

UTOPIA FILMS PRESENTS

NOUR HAJRI
IN

Black Medusa

A FILM BY **ISMAEL, YOUSSEF CHEBBI**

WITH
RYM HAYOUNI
AYMEN BEN HMIDA, AYMEN MEJRI

DOP **IMED AISSAOUI** SOUND RECORDIST **AMAL ATTAIA** MAKE-UP & HAIR **NIHEL BEN TANFOUS** SET **BATAL TEMMANI** DRESSER **RYMA GTARI**
1ST ASSISTANT **DORA MHAMDI** 2ND ASSISTANT **FATMA DALDOUL** FOCUS PULLER **EMIR LAHDHIRI** PRODUCTION MANAGER **ASHREF EL AMRI**
LOCATION MANAGER **MOHAMED NEJI** ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS **MOHAMED AZIZ BEN MUSTAPHA, OMAR BEN ALI, FREDERIC ZEIMET**

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Set photography
by Fatma Daldoul

Lead
Nour Hajri



Stills from Black Medusa's work copy
Nour Hajri as Nada

Supporting
Rym Hayouni



Stills from Black Medusa's work copy
Rym Hayouni as Noura

AYMEN BEN HMIDA
Tall young man

AYMEN MEJRI
Skinny young man

KARIM REMADI
Fifty years old man

ALA EDDINE SLIM
Cab driver

MEHDI HAJRI
Young man in black

CALLUM FRANCIS HUGH
British young man

KADHEM HARRAZI
Bodybuilder

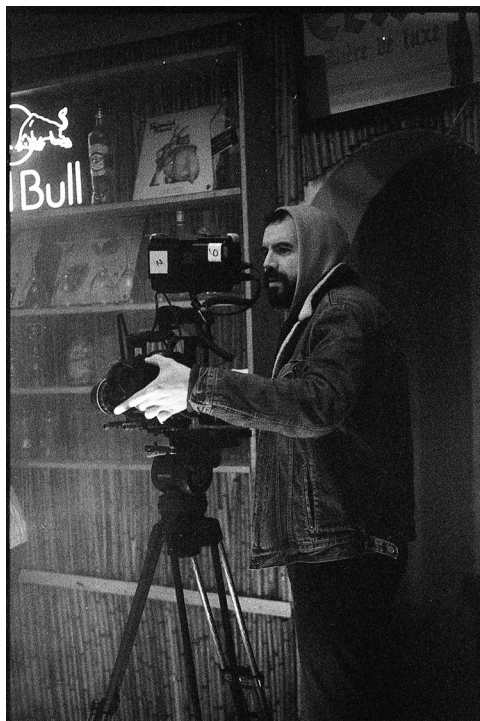
SARAH ALINA GROSZ
Italian young woman

ismaël
Scriptwriter, editor, producer & director



Set photography
by Fatma Daldoul

Youssef Chebbi
Camera operator, co-writer & co-director



Set photography
by Fatma Daldoul

IMED AISSAOUI
Director of photography

AMAL ATTAIA
Sound recordist

NIHEL BEN TANFOUS
Hair, make-up & effects

BATAL TEMMANI
Set decorator

RYMA GTARI
Wardrobe

DORRA MHAMDI
First direction assistant

FATMA DALDOUL
Second direction assistant

AMIR LAHDHIRI
Camera assistant

ASHREF AMRI
Production manager

MOHAMED NEJI
Location manager

FAKHREDDINE AMRI
Postproduction manager & colorist

YAZID CHABBI
Additional sound recordings, sound editing & mixing

OMAR ALOULOU
Original music composer

TARAK LOUATI
Sound design & techno tracks

OMAR BEN ALI (S.V.P.)
FREDERIC ZEIMET (SIX LETTERS)
& MOHAMED AZIZ BEN MUSTAPHA
Associate producers

In today's Tunis, Nada is hard of hearing and communicates through a Smartphone app.

The 25 years old young woman leads a double life: lonely and boring during the day, violent and extreme during the night.

This highly ritualized life is going to shatter the day she falls in love with an old knife and a colleague of hers - Noura - falls in love with her.

The film is a Medusa myth-inspired *film noir* in the #MeToo era.



Set photography
by Callum Francis Hugh

Black Medusa is both the portrait of a young woman in post-revolutionary Tunisia and the portrait of a city: Tunis. It is a genre film on the issue of gender. From thriller to fantasy, through certain codes of the film noir with the figure of the femme fatale or even the thriller with the figure of the serial killer, the film deflects expectations on its topic and constantly oscillates between genres.

Black Medusa offers a new and unique reading on contemporary Tunisia. Through Nada's double life, where daytime monotony is contrasted with nocturnal violence, the film explores deeper heartbreaks and worries. Nada makes us discover Tunisian nightlife and party scene and especially the various portraits of the men who roam this world. She is a confidant before becoming an agent of destruction. As she is silent, the different men she meets tell her about themselves and about their relationship to women. These heterogeneous male portraits show the complexity of gender relations in a mosaic of affects.

As a counterpoint to the male portraits, the portrait of another woman emerges. Noura chooses to stay in Tunisia while her country is in turmoil. Is she more comfortable in a foreign country? Does she live her homosexuality in a safer environment? Or is she simply aware of the disillusionment that follows the various uprisings that the Arab countries have been going through over the last decade? In a way, Noura is the only one who looks at Nada beyond mere sexual desire. This will lead her to discover her love's buried secrets. She will accept the violent and destructive side of Nada in the hope of living by her side. But Nada just doesn't want to be saved.

Like my short narrative *Leila's blues* (premiered at Cannes Directors' Fortnight in 2018) and my next feature in development entitled *A woman*, the story of *Black Medusa* is about a strong leading female character struggling to free herself from the chains of society.

Nada is angry and rebellious. In her job as editor, she creates an imaginary from images; likewise, she creates her own reality outside all known social and moral rules. Throughout her journey she discovers that, maybe, there is something to save. Even if she does not let herself be saved, she learns through Noura that there are some things worth saving, even in the darkest places. She is not angry anymore; she embraces herself as a whole, beyond good and evil. *Black Medusa* is a film about discovering feelings after thinking they're not real, a crime drama on sorority.

As Nada builds realities of her own through her work as an editor, but also and above all through her lifestyle, the film reflects on the perception of the reality. The story is told in an elliptical manner, information is given by successive details that provide by accumulation the complete picture of the narrative. Editing wise, several shots or sequences end abruptly; the cut is made in the middle of an action. In addition, I use a lot of jump cuts. Thus, this sharp editing creates a tense atmosphere and an incisive film.

With *Black Medusa* I wanted to resolutely avoid any psychologizing or moralizing aim. It seems to me that it is more thrilling to catch the audience's attention by the mystery and the atmosphere. From this enigmatic starting point, the suspense and the pace can arise.

ismaël



Set photography
by Callum Francis Hugh

Director's biography and filmography

Ismaël (born in Tunis, October 14th 1981) is a filmmaker, a visual artist and a writer.

He directed the feature documentary *Babylon* (Grand Prix at FID Marseilles 2012) and the short narrative *Leila's blues* (premiered at Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2018). One of his latest works, the short experimental *Fragments of self-phone-destruction* was awarded at the Experimental and Different Cinemas Festival (Paris, 2019). He produced the feature narrative *The last of us* (Lion of the Future at the Venice IFF).

He is currently post-producing a short narrative film *373, Pasteur Street*. He has also been shooting for years a long curse documentary project around refugees in Lebanon *The Syrians* (awarded at the Dubai Film Connection in the framework of the Dubai International Film Festival 2017).

As a visual artist, ismaël produced mainly video art and photography works but also multimedia installations, printed works and more.

His works (films, videos, photographs, installations, etc.) were featured at several venues around the world: New York's MoMA, London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, Madrid's Museo Reina Sofia, the galleries Momenta (New York), Talmart (Paris), Le Cube (Rabat), Kanvas and A. Gorgi (Tunis)...

As a writer, ismaël published a book on Tunisian cinema (2008), a collection of poems (2009) alongside more than a hundred poems and papers in newspapers, magazines, exhibition catalogues, websites, etc.

Ismaël curated film programs (for the Carthage Film Festival, Marseille Museum of Mediterranean Civilisations, etc.) and contemporary art exhibitions (for the Venice Cadre Gallery in Casablanca or the Gallery of the French Institute in Tunis...), he was the artistic director of the Masnaa Festival (Casablanca, 2016) and was a resident artist in the Villa Romana (Florence), Trankat (Tetouan), Backstory (Beirut) among others.

Babylon

Codirected by Youssef Chebbi & Ala Eddine Slim

2012. Documentary. 119 minutes



Leila's blues

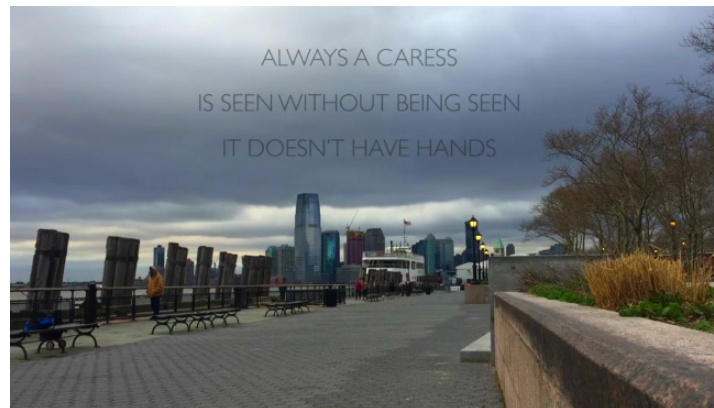
Codirected by Fateme Ahmadi

2018. Narrative. 15 minutes



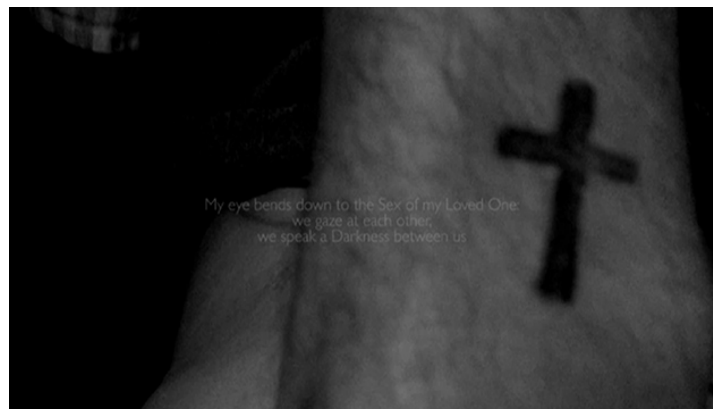
Fragments of self-phone-destruction

2018. Experimental. 9 minutes



Fragments of self-phone-destruction II

2019. Experimental. 25 minutes



Co-director's biography and filmography

Youssef Chebbi is the scriptwriter and director of *Heading north* in 2010 and *The depths* in 2013 (both in competition at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival and both featured in several TV stations in France and elsewhere).

Alongside ismaël and Ala Eddine Slim, he directed *Babylon* in 2012 (feature documentary premiered and awarded at the FIDMarseille, among others).

He is currently working as scriptwriter and director on his second feature narrative *Ashkal* (in development, selected at Les Ateliers de l'Atlas, Marrakesh Film Festival 2019, granted by the Tunisian and French Coproduction Fund).

Youssef is also a musician, founder of a music label in Paris and a music festival in Tunisia.

Babylon

Codirected by ismaël & Ala Eddine Slim

2012. Documentary. 119 minutes



The depths

2013. Narrative. 25 minutes



Heading north

2010. Narrative. 15 minutes





Set photography
by Fatma Daldoul

Production company profile

Ismaël started producing films with his former company Exit Productions. In a couple of years at the head of the film section of Exit Productions, ismaël produce two feature documentaries and a feature narrative:

- *Hecho en casa*, directed by Belhassan Handous feature documentary, self-financed, 2014.
- *The after*, directed by Fakhri El Ghezal, feature documentary, granted by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, 2015
- *The last of us*, feature narrative, coproduced with MadBox Studios, Inside Production and SVP, granted by the Hubert Bals Fund, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Sanad and the Doha Film Institute (Lion of the Future at the Venice International FF, Best First Film at Carthage FF, Tunisian entry for the Oscar ceremony, theatrical release in Tunisia and France, video release...)

In 2017, ismaël created a new production company. With Utopia Films, ismaël is producing all the projects he is currently working on as a director:

- *The Syrians*, international coproduction with Les Valseurs from France (2019 Cesar of the best short animation film, nominated for the live action short of the 2020 Oscar), Tavma from Germany and Orjouane Productions from Lebanon (granted by IDFA Bertha Fund, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Kamal Lazaar Foundation, the Tunisian-French Coproduction Fund, awarded by the Dubai Film Festival in the framework of Dubai Film Connection, etc.)
- *373, Pasteur Street*, a self-financed and independent short narrative in post-production. Release in 2021.

As a filmmaker, both director and producer, ismaël believes in the motto: “each film has its own rules and truths”. So as producer he tries to come up with the unique and adequate way to execute, finance and shoot each project.

For instance, *The last of us* was the first Tunisian film coproduced by four different Tunisian co-production companies. On the other end of the spectrum, *Black Medusa* is only produced by Utopia Films and was written, prepared and shot in less than 5 months. It is in a way being creative in production terms at the same time as being creative in visual terms. Both of these takes on creativity work together to uniquely design the best possible method for each project.

Black Medusa is a low-budget independent feature narrative film. The production is obviously part of the new generation of Tunisian films that not only invent new aesthetics and meanings but also come up with unprecedented production methods in Tunisian cinematography.

After directing *Babylon* in a completely independent and self-funded manner and inventing for *The last of us* a new model of Tunisian-Tunisian co-production shaped in the form of a cooperative bringing together of 4 different production companies on the same film, ismaël (director and producer of *Black Medusa*) continues to explore new production areas.

The film was written, prepared and shot in less than 5 months. The shooting itself only lasted 12 days (for a final duration of around 90 minutes). This urgency made it possible to create a great tension that irrigates the very images of the film and the incisive side of its form. The production therefore participates in the general aesthetic and the staging biases find their continuation in the way the film is produced, shot, made, etc.

Until now, the production is entirely independent and self-financed. With our small crew and limited light equipment we were eager to give our personal take on a female anti-hero and to shoot our city, Tunis, in black and white for the first time in a Tunisian feature.

Moreover, as it was the case with *Babylon* or *The last of us*, *Black Medusa* was made by a small team of young crew members and cast. It is the first narrative feature for the two scriptwriters/directors, the director of photography, the sound engineer, the makeup artist, the decorator, the dresser, etc. It is only the second film for the lead actress and the first for the supporting actress.

The film also features an appearance by the director of *The last of us* and *Tlameess*; Ala Eddine Slim (co-director of *Babylon* alongside Youssef and ismaël). In a way, it is an entire talented and passionate new generation of crew and cast who has embraced *Black Medusa*.



Set photography
by Callum Francis Hugh

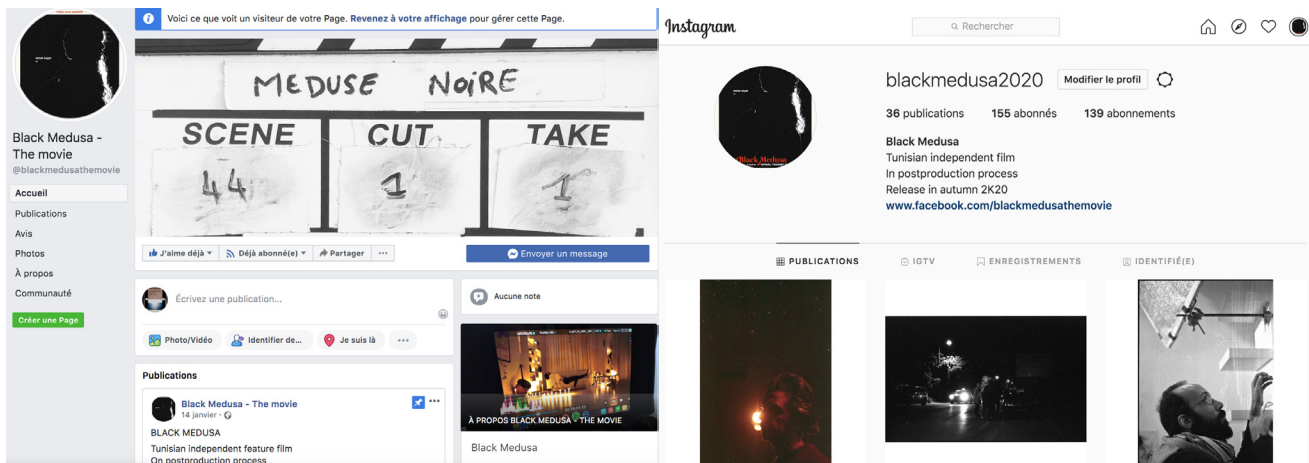
In addition to being a continuation of the spirit of the successful Tunisian films released over the past couple of years (such as *The last of us* or *Dachra*), *Black Medusa* falls more broadly within the framework of a revival of the cinema of genre and more particularly the renewed interest growing around genre cinema in the Arab world and Africa.

It is also not trivial to find, at different instances in the film, posters of Egyptian genre films from the 70s or a reference to *Dressed to kill* by Brian de Palma or *Ms.45*, the exploitation film by Abel Ferrara, etc.

We therefore intend to highlight the genre film aspect of our film as well as the tribute paid to this type of films in *Black Medusa*. This will help identify the film clearly and bring together an ever-growing audience curious about how contemporary Arab and African cinema is reinventing the codes of cinema.

Thus, *Black Medusa* is a strong cinematic and aesthetic proposition on extremely pressing issues of our time, namely gender issues. The story is built around Nada's relationship with men on the one hand and her relationship with Noura who is in love with her, on the other. The film engages in a debate on the relationships between men and women, on sisterhood, on violence, etc.

Black Medusa, therefore, makes it possible to reconcile a film buff audience through its tribute to and its reinterpretation of cinematographic genres with a wider audience through the character and the story of Nada and by including a debate of universal contemporary issues.



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Set photography
by Fatma Daldoul