



Raed Alsemari : "To hear the laughter of the audience is the ultimate reward for me !"

*Screened at the opening of this 23rd edition, the comedy **Dunya's Day** directed by Raed Alsemari, conquered the audience of the Institut Lumière. Awarded at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival, this short film confirms the talent of the young Saudi filmmaker. Meeting with Raed Alsemari.*

***Dunya's Day* tells the story of how a graduation party turns into a disaster when the hostess, Dunya, is abandoned by her housekeepers. How did the story of the film come about ?**

It all started with the character of Dunya. I wanted to tell the story of a person who is purchasing a social status. There is a part of Saudi society in Riyadh that is a microcosm where graduation parties are like the Met Gala. I wanted the film to be a dive into this world, without judging it. Many of my collaborators have access to this subculture, the character of Dunya is inspired by some of the women we know. Since the film is a comedy, it was important for me to be as authentic as possible.

How was the casting process to find the interpreter of Dunya?

From the beginning, I knew that finding Dunya was going to be a huge challenge. We started by holding auditions in the traditional way. After several months, we had not found the person who would play Dunya. In talking with my producer Sarah Elnawasrah, we both thought that one person could be great for this role : our casting director Sarah Balghonaim. So we cast our casting director ! She is the one who plays Dunya. It was very important that the person who was going to play this role would make the audience empathize with her, despite the imperfections of the character. It was important that the interpreter did not give the impression that Dunya was being denigrated, that she was being judged. I am very proud that Sarah accepted to play this role, her performance is incredible ! I would be honored to work with her again. By the way, she just finished her first short film as a director Me & Aydarous. It will premiere this month at the Aspen Film Festival.

Judging by the laughter in the theater, the audience was charmed by your film. The character of Dunya was unanimously appreciated. Will we see her again in one of your next films ?

Yes (laughs) ! I am currently writing a film that will feature Dunya. I am working with the screenwriter Nada Alfayez on this project, we are taking the time to build this story. Since I love genre films, I may borrow the codes of several genres, like comedy and horror. Maybe this time it will be about Dunya's wedding...One thing is for sure, the film will be shot in Saudi Arabia. Coming back to the warm reception from the audience, that's also what's great about making genre films like comedies, is that you can hear the reactions directly in the theater. To hear the laughter of the audience during the screenings from Mexico City, Paris, Lyon: that's the ultimate reward for me!

Laura Lépine