



**Chadi Zeneddine's** films are falling from new heights

**B**orn in central Africa, Chadi Zeneddine belongs to the new generation of Lebanese filmmakers who did not live in civil-war Beirut, but came back to film their visions of the undying city. His latest project, *Falling from Earth*, will be released this month to international critical acclaim. Zeneddine and his film have also been invited to be part of New York City Film Festival, which takes place at the end of this month, and to far away Argentina. So, how's the young filmmaker holding up to the praise?

**What is *Falling from Earth* about?**

The film deals with the story of four people and their relationship with Beirut, which is the fifth character in the movie. They live in a state of internal war during the real war that is devastating the country. The stories are different: The first is that of the actor Rafik Ali Ahmad who plays Youssef, a man who decided to live in a destroyed area, a place that reminds us of a devastated Beirut. And because I love this city with all its imperfections, I try, with my camera, to show this place *prima facie*, hostile even in Youssef's happiest day. The other three stories take place in the same dilapidated shelter, but at different times from different view points.

**So the characters never meet?**

No, the characters never meet in the film, as each story is different from the other. The core of the story lies in the fact that Youssef, who lives in this very special place, gathers various pictures, memories, which make up the landscape of his room. He collected these pictures throughout his hard life; many of them are the only traces left by the people who fled during the war. Three of these images are those stories that we will follow, making this the only link between the characters, but an important link all the same.

**How did all this start?**

I started this movie with some friends when I was 24. It took us three years to finish it, mostly because it required a big budget; I was taking my time so as not to compromise any details and make it faster or cheaper.

**Do you regret waiting?**

Sometimes I say maybe I should have finished it earlier, but then I think everything happens for a reason. I am content.

**What was the biggest challenge in this case?**

Imagine trying to continue the same scene we started the first year in the third year. For example, Carmen had to wear the same dress, make-up, hair and all with no change! Yet we pulled it off...

**How did you get well-known actors like Rafik Ali Ahmad and Carmen Lebbos to work with you?**

[Laughs] Charm. When you're new and not well-known, of course it's hard to have people trust you and want to work with you, especially people this well-known. I don't know how, but when they read the script they said that they were in, no questions asked. I was *really* lucky in that. Working with professional and amateur actors created a fantastic vibe in the movie.

**Roughly 15 minutes of this 70-minute movie include dialogue; why did you want so much silence?**

That is how we tried to highlight the internal war that the characters lived through, rather than the actual state of war that ravaged the country. I take the viewer on a voyage with an underlying message of faith. It's a poetic film, not a narrative feature; it was imperative to keep it that way.

**What are you working on now?**

I have many ideas for film; I can't wait to start on them! *Brahim: The Last of the Storytellers*, which I'm working on now, is the first episode of a trilogy called *Storytellers of Cinema*. It's the concept of creating and expressing subtext through ordinary movies. That is what leaves a mark on viewers. I also have five feature film scripts in the pipeline, which means that I may not have time to feed myself in the next couple of years!