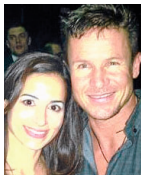


## Spotted



Speed-of-sound-breaking Austrian skydiver **Felix Baumgartner (left)** partying with his wife

at **People by Crystal**. Czech supermodel **Karolina Kurkova** riding on an abra around the Madinat. **German supermodel Heidi Klum** at **Atlantis The Palm**. British actress and model **Kelly Brook** dining at **Villa Romana** in the Habtoor Grand.

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## Hot seat

# Director Haifaa Al Mansour

Saudi Arabia's first female director is in Dubai to present *Wajda*, the first feature film to be shot in her country. *Rob Garratt* meets the 38-year-old director



is the first ever [feature] film shows how it's opening up. **You must have encountered a lot of criticism at home.** Saudi people are very traditional. I don't like to provoke for the sake of provoking, I like to open a dialogue. I never take anything personally. **Cinema is currently banned in Saudi Arabia. Do you think your film will ever be shown in your country?**



### *Wajda* seems to be an autobiographical story.

I grew up in a very small town in Saudi Arabia, so I come from a similar background [as the film's protagonist]. But my parents and family were very liberal so I never had that same situation [of being held back]. I went to a public school; all my friends had great potential, a story to tell, but [because of local traditions] they didn't have a chance. The film is about them more than about me. I wanted to tell that story.

### What were you hoping to achieve with this movie?

I wanted to open up Saudi. I don't try to teach a concept – I wanted to tell a story that people just enjoy, to create characters who don't give up. The situation is sometimes very difficult for women. Where do we go from there?

### We hear you had to direct covertly, by walkie-talkie.

It's very segregated [in Saudi Arabia] so it was very difficult for me to talk to the crew [in public]. So I had a van, and I would talk to them [remotely]. I had a great crew – it's important to have that trust.

### 'I don't like to provoke for the sake of provoking'

### What was the greatest challenge you faced?

There were lots of challenges when shooting. Saudi Arabia is very conservative; [people] don't like to see the camera. We had to keep a low profile. Yet still people would tell us to leave. But Saudi Arabia is opening up. The fact that this

It will be on TV. I'd love to see it on the big screen in Saudi. I think we can create cinemas, one for women and one for men. Mixing the genders is very frowned upon; in cinemas it is very easy to solve this problem. But cinemas are very polarising at the moment.

### Do you feel you've become a role model for Arab women?

I try to do things that I really enjoy. I try to make films that make me happy. I don't try to be a role model.

### How do you see the state of Arab cinema today?

I think there are a lot of things happening, there are some really interesting voices emerging. It's a form of art that crosses borders and humanises the world.

*Wajda* screens at the **Madinat Arena** on **Wednesday December 12 at 8pm**, and at **Vox, Mall of the Emirates** on **Saturday 15 at 3.45pm**. [www.dubaifilmfest.com](http://www.dubaifilmfest.com).

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