

# Jewish director Julian Schnabel brings Palestine to Venice

Director talks of 'responsibility' to tell story of Middle East conflict in film *Miral*, told through eyes of two Palestinian women

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Mark Brown in Venice  
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Yasmine Al Masri attends the *Miral* photocall during the Venice Film Festival. Photograph: Andreas Rentz/Getty Images

The American artist and film-maker Julian Schnabel said he felt a "responsibility" as a Jew to tell the story of Palestine when he opened his new movie at the [Venice film festival](#).

**Miral**

**Production year:** 2010

**Countries:** France, India, Israel, Italy

**Runtime:** 112 mins

**Directors:** Julian Schnabel

**Cast:** Alexander Siddig, Freida Pinto, Vanessa Redgrave, Willem Dafoe

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Schnabel's film [Miral](#), competing with 22 others for the Golden Lion award, brought a note of seriousness to an event that sometimes veers towards the frothier side of culture.

*Miral* is told mainly through the eyes of two Palestinian women, covering 40 years of history from the birth of the state of [Israel](#) in 1948 to the failed Oslo peace accord of 1993. Its message is that education is the only hope to bringing any kind of resolution to the conflict.

Yesterday Schnabel said he felt a responsibility to bring the story to the big screen. "Coming from my background, as an American Jewish person whose mother was president of Hadassah [the Women's Zionist Organisation of

America] in 1948, I figured I was a pretty good person to try to tell the story of the other side."

Schnabel has admitted not knowing much about the Palestinian people until he read the semi-autobiographical book by Rula Jebreal on which the film is based. "I felt it was my responsibility to confront this issue because, maybe, I've spent most of my life receding from my responsibility as a Jewish person."

He said there was an urgency to his film. "This conflict has to end. Every time a child dies on each side — there's no reason for it."

Miral tells the story of the Dar al-Tifl orphanage in Jerusalem, which was set up by a rich socialite called Hind Hussein in 1948 after she came across 55 orphans in the street. Within six months she had a school for 2,000 children.

The film shows how one of the orphans, Miral, is forced to grow up fast when she falls in love with a Palestinian activist. Miral is played by Slumdog Millionaire's Freida Pinto, and while there have been eyebrows raised at the Indian actor's casting as a Palestinian, Pinto bears an uncanny resemblance to Jebreal, on whom the character of Miral is based. Vanessa Redgrave and Willem Dafoe have small cameo roles.

Schnabel said the values that were instilled in him by his mother were the same as the ones instilled in Jebreal by Hind Hussein. "One of the reasons why I made this film is that it was so obvious to me that there are more similarities between these people than differences."

The debut of Miral was well-timed, coming on the day the US president, Barack Obama, opened a new round of Middle East peace talks.

Meanwhile, Iranian film-maker Jafar Panahi has been forbidden by the authorities from attending the premiere of his new short film Accordion. He was arrested last year and imprisoned for making a film looking at the Iranian elections, but had planned to attend.