

... *And Justice for All*

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Who remembers Al Pacino's Academy Award nominated rendition of the driven-to-the-edge defense attorney, Arthur Kirkland, in Norman Jewison's 1979 courtroom drama, *...And Justice for All*? It's probably a generation thing, for those 'not of age', it's definitely worth looking up on YouTube. Most likely on YouTube, is a rebroadcast -or capture- of Pacino's unforgettable scene when he erupts screaming: "You're out of order! You're out of order! The whole trial is out of order! They're out of order!" As the year 2013 nears its conclusion, the scene has mysteriously resurrected from the folds of my memory and played over and over and over... For the words I have lost and struggle to string to make sentences that make sense of the world and of this year, Al Pacino's fit incarnates, all too often, the release I contain, day after day, Facebook browse after browse, news broadcast after broadcast, for fear of being taxed with emotional or psychological instability... When it plays in my head, the identification is so immediate, it instigates a sedating effect and I learn to live with images of starving, freezing Syrian refugees, tweets announcing more detentions in Egypt or car bombs in Beirut.

Yet, in my heart of hearts, I refuse to surrender to despair. When I am asked to opine on the "sorry" or "awry" state of the Arab spring, I smile wryly and insist, I do think it's a spring, not a winter, nor a summer, and certainly not an autumn. The reason is simple, I hold a uniquely privileged position. By virtue of my profession as a visual arts curator and film programmer, I have the privilege of apprehending the world, our present, our everyday and our tomorrow, our elderly and youth, our countrysides and cities, our farmers, workers, public servants and unemployed, our men and women, our icons and forgotten, our living and our dead, through the fabrications of artists, filmmakers, novelists, poets, musicians and dancers. With Arab media outlets tongue-tied at the service of their trustees, courts and judiciary bodies cowered to power, dissidents jailed and tortured, more than ever since decades, an ever growing number of Arab artists have been fearless, tireless, enchanting and inspiring. Security forces think they can execute with impunity and eliminate hard (forensic) evidence of their murders, but their crimes are recorded in poems, novels, paintings, photographs and

films. Rulers think they can lacerate our social fabric with sectarian, ethnic or cultural strife, turn us against one another, but our civility and solidarity are recorded in poems, novels, paintings, photographs and films. In our films, photographs, paintings, novels and poems, artists have given our martyrs dignified burials and consoled their beloved, kept traces of the missing, safeguarded our aspirations, reclaimed our rights.

What we have demonstrated, what we have showed, was unimaginable to them: men and women, from across classes and generations, standing peacefully side by side, sharing food, song and dance, shaping their destiny and taking their dignity, knowing they have the moral highground. The inalienable outcome of the Arab spring is the dissipation of the prohibitions we had internalized and the demons that bucked creative expression from within. It is the decisive rupture, and the fuel propelling the captivating flourishing in artistic production. The inalienable animus of the Arab spring are desire and necessity, essential constituents to the creative expression. In 2013, our rulers robbed our rights, governed us with injustice, denied our aspirations. In 2013, our artists -those not at the service of power- gave us poetic justice. It's a metaphor that cannot quench thirst, quell hunger, or repel despair, but it's an empowering representation of a becoming, the herald of a future for us. nearer than suspected. In 2013, an ever growing number of Arab artists has not only rescued me from surrendering to despair, but given me the strength to imagine that the future is mine, ours, and not to those who rule us and their policemen "out of order". Nearer than suspected... and with justice for all.