

The new web series 'Zyara': 9 awards through its first season



Every now and then we ought to pay a warm visit to the keen emotions inside each of us; the emotions that remind us of the core essence of humanity that links us all together. Every now and then we ought to avoid the bigger image and visit a deeper sense of what bonds us and Lebanon. We shall call this visit a 'Zyara'.

'Zyara' is a new web-series by [Muriel Aboulrouss](#) designated to the in-depth stories of individuals around Lebanon. The documentary web series is produced by [Denise Jabbour](#) and is a heart-felt collaboration between Jabbour and Aboulrouss to create a project that revolves around the authenticity of people's stories.

By the end of season one which consists of 12 episodes, Zyara has won 9 international awards. It won best documentary web series at [UK Web Festival 2015](#) and [Dub Web Festival 2015](#), Best Innovative Technique or Narration at [Bilbao Web Festival 2015](#), Best Cinematography Dub Web Festival 2015, Special Award Creative Media for Positive Change at Mythwork 2015, Marble Award for Best Non-fiction by Web Series Magazine, Best Edition for Liliane Hanbali BAWEBFEST (Buenos Aires) 2016 and recently Best Cinematography and Directing at Rome Web Merit Awards.

'Zyara' adopts the production of [Denise Jabbour](#), cinematographic and directing skills of [Muriel Aboulrouss](#), Editor Liliane Hanbali, Sound Engineer Mohab Chanesaz, Camera Assistant Rachelle Noja and Colorist Khalil Abourrousse.

The Tribune conducted an interview with Muriel Aboulrouss about the initiation of Zyara:

1- You are a very well-known Director of Photography, what was the main motivation behind 'Zyara', and pursuing Directing?

When the idea of Zyara was born, Denise Jabbour, the creative producer asked me to direct and shoot it. I was hesitant not only because it scared me, but also because I love cinematography too much to compromise on it. Yet then I found my own way to be a free cinematographer; shooting only what I feel with no restriction or second opinion and I got hooked. It's called "directing" but for me it is the freedom to shoot and edit my visuals just the way I feel. I felt free for the first time in my life as an artist and now I can never go back to where I was. I am free!

2- How did your photography skill enhance your vision of the shots?

Knowing your tools allows you to express yourself without thinking, and after 20 years of being a cinematographer with all kind of directors and all sorts of projects from advertising to film, I gained enough knowledge to use my tools instinctively and authentically without fear or doubt. I am guided by the light and by my love to telling true stories.

3 - In Zyara, we see your approach to your 'subjects' in extreme close-ups, what motivated this intimacy?

For me, Cinema is in the "close up", in the personal, and the intimate. It is very difficult for me to view things in wide shots unless I went deep inside and discovered the layers. Only then am ready to reveal the space and subject. It wasn't thought of at all at first, as I really worked instinctively through it all (the first 4 episodes), then I realized that Zyara represents everything I feel and believe in when it comes to its esthetics. I caress the people, love them, feel them, smell them then when I'm totally in love and full, I step back and observe them. We are made of thousands of layers, I do my best to portray people in their most authentic layers available in their homes, but people are much more than that. We just visit and share the essence of that visit in 5 minutes. Zyara is a simple minimalistic concept portraying "love" through the lens.

4- How do you 'pick' your subjects, does it go back to their story or their personal accounts?

We started by looking around us, people we know, people we bump into, people we personally admire and love. The first season is very rich and diverse but it was mainly composed of characters that are accessible to us within our time frame and production capacity. Our only rule in Zyara is "authenticity" so if the person can stay authentic in front of the camera, if they want to genuinely share their stories and emotions as much as we are hungry to hear and feel them, then we go for it.

5- Tell us more about the team, and how did you come to start-up Zyara?

Zyara came from Denise Jabbour the creative producer, my partner in "Home of Cine-Jam" our production hub and film lab.

She loves to listen to people and she has a gift of connecting with them instantly. We were going through a tough phase like we always do in Lebanon, in 2014, and we decided to act instead of wait. Zyara was born from our need to resist evil and war, hatred and fanaticism, our need for love and oneness. The team joined for the same reason.

When the first episode was created, it took us all by surprise, we fell in love and we decided to continue. After the 4 episodes (pilots) were created, we decided to touch base with the international market to see how they will react; we then submitted Zyara to many international festivals and won 9 awards so far which was really a beautiful journey which is still ongoing. Today we have 12 episodes in total out of which 10 are online and the other two will follow soon. We got international distribution for the first season, and we are working on finding sponsorship to keep "Zyara" alive.

6- What is the core message you want to convey through Zyara, and specifically to the Lebanese society?

Zyara is our way of loving the world not just Lebanon. Zyara is about oneness & tolerance. Zyara is conceived to be a cinematic passport to the world and in one click you can touch, feel & listen to as many people as possible all around the planet.

For now we have started in Lebanon because it is our country, but Zyara departs from Beirut to spread love, art and authenticity all around the world. We dream and plan to travel to as many countries as possible to film a season (12 episodes) in each country. We are very happy and proud to be the Zyara makers, we complete each other and we are all willing to keep making Zyara as long as our bodies allow us to do so. It is a marvelous adventure, full of love and life lessons.



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