

*"For the first time in the institution's 138-year-existence, two young filmmakers found themselves in the right place at the right time, with the right cinematic idea: "Crop."*

EGYPT INDEPENDENT

# CROP

A FILM BY JOHANNA DOMKE & MAROUAN OMARA

*"I am a real fan of this film!"  
Alisa Lebow, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX*

*"This is an outstanding film. Surely my favorite 'Egyptian Revolutionary' film."  
Mark R. Westmoreland, THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO*



# CROP

a film by Johanna Domke & Marouan Omara

**Format:**

HD / 47 min / color / stereo

**Genre:**

creative documentary, human rights, politics, social affairs

**Language versions:**

english voice-over  
arabic voice-over optional  
with english subtitles

**Production Countries:** Egypt,  
Germany, Denmark

**Available Screening**

**Formats:**

DCP, Blue Ray, HD CAM, DVD,  
digital files (MOV, AVI)

CROP is available on  
Festivalscope.

*"This rather simple documentary engages viewers to challenge how we perceive images and who is or is not included in the frame of Egyptian state media and, subsequently, society." EGYPT INDEPENDENT*

**CROP** is an absorbing account of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 – one that includes no images of the popular uprising itself. Filmed entirely within the offices of Al-Ahram, the country's largest state-run newspaper, the film is a series of carefully composed shots that expose the institution's functioning and the former regime's strict control over information. We are listening to the story of an older photojournalist, that missed out on the revolution due to a hospital stay.

Everyone deserves their own image, that's the gist of an old Egyptian pop song. In reality there used to be only one official image along the Nile for a long time: that of a strong and powerful Egypt, embodied by its rulers. The majority of the population had no place in it. The young revolution was a revolution of images, too: the people conquered the right to be represented with their digital cameras and mobile phones, and reached the world. But how representative are those new images, one wonders in view of the more than uncertain current situation. This film takes a step back to look behind the structures of the old power. It reveals with tableau-like shots the apparatus of power, in which official Egypt reproduced itself since Nasser's day. Starting with the conference rooms under the roof down to the basement garages where the papers are bundled for delivery, we meet a multitude of employees doing their various jobs, while a narrator's voice, an intersubjective surrogate of interviews with photo journalists, recites a first-hand account, as it were, of Egyptian media history. The strict division between the visual and audio levels makes us look more closely and raises questions: for whom will this apparatus work in the future? With their formal mastery and perceptive framing, Johanna Domke and Marouan Omara inspire us to think about the power of images.

*"Crop is three works in one, a story in audio format about the censorship of images in Egypt, a silent video installation to see in an art gallery that conveys self-censorship, and a film bringing both together." Alice Hackman for Euromed Audiovisual*

## THE FILMMAKER



Johanna Domke



Marouan Omara

**Marouan Omara** is a young creative filmmaker from Cairo, Egypt born in 1987. He studied photography at the faculty of Applied Arts in Cairo and joined the Academy of Cinema Arts And Technology in 2006 to follow his passion for filmmaking. Starting his career as a freelance photographer, he showed his work in exhibitions on both national and international level. He has been producing a row of documentaries and worked in several productions in different positions. He has been recently taking part in the cultural expedition "Arabia Off Screen" and participated in the Durban Talent Campus for young filmmakers. Marouan Omara is currently preparing his first feature film "Repeated Stopping" which will be produced in the beginning of 2014.

**Filmography:** Repeated Stopping / feature film) (pre-production) CROP / creative documentary (2012) Those People / mini-documentaries (2011) The Doll / short film (2010) TTS Lead Consulting / short documentary (2009) Fez / short documentary (2009) Taxi / short film (2008) What time is it? / short film (2008)

**Johanna Domke** is a visual artist and filmmaker, born in 1978 in Kiel, D. She grew up in Germany and Argentina and studied Fine Arts at the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen, Denmark and the Malmö Art Academy, Sweden. She is producing work for a cross-over field between art and cinema with a both structural and socio-political approach. She regards the image production itself as an analysis of perception and is concerned with how images influence the course of history, the creation of meaning and the shaping of identity. She carried out a number of collaborative projects and participated in artist in residencies at Platform, Istanbul, Townhouse, Cairo and EMPAC, NY. Her work has been shown in international group and solo shows in recognized art institutions and film festivals around the world.

**Filmography:** JABNI /artistic documentary (in production) CROP / artistic documentary with Marouan Omara (2012 ) Untitled-Epilog / experimental feature (2011) Man kenenki / documentary with Fatou Kande (2010) 100 % Yün/16 mm short film (2010) Søen i Spejlet -The lake in the mirror /16 mm short film (2010) Stultifera Garden / short film (2009) Cuers / short film (2008) A sunset takes 7 minutes /16 mm experimental short film (2005)

*"The complex relationship between what we see, what we want others to see and what we know is at the heart of this deceptively simple documentary film."*

**Liam Devlin, Lecturer at Goldsmiths University of London and the University of Wales**

**festivals:**

- 42nd International Film Festival Rotterdam, Netherlands - Official Selection
- 23rd Festival del Cinema Africano, d'Asia e America Latina, Milano, Italy - Official Competition
- 11th Ischia Film Festival, Ischia, Italy - Official Selection
- 12th New Filmmakers | New Films Festival, Espinho, Portugal - Official Selection
- 6th Muslihat OK Video Jakarta, Indonesia - Official Selection
- 13th Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Japan - Official Selection
- 14th Beirut International Film Festival, Libanon - Official Competition
- 17th Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, Czech Republic, Opus Bonum Competition
- 57th Internationales Leipziger Festival für Dokumentarfilm, Germany - Young Cinema Competition
- 16th RIDM - Montreal International Documentary Festival, Canada - Official Selection
- 30th Kasseler Dokumentar und Videofest, Germany - nominated for the Golden Key
- 8th Pravo Ljudski Film Festival, Bosnia and Herzegovina - Extra Muros Competition
- Arab Camera Filmfestival Rotterdam, Netherlands - Official Selection
- 12th Paris Human Rights International Film Festival, France - Official Competition
- 6th One World Romania International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, Bucharest, Romania
- 16th Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, UK - Official Selection
- Masry Asly Film Festival, Cairo, Damnhour, Aswan, Egypt
- CinemAfrica Festival, Stockholm, Sweden - Official Competition
- 5th Alfilm, Arab Film Festival, Berlin, Germany - Official Competition
- 11th Hamburg Documentary Film Festival, Germany - nominated for the Klaus Wildenhahn-Pries

**awards:**

- Golden Key Honorable mention at the 30th Kasseler Dokumentar und Videofest, Germany
- Honorable mention at the CinemAfrica Festival, Stockholm, Sweden
- Klaus Wildenhahn Preis at 11th Hamburg Documentary Film Festival, Germany

**Museum presentations:**

"global aCtIVISm" ZKM - Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Germany

"Cairo. Open City- New Testimonies from an Ongoing Revolution"-

Photomuseum Braunschweig, Germany

5th European Month of Photography, Berlin, Germany

Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany

FOKUS, Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, Denmark

Utopia, Image Festival, Copenhagen, Denmark

LOOP Festival, Barcelona Spain

**Conferences / Book Launches:**

World Press Photo Conference; "Reporting Change" Investigating and documenting transition in the Middle East and North Africa.

"Cairo: Images of transition", published by Townhouse Gallery

*"Crop is shot entirely on location inside the powerhouse behind these images, the surreal, somewhat Orwellian headquarters of Egypt's state newspaper Al-Ahram. A world away from the chaos of a busy newsroom, carefully framed shots of this building's high ceilings and dauntingly quiet offices, idle clerks and shiny elevators beg the question of where on Earth the next day's news is coming from."* **Alice Hackman for Euromed Audiovisual**

**Public screenings in art spaces and cultural institutions:**

General Public curated by Graw Böckler Berlin  
Goethe Institute Film week, Goethe Institute, Cairo  
Dour Art Foundation, Cairo  
Townhouse Art Gallery, Cairo  
Artellewa, Cairo  
Qabila Art Space, Cairo  
Netherlands-Flemish Institute, Cairo  
Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria  
No.W.Here, London curated by Omar Kholeif  
Arnolfini, Bristol curated by Omar Kholeif  
British Film Institute, Discover Arab Cinema Program, London  
Documentary Monday, Kinoscetozor Arthouse, Prag  
Brussels Echoes featured by IDFF Jhilava, Cinema Nova, Brussels  
Rawabet Theatre, Cairo  
Studio Emad Eddin Foundation  
The strike of Tanta linen factory at the headquarters of the Federation Workers, Cairo.  
The District, Cairo.  
Cairo Opera House.  
The High Film Institute, Cairo.  
Janaklees for visual art, Alexandria.

*"This film reiterates the importance of a space for the people of Egypt to create their own suwra\*  
"image", to imagine their own Egypt as a vital first step in the continual struggle to create a more  
equitable society." Liam Devlin, Lecturer at Goldsmiths University of London and the  
University of Wales*

**Articles, Reviews, Interviews and Panels:**

- CROP gewinnt Klaus Wildenhahn Preis, Kulturport
- CROP de Marouan Omara et Johanna Domke, Brigitte Remer, Gauche Republicaine
- One World Romania, 2014 - Interview with Marouan Omara & Bilgehan Ozis - [www.veiozaarte.ro](http://www.veiozaarte.ro)
- 7 documentaries about life in Cairo you need to watch. - Cairoobserver
- Defiance is present - Özge Calafato looks at some of the most compelling  
recent documentary works from the Arab World.  
DOX European Documentary Magazine Spring 2014 \* 101 by Özge Calafato
- DOK TALK - Panel during DOK Leipzig - Dok Talk <https://vimeo.com/78833090>
- New angle to an old topic - Egypt Today by Sherif Awad
- New angle to an old topic - Westchester guardian by Sherif Awad
- Crop: An Orwellian state newspaper building, and the power of images  
An intelligent creative documentary about the censorship and self-censorship of images in  
Egypt, Euromed by Alice Hackman
- 'Crop' challenges dominance of state-produced photos - Egypt Independent by Maha El Nabawi
- Crop and Coming Forth by Day in Goethe Film Week , Daily News Egypt by Adel Heine
- Suwra - Ägypten und die Bilder - FAZ / Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung by Liam Devlin
- Revisiting CROP - Townhouse Gallery, Cairo by Alexandra Stock

## **EGYPT TODAY 12/2013**

### **The experimental documentary *Crop* explores the power of political images on our perception**

*By Sherif Awad*

Anyone who has ever held a camera has had to decide what goes into the picture and what stays outside the frame. What remains inside the frame has the power to impact how we feel about a subject, and careful framing can even affect how we feel about ourselves as a nation. Such is the premise of *Crop*, an experimental documentary about Egypt's 2011 Revolution.

Co-directed by Egyptian Marouan Omara and Danish filmmaker Johanna Domke, *Crop* follows a fictional photojournalist around the actual building of the state-run Al-Ahram newspaper. This photojournalist, representing the 'everyman' state employee, missed the 18 days of revolution due to a hospital stay, and when he returns to his work in the newspaper, his life seems not quite the same. His narration, scripted from interviews with real Al-Ahram journalists, gives a personal reflection on the media ploys of the old regime and how they are changing. In the process, the filmmakers reflect upon the impact of images in the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and put it in relation to the image politics of Egypt's leaders.

Omara, born in 1987, first studied photography at the faculty of Applied Arts in Cairo and joined the Academy of Cinema Arts And Technology in 2006 to follow his passion for filmmaking. Starting his career as a freelance photographer, he showed his work in exhibitions on both national and international levels. He is currently preparing his first feature film "Repeated Stopping" which will be produced in the beginning of 2014. Domke, a visual artist born in 1987, grew up in Germany and Argentina and studied Fine Arts at the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen, Denmark and the Malmö Art Academy, Sweden. She has done a number of collaborative projects and participated in artist in residencies at Platform, Istanbul.

*Crop* was screened in several film festivals around the world including International Film Festival Rotterdam, Milan's Festival del Cinema Africano d'Asia e America Latina and the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan. Most recently, it screened at the Beirut International Film Festival in October.

Domke talks about her experience shooting the film in Al-Ahram and her collaboration with Omara.

#### ***How was the idea of this documentary conceived?***

Marouan and I met in a time where there was a lot of media attention on the revolution. It was about one year after the revolution and Cairo was full of camera teams, artists and photographers. Neither of us had the impulse to document what was going on in the streets. Marouan, who even took part in the revolution during the 18 days, had never considered taking a single picture. We were both fascinated by the need for images that the people and the media around the world had on the subject. We wanted to understand what impact these images had on people's perceptions of Egypt and what it meant for the Egyptian people. Moreover, we wanted to go back in history to draw attention on how images were dealt with in the past, and what they meant in a political context.

We started our research by interviewing photographers and journalists from both national and international press. At a very early stage, we decided not to use any images or people to which the narrator refers to create a distance to them; we intended to make apparent how powerful the impact of an image is. These images are actually present in our memory like a blueprint. While we hear about Sadat's appearance as a leader, we don't need to see him standing in his uniform, because we can remember that. If we have never seen a picture of Sadat, we can actually imagine it. When talking about Egypt, we have an image in mind that probably resembles the picture that comes up.

The interesting question, though, is who actually constructed these images and what do they serve apart from being a fantasy? It was needless to talk about the images of the revolution. Everyone has seen countless images and videos in the media or over Facebook. In a film concerning the images about the revolution, why would we need to show them again? We wanted to draw attention to an internal change, one that has been going on in relation to images: the shift from a highly idealized representation of the nation to a national image that the people of this country actually take part in “whether by being in it, or making it,” as is said in the film. This is an invisible change, which in the film can be sensed by the viewer with the images that he is asked to imagine over the course of the narrative. In a way, you can watch the film in three different ways: whether you listen, you watch or you imagine.

***Why did you choose to narrate the contemporary history of Egypt through this form: a photographer’s narration on images taken inside Al-Ahram newspaper?***

Naturally you cannot make a film without any footage at all. One day when we had an interview with a journalist at Al-Ahram, we got the idea to set our film entirely inside this building. It suddenly became apparent that this immense building is the big machinery that has been so actively defining the images that we have been talking about throughout history. At the same time it is a wonderful representation of society itself, presenting it from top to down, from the highest-ranking offices to the lowest workers, displaying all sorts of hierarchies and power structures. The narration is based on the many interviews we carried out with photojournalists, and the narrator is a fictitious character who gives voice to the many stories we heard. In this way it is both true and fictive. This character — “whose name is Ahmed but it could also be Amr,” as it is said in the beginning of the film, is the story of one who could be many. We move through the building, where he has worked or even still works. We look for him and see him in everybody we come to meet.

***Did you face any problems or difficulties in presenting the documentary to the Egyptian censorship? Was it easy to get permits to shoot inside Al-Ahram’s buildings?***

It was extremely difficult to get access to the Al-Ahram and even more so to obtain a shooting permit. We were lucky, though, with the timing of our request. It was during the first round of the presidential elections, when Al-Ahram was shifting heads of departments all the time to appear more open and transparent. We had a letter of support from the Goethe Institute that passed over many desks and collected stamps and signatures. It was a process that took about four months and cost us endless phone calls, visits and nerves. In the end we believe that neither of us would have gotten access without the other... Johanna by herself would have been too suspicious and Marouan would probably not have been taken seriously! Our combination confused them and they gave us the permission, after we paid quite an amount for a location fee.

Until now the film has only shown in Cairo during the Goethe Institute Film week and on smaller occasions during talks we gave in institutions like Townhouse Gallery. There have been no incidents from an official side.

***How was your experience shooting in Ahram?***

Once we had the shooting permit it was easy to deal with the people in charge. They allowed us to film in the entire building. Of course, there was always a representative of the public relations department present to survey our shooting. We were generally very impressed by the people working at Al-Ahram. We had thought we would get many more questions or reactions regarding our presence with a camera. We later assumed that people knew that it is not easy to enter the building with a camera so we obviously had all the legitimacy we needed. They were told by the PR department to look serious and efficient while working. The result was that they ignored us professionally, while observing us thoroughly from the corner of the eye.



**CREW:**

**Written and Directed** Johanna Domke & Marouan Omara

**Director of Photography** Melanie Brugger

**Sound Designer** Bilghan Öziş

**Sound Recordist** Lisa Wagner

**Music** Abdel Halim Hafez, Sura, 1966

**Assistant Director** Hesham Saloom

**Editor** Johanna Domke, Emad Maher

**Assistant Editor** Aly Mourad

**Edit Advisor** Gesa Marten

**Color Grading** Melanie Brugger

**Poster Photo** ANTRO

**Graphic Design** Ahmed Kamal





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KUNSTRÅD  
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