

# 44th CINEMED fest to Fête Simone Bitton & Abdellatif Kéchiche

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Montpellier's mayor, Michel Delafosse, center, with CINEMED president Leoluca Orlando to his right (photo Jordan Elgrably).

## Jordan Elgrably

Just as live events, including concerts and comedy shows, were dead in the water due to Covid for the longest time, cinema found itself an endangered species. Movie theatres were empty for nearly two years and these days are typically at 30% capacity — in Europe at any rate — so filmmakers not only struggle to obtain funding and get their pictures produced, they also rely more and more on video-on-demand sales, so that their work can find an audience. While on the face of it, this affords greater democratic distribution (more people are connected to the net these days because of the pandemic), the beauty of cinema is still to be found sitting in an expansive hall, filled with other moviegoers.

Let's face it, watching on the small screen or a handheld device has shrunk our world, and has endangered the 7<sup>th</sup> art.

This is why I become so animated at the advent of attending a film festival, and the 44<sup>th</sup> annual CINEMED in Montpellier just held its first press conference this morning, discussing the roster of films and filmmakers (dozens) to be presented from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of October. Among the filmmaker retrospectives will be screenings devoted to French-Moroccan documentarian [Simone Bitton](#) and Franco-Tunisian director [Abdellatif Kéchiche](#), as well as Spanish director Iciar Bollain. Bitton, a renowned pacifist, is Arab and Jewish and has devoted much of her career to underdogs including the Palestinians, and to supporting Muslim-Jewish entente.



Franco-Moroccan director Simone Bitton and Franco-Tunisian director Abdellatif Kéchiche,

CINEMED, for those unfamiliar with it, screens a broad range of movies from around the Mediterranean and neighboring countries, including much of southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. It is a truly democratic and intercultural event, overflowing with cinematic gems.

I first attended CINEMED in 2017, when the central focus of the festival was Algeria and its cinéastes. I had an opportunity to see films that I likely would not have easily found in local theatres, and spoke with a handful of younger directors, among them Amel Bliidi, Sofia Djama, Damien Ouniri, Lyes Salem and Karim Moussaoui. "The international community has been taking notice of Algeria's film production since the Black Decade officially ended," I wrote at the time. "Several directors have claimed that they became filmmakers out of an almost dire need to share Algerian stories with the world."

Apart from Bitton and Abdellatif, other Arab filmmakers who will attend CINEMED during the screenings of their films include Mounia Meddour, Rachida Brakni, Ramzi Ben Sliman, Erige Sehiri, Rachid Bouchareb and Roschdy Zem. Several screenings will be avant-premières.

"We have got to advocate for culture," Montpellier's mayor, Michel Delafosse, insisted at this morning's press conference. A strong supporter of building cultural bridges, he added: "It's inconceivable to fear others; on the contrary, we've got to come towards them." Delafosse criticized the illiberal and xenophobic policies of Vladimir Putin and Hungary's Viktor Orban, while another speaker on the dais, Leoluca Orlando, called out Italy's expected new prime minister, the extreme rightwinger Giorgia Meloni, when he said that, "There's a problem in our time with freedom, and this our chance to support it." Orlando, the former mayor of Palermo, is this year's guest president of CINEMED.

Visit the [CINEMED site](#) for details, and if you're in Montpellier this season, I look forward to seeing you in a movie theatre, soon.



[Abdellatif Kéchiche](#) [Algeria](#) [Arab film](#) [Moroccan cinema](#) [Simone Bitton](#) [Tunisia](#)



### Jordan Elgrably

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