule, et elles sont difficiles. Les craintes et les espoirs de cette jeune Égyptienne, qui a fait le deuil de la liberté toute sa vie, prennent vie dans son voyage à travers une nuit étrange. En utilisant le trope du réalisme magique, *Whale Belly* examine la psyché refoulée de Rim et sa transformation ultérieure.

