

Interview with Palestinian Director Amer Shomali

[Amer Shomali](#) isn't just a film director. He's a visual artist, an animator, a graphic designer, a painter and a cartoonist with an academic background in architecture and animation. His latest work, a film titled *The Wanted 18*, has been making headlines at the [Abu Dhabi Film Festival \(ADFF\)](#). We caught up with this prolific artist who originally hails from Palestine for a quick interview.

What inspired you to go into the artistic field?

Being an artist is not a choice for me: It is who I am. As to how I got into it, it was because of a traffic jam! I always wanted to work in the creative field, but my family kept saying that we as refugees can't afford this kind of luxury. And they pushed me towards engineering instead. So I studied architecture for 5 years all the while sending cartoons to local newspapers. The day I graduated I got in a taxi to go back to my home town of Beit Sahour to work in an engineer office. The taxi got stuck in a traffic jam and changed routes only to get stuck again, just in front of an office at Birzeit University. And by pure accident, the manager was smoking outside and saw me in the taxi. She waved to me and shouted to get out of the taxi and have coffee with her. She asked me if I was still doing cartoons and if I want to work full time as a cartoonist for children's comic books. The next day I was on my desk doing comics for the university!

Your latest work, *The Wanted 18*, was recently screened at the ADFF. What messages did you want to convey with your film?

HOPE. The story of the intifada. The spirit of a unique, unified community can change the perspective of the youth in Palestine. My generation is stuck in between 2 choices: either accept being the absolute victim of occupation, dictatorship and capitalism, OR being a lunatic radical and join ISIS. This film is proposing an old module we created 25 years ago, where you can create your own future.

How has the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture helped in supporting your work?

At the beginning many people said that this film is crazy idea. That it cannot be done. You can't mix all those visual elements together. You can't use comedy to tell the story of the intifada, especially since I have no experience at all, and has a budget of over 1 million dollars. And yet, some people believed in me and my approach. I was taking a risk, and they did too by supporting me. AFAC was there to take a risk in supporting a filmmaker without experience.

[AFAC](#) is an initiative established in 2007 dedicated to supporting individuals and organizations in the fields of cinema, performing arts, literature, music and visual arts volunteers. Follow them online on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep up with all the exciting things happening in the region!