



Home > Film > Global

May 18, 2024 10:45pm PT

Somali Filmmaker Mo Harawe Makes History in Cannes With Intimate Family Drama 'The Village Next to Paradise'

By Christopher Vourlias ▾



"The Village Next to Paradise" (Courtesy of Freibeuter Film)



Listen to this article now

Powered by **Trinity Audio**

00:00



1.0x

03:54

After making waves on the festival circuit with a pair of heralded short films, Somali filmmaker Mo Harawe makes his auspicious feature debut at this year's [Cannes Film Festival](#) with “The Village Next to Paradise,” which premieres May 21 in the French fest's Un Certain Regard section — the first feature from the African nation ever to screen on the Croisette.

An intimate family drama set in a windswept Somali fishing village, “Paradise” follows Mamargade (Ahmed Ali Farah), a single father working odd jobs to provide a better life for his son, Cigaal (Ahmed Mohamud Saleban). They're joined by his sister, Araweelo (Anab Ahmed Ibrahim), who comes back to live with the duo after her divorce. Each pursues their own ambitions in a country wracked by civil war, natural disasters and the deadly threat posed by the U.S. drones constantly buzzing overhead.

A testament to love, family and resilience, “The Village Next to Paradise” is produced by Sabine Moser and Oliver Neumann for Austria's Freibeuter Film (“Great Freedom”), Germany's Niko Film (“More Than Ever”), France's Kazak Prods. (“Corsage,” “Titane”) and Somalia's Maanmaal. Totem Films is handling international sales.

Born and raised in Mogadishu, Harawe emigrated to Austria in 2009, where he taught himself the fundamentals of filmmaking before pursuing formal studies in Germany. Beginning with the short films “Life on the Horn” (2020), an official selection of the Locarno Film Festival, and “Will My Parents Come to See Me” (2022), which premiered in Berlin, he began to explore life in the country he left behind, using cinema to bridge the gap between the memories of his homeland

and the way Somalia was perceived through a European lens.

“It was a way to know myself, in way,” Harawe tells *Variety*. As an immigrant, he often found himself recalling his Somali childhood to skeptical audiences. “I didn’t think I was living in a failed state,” he said. “You question yourself. And then when you start writing, you realize, ‘No, my reality is reality.’ Willingly or not willingly, that’s what came out.”

“The Village Next to Paradise” doesn’t shy away from the complexities of Somalia, an impoverished country thrust against the Indian Ocean whose precarious central government has struggled for decades to keep a violent insurgency at bay. The birthplace of the Al-Shabaab terrorist group, it has also been a focal point of the U.S. war on terror, the consequences of which are felt throughout Harawe’s film.

The director resists the urge to cast Somalis as helpless victims, though his poised debut certainly exposes the human toll behind euphemisms like “collateral damage.” Harawe is more interested in probing at the intimate bonds of his unconventional but tight-knit family unit, while exploring how individuals assume or evade responsibility for their actions.

He is careful, however, to withhold judgment when his characters make compromises in the face of forces beyond their control. “I’m not blaming anyone,” he said. “If you survive in these kinds of circumstances, you are superhuman. And if you don’t make it, then you’re still human. It’s not that you’re any less [of a person].”

While the film’s title hints at the thwarted promise of a troubled country where paradise remains tantalizingly out of reach, Harawe insisted Somalis — bound by family ties and an unwavering perseverance — are ultimately masters of their own fate.

“There is still hope. You can take a lot of things, but that’s not something you can take from them,” he said. “There is a freedom in that. It’s hard to describe. There is a freedom when you have this hope and you have this resilience. No matter what happens, there is tomorrow.”

Read More About: Cannes Film Festival

Jump To Comments

0 Comments

Comments are moderated. They may be edited for clarity and reprinting in whole or in part in Variety publications.

Leave a Reply

Leave your comment here

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

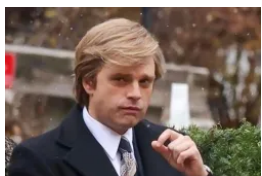
Name *

Email *

Website

Post Comment

Most Popular



Donald Trump Movie 'The Apprentice' Ignites Controversy in Cannes Over Rape Scene



Inside the Legal Battle to Recut Trump Movie 'The Apprentice': Why Billionaire Investor Dan Snyder Is Furious With Ex-President's Portrayal...



Trump's Social Media Company Posts Q1 Revenue of \$770,500 and Net Loss of \$327.6 Million



Kevin Costner Can't Hold Back Tears as His Western Epic 'Horizon' Earns 7-Minute Cannes Standing Ovation, Promises '3 More...



Demi Moore on Full Frontal Nudity With Margaret Qualley in 'The Substance': 'A Very Vulnerable Experience' but I Had a 'Great Partner Who I Felt Very...

Brutal Donald Trump Biopic 'The Apprentice' Gets 8-Minute Cannes Standing Ovation as Director Says 'It's Time to Make Movies Political Again...

'Pirates of the Caribbean' Producer Would Bring Johnny Depp Back in New Reboot 'If It Were Up to Me,' Thinks Disney Still 'Really Wants to Make...

Mariska Hargitay Is Already 'Planning' Benson and Stabler Reunion Despite 'Law and Order: Organized Crime' Moving to Peacock: 'It's...

Olivia Colman as Queen Elizabeth Not Eligible for 'The Crown' in Emmy Guest Actress Race, Claire Foy Remains Early Favorite (EXCLUSIVE)

'All American' Boss on How She Brought Back Taye Diggs' Billy Baker and Hopes for Future Seasons While Awaiting Season 7 Renewal

Must Read

Film

Witness Anya Taylor-Joy: The 'Furiosa' Star on Making the 'Mad Max' Icon Her Own and Hopes for 'Dune 3'

Film

Box Office: 'Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes' Climbs to No. 1 With \$58 Million Debut

TV

'Squid Game: The Challenge,' Matthew Macfadyen Among Winners at BAFTA TV Awards 2024

Film

Ron Howard Remembers Roger Corman's Mentorship and Impact on Filmmaking: 'What a Life'

Film

'The Phantom Menace' at 25: A Lover, Hater and Newcomer Debate Jar Jar Binks, Podraces, Droids and Darth Maul

Sign Up for Variety Newsletters

Enter Your Email Address

Sign Up

By providing your information, you agree to our Terms of Use and our Privacy Policy. We use vendors that may also process your information to help provide our services. // This site is protected by reCAPTCHA Enterprise and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.

More From Our Brands

Rolling Stone

'Emphasis on Cult': Jon Stewart Breaks Down Why Trump is the 'Real Cancel Culture'

Robb Report

Watch: This Speedy 23-Foot Electric Wakeboat Soar Across the Seas at 40 MPH

Sportico

Sporticast 346: It's Timberwolves vs. Mavs. Who Owns Them?

SPY

The Best Loofahs and Body Scrubbers, According to Dermatologists

TVLine

The Voice Finale Recap: Which of the Top 5 Sang Like They Were Headed for the Winner's Circle?

Variety

Legal

Variety Magazine

VIP+

Connect

VARIETY

The Business of Entertainment

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Variety is a part of Penske Media Corporation. © 2024 Variety Media, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Variety and the Flying V logos are trademarks of Variety Media, LLC. Powered by WordPress.com VIP

Have a News Tip? Let us know