

MoMA
Doc Fortnight 2025
Official Selection

— FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION —
BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE
98TH ACADEMY AWARDS

EUROPE'S NEW FACES

TWO-WEEK THEATRICAL RELEASE (NYC & LA)

DEC 12, 2025

ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS (IN SELECT CITIES)

DEC 12, 2025

EUROPE & UK SCREENINGS

DEC 12, 2025

VOD RELEASE

DEC 19, 2025

A FILM BY **SAM ABBAS** WITH
MUSIC BY **BERTRAND BONELLO**

VIEWER DISCRETION: This film contains an explicit C-section, an armed migrant attack, death, and footage of contemporary African slavery.

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SETTING

Part One

Underbelly of Paris in an abandoned building that used to be a retirement home. (Approx amount of residents: 400 Africans.)

Part Two

Médecins Sans Frontières(Doctors Without Borders)' rescue ship Geo Barents. (Doctors Without Borders recently suspended operations of its search and rescue vessel in December 2024. MSF cited Italian laws and policies as making it impossible to continue operations. The ship spent around 160 days in port over the previous two years due to bureaucratic blockages.)

LOGLINE

The film is an observation of the migrant experience; from crossing the Mediterranean Sea out of Libya to settling in Paris-based squats. In a view free from prejudice, we quickly see how the experiences of migrants vary in extremes during the different stages in their journey to a better life.

SYNOPSIS

The film captures an unfiltered and empathetic observation of the migrant experience, chronicling the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to the uncertain refuge of Paris-based squats. Each stage of this journey reveals a spectrum of experiences, from the desperate hope that drives individuals to leave their homelands, to the stark realities of displacement, survival, and resilience in foreign lands.

Through intimate storytelling, the film highlights the diversity of struggles and triumphs faced by migrants, of all ages, as they navigate the complexities of starting over. By stripping away prejudice and preconceived notions, it offers an authentic glimpse into the human spirit's endurance and the shared pursuit of a better life, illuminating the personal stories behind the global headlines.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was born in Egypt and immigrated to the United States with my family when I was three years old. Growing up, I struggled to understand what it truly meant to be caught between two worlds. I spent much of my time trying to convince Americans that I was truly American and Egyptians that I was truly Egyptian. It often felt like I was living in a kind of nomadic no-man's land. Despite this personal history, I never imagined that migration would one day become the focus of my filmmaking.

That changed when I moved to Germany after my partner's U.S. visa expired. It was there that I experienced my first encounter with confrontational racism and the deep alienation that followed. The impact was profound—my depression and anxiety became so overwhelming that I shut down, even developing a twitch from the stress. The pandemic led us to my father-in-law's home in the tranquil countryside of Normandy, France. Later, we decided to move to Paris, a city that would forever alter the course of my life.

During my first Fête de la Musique, we stumbled upon a building alive with music, energy, and a sense of community. I assumed it was a college dorm, but my partner corrected me: it was a squat. Until then, my only understanding of squatting came from stories in New York, where the term often carried negative connotations. This was different. The building(abandoned for years) was occupied, renovated, and transformed by its residents into a vibrant space for artists and creatives.

As I befriended the collective, I was introduced to migrant squats and became deeply aware of the systemic inequalities they faced. Evictions came swiftly and without mercy, disrupting lives and dismantling fragile communities. Something in me resonated with their struggles, and I found myself drawn into their world. As an Arab in Paris, I faced my own challenges with racism, but within these migrant squats, I discovered a sense of belonging. Over time, my involvement deepened. I became a part of their daily lives, helping with the occupations of buildings and supporting during evictions. I had no intention of turning this into a project initially, but after a year of immersion, it became clear that this story needed to be told. Encouraged by my friends in the squats, we began filming—capturing moments of celebration, ordinary days, and intimate stories that defined their lives.

One of the most powerful experiences was witnessing Sophia give birth to her baby, Light, and supporting her through the complications that followed.

But as with all things, the community faced an inevitable eviction. Over 400 residents—who had built a vibrant and supportive ecosystem—were suddenly scattered across France, most left with nothing more than temporary housing. Before long, many were back on the streets, searching for the next squat and the sense of community they had lost.

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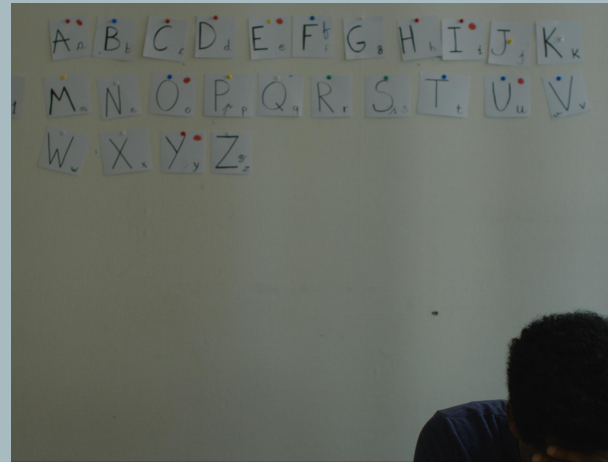
What haunted me most were the stories of the crossings: the horrors faced by migrants traveling from Africa to Europe. Many spoke of surviving Libya, enduring torture, rape, and slavery before risking their lives on makeshift boats in the Mediterranean. One woman I met had given birth to a Libyan officer's baby as a result of rape. A close friend shared photos of himself suspended naked in chains, sent to his family by his captors as part of an extortion scheme.

Determined to understand this journey firsthand, I joined a month-long rotation aboard Médecins Sans Frontières' Geo Barents rescue vessel. The experience was devastating. We encountered everything from the belongings of migrants who had drowned to armed intimidation by the Libyan Coast Guard. One rescue we attempted was intercepted by force, with the Coast Guard taking the migrants back to detention, stealing the boat engine, and setting the vessel on fire as a warning.

Through all the tragedy, there were also moments of hope. The joy and relief in the eyes of those we rescued is indescribable—a reminder of the resilience and humanity that endure even in the darkest circumstances.

I spent four years working on this project, three of them filming. This film is my attempt to honor these stories. It's a deeply personal exploration of migration, displacement, and the unbreakable bonds of community. My hope is that it challenges audiences to see the humanity in every migrant's journey and inspires a deeper understanding of the resilience required to fight for a better future.

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BIOGRAPHY

Sam Abbas is an Egyptian-American filmmaker. In 2018, he released his debut queer-themed feature *The Wedding* across the U.S. and Middle East. The film screened in Turkey, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt; countries in which it is difficult and in parts illegal to identify as gay or nonbinary. In 2020, Abbas' second feature *Alia's Birth* was released across the U.S. and Europe. The film features a live home birth with a dramatic neonatal resuscitation that shocked audiences. Abbas also acted as curator, director, editor, and producer for the 2021 documentary *Eremita (Anthologies)* where he teamed up with leading cinematographers from around the world. *Europe's New Faces* is his latest directorial effort. He currently teaches in the film studies department at Barnard College.

FILMOGRAPHY

Europe's New Faces - 2025 - 159mins - Documentary

Obstaculum - 2023 - 7mins - Documentary

Erēmīta (Anthologies) - 2021 - 58mins Documentary

Alia's Birth - 2020 - 66mins - Fiction

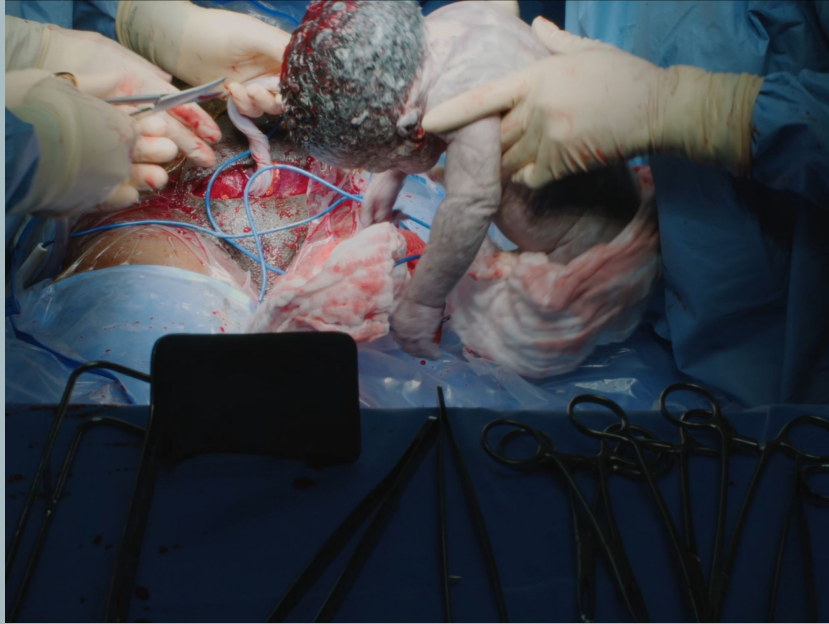
Marie - 2020 - 6mins - Documentary

Rusted Carvaggios - 2020 - 3mins - Documentary

The Wedding - 2018 - 75mins - Fiction



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TECH SPECS

2025 - 159 Minutes - Color

Directed, Produced, Edited
Sam Abbas

Photography and Sound recording
Sam Abbas

Music
Bertrand Bonello

Sound design
Jason Candler

Mix Studio Nocturnal Sound
Re-recording Mixer Eli Cohn

Color Studio The Mill
Colorist Ashley Ayarza Woods

Visual Effects Dulany Foster IV

Production & Distribution Company
Maxxie, Suzzee & Cinema

Financing
France - Italy - Switzerland - USA

ASSOCIATIONS & NGOS THAT PROVIDED INCREDIBLE HELP AND ACCESS

United Migrants

Utopia 56

Médecins du Monde

Association Aurore - Les Amarres

Hôpitaux Universitaires Pitié Salpêtrière

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

Sea-Watch

Pilotes Volontaires

The Outlaw Ocean Project

SOS MEDITERRANEE

Italian Red Cross

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STILLS|VISUALS: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/68j18xjr9t3jr1o3oxksi/AJY6uv5F614-RQobl5uGcDU?dl=0&e=3&rlkey=a3zirvj2c9memwdxkm631fyfe&st=pc596oft>

TRAILER: <https://youtu.be/hvcPyVRdkT4>

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