

HOLT McCALLANY

HOLLYWOOD WITH A CONSCIENCE

You've seen him in *Fight Club*, *CSI: Miami*, and *Gangster Squad*, but behind the tough guy exterior is a man with a very big heart. enigma's Lina Ashour caught up with actor Holt McCallany on his recent trip to Egypt and talked about activists, satirists, and Hollywood types.



McCallany in *Lights Out*

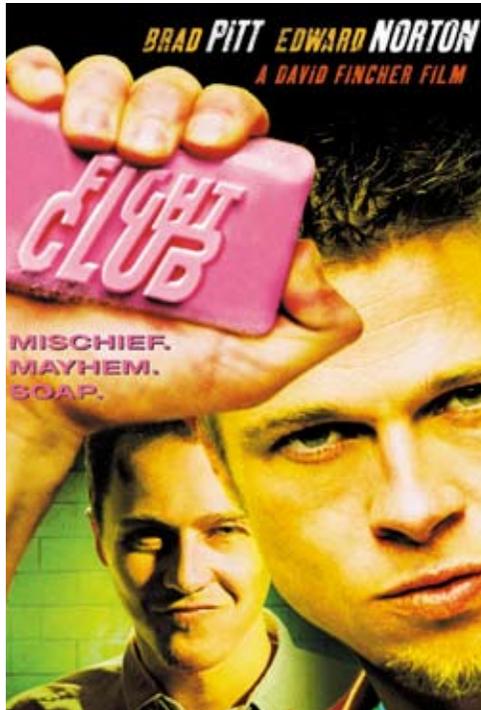
Just two hours before he was scheduled to make an appearance on Bassem Youssef's show, *Al Bernamey*, we sat for a quick chat with what could be the only American actor to ever visit Bulaq. McCallany was visiting Egypt for more than just the Pyramids and the Nile, he wanted to see the real Egypt and the people who make it what it is today.

What were your first impressions of Egypt?

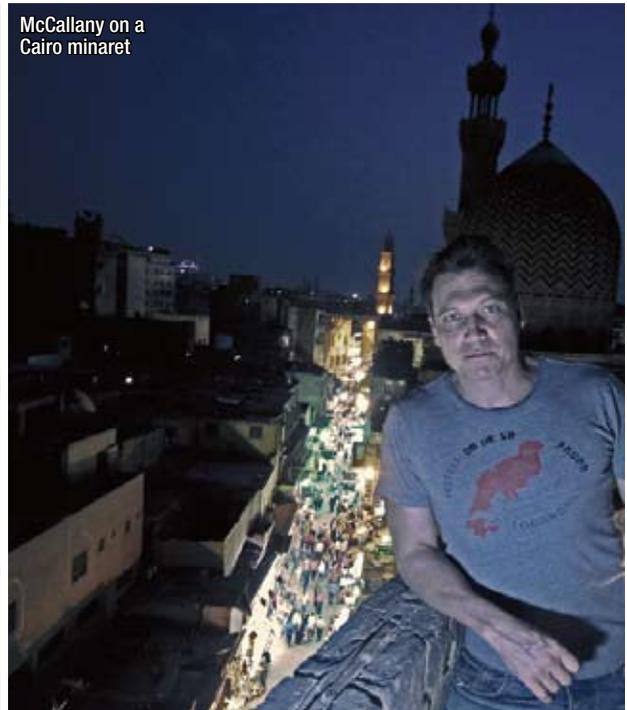
There's a perception in the United States that Cairo is a warzone because the only reports that we ever hear are tragedies. So when I made the decision to come to Cairo a lot of my friends said don't do it's too risky. But once you get here you find out that life does continue for the Egyptian people even though it is a very volatile time. I guess the thing that struck me the most is how friendly the people are, how kind they are to strangers and the warmth and hospitality of the Egyptian people.

How would you describe this trip and the experiences you've had?

I've done some amazing things and it started when I got off the plane. My first night here I met with a number of Egyptian activists and women who are involved in the anti-harassment movements. I was even made an honorary Tahrir Bodyguard! I was also fortunate enough to have a wonderful and very entertaining meeting with Bassem Youssef and to see his incredible television studio. I met all the people on his team and was really touched by their optimism, enthusiasm and energy. It's very clear that the young people working for him are having a great time and feel they're doing something very important. It was wonderful to see that.



McCallany on a Cairo minaret



We heard you also went to Bulaq, is this true?

We went to Bulaq to meet with the family of a young man who is coincidentally named Mohamed Morsi. He is not yet 17 and was sentenced to 15 years in prison for violating a curfew which, from my understanding, was largely ignored by everyone in Egypt. In the U.S., a 16 year old boy is considered a juvenile and cannot be sentenced to 15 years under any circumstances. There's a law preventing that because you're still a child at that age. I felt this is a tremendous injustice and I was so sorry for his family, particularly his mother. She is completely veiled and all I could see were her eyes, but I could see the tremendous sadness that she felt. That family has been through a lot

McCallany with Mohamed Morsi's family



of pain. Their son was moved to a prison that is several hours away from where they live and they don't have the resources to even go visit him. They haven't seen him in a year. From there we went to meet the father and mother of Jika, and that was an amazing experience. I was so impressed with Jika's father. He's such a powerful, charismatic, and dignified guy. And

to grow as an artist to make people see you as a mature actor. Keep learning more about the craft. I had to prove that there's more to me as an actor, that I'm more than just a tough guy.

So what advice would you give to young actors trying to break into the business?

I would say the important thing is to believe in

“When I made the decision to come to Cairo, a lot of my friends said don't do it, it's too risky”

you know, despite his sorrow at losing his son, he was so proud of him. His son is now an icon. A hero. Everybody knows his name. That was also an incredible experience.

Let's talk a bit about your movie career, were you worried about getting typecast when you started out?

You have to worry about it. The truth is, in Hollywood more than anywhere else in the world, anatomy is destiny. So if you're a big rough looking guy, you're going to play a lot of bad guys. It's just the way it is. You can fight it or you can embrace it. That's what it is. I think the best thing to do is to work, learn, and try

yourself and not worry about being 'in' with the 'in' crowd. If you're really good and you work hard, just the fact that you do what you do puts you in. It's not about showing up at the right parties or walking on the red carpet at the right premiere and shaking hands with certain people. It's about the work that you do and trying to become the best actor that you can be. That's what is going to pay off for you. Mohamed Ali used to say “I win my fights in the gym” when no one is watching at five in the morning. At night when the lights come up and the audience is watching, that's actually the fun part. It's the hard work before all that that's tougher. ■



McCallany in Jika's room



McCallany in Tahrir Square

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