

**BABYLON**  
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***PRESS ARTICLE***

**International Film Festival Rotterdam**

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**ENRICHING OUR CULTURES**

Launched just a year ago at the International Film Festival Locarno, the Babylon Feature Film Project Development Workshop held its inaugural session in Rotterdam to coincide with this year's IFFR. Simon Kingsley reports.

Running 28-31 January, at Rotterdam's Goethe Institute, a stone's throw from De Doelen, the programme welcomed fifteen filmmakers of migrant backgrounds to the four-day event.

Gareth Jones and Fiona Howe of London-based production company Scenario Films produce the event in conjunction with Thierry Lenouvel of Cine-Sud Promotions.

The workshop is designed to help participants develop their feature films, and offers expert advice and support from a long list of guest speakers and consultants.

CineMart co-head, Bianca Taal, was one of a number of speakers taking part this year. Others included Michel Reilhac (ARTE France Cinema); Alan Fountain (EAVE); Georges Goldenstern (Cinefondation); Sally Hibbin (Ken Loach's producer) and Andy Whittaker from Dogwoof Pictures. Frederic Maire of the Locarno Film Festival also took part.

"We look for a mixture of producer-director duos, but we also have some producer-writer duos and writer-directors as own producers," adds Jones. "But the strength of the project comes first."

Howe stresses the workshop's international approach. "We're working multi-lingually and multi-culturally, using interpreters," she says. "We don't want anyone excluded on grounds of language or any other reason. That's led to unusual solidarity between the participants."

Among those selected this year was Jilani Saadi, a Tunisian living in Paris, whose feature *TENDER IS THE WOLF* screens in this year's Sturm und Drang. "Very happy" with the audience's response, he is also proud "to be part of an upcoming network that will allow films to be created in Europe, by European individuals originally from another ethnic

background.” His next project, THE IMPOSSIBLE BEQUEST, is in development with Babylon.

Another participant was Ghanaian-British writer-director Victoria Hayford with LOWARCHY, her feature project about racial tension among minorities in Great Britain.

“I’m very privileged to have been selected,” Hayford says. “It’s made me realize my story has validity and connection. Babylon has helped me explore the idea further. I feel I have greater reach as an artist and there’s a real possibility of realizing the project.”

“Babylon is very important,” says Dr Christian Lüffe, coordinator of Film Programmes at Germany’s Goethe Institute. “When British filmmakers from Ghana talk to French ones from China and Germans with a Kurdish background, that’s an enrichment of our respective cultures.”

With “IFFR such an excellent platform,” says Jones, “we’ve just attracted new support from Filmfonds Wien and Mira Media here in Holland.”