

# Memory Box' Review: Reanimating a Painful Past

In this ambitious, intergenerational drama, a teenager in Montreal discovers her mother's diaries and photos from her adolescent years in a war-torn Lebanon.

By Devika Girish

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**Memory Box** Directed by Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige | Drama | 1h 42m

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There's a moment in "Memory Box" when Alex (Paloma Vauthier), a Lebanese teenager in Montreal, finds a series of old photos of her mother, Maia, walking through the streets of Beirut as a girl. Alex snaps pictures of them with her iPhone, then scrolls through them rapidly, so that the photos come to magical life, the still images becoming a movie.

Such beautiful, séance-like moments abound in Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's drama, about the new lives that memories — even traumatic ones — can take when passed down through generations. On a snowy Christmas

morning, Maia (Rim Turki) receives a box full of diaries, photos and tapes she had sent to a friend in Paris in the 1980s, documenting her adolescence in the shadow of the Lebanese Civil War.

Memory Box | Official UK Trailer



When Alex, defying her mother and grandmother's orders, rummages through the box, she finds an entire life that Maia has never shared with her.

The relationship between mother and daughter is rather thinly etched — there's a little too much going on in this ambitious, intergenerational film — but Hadjithomas and Joreige deftly use Maia's archive to weave together past and present. Her notebooks and cassettes are based on Hadjithomas's real-life correspondences and Joreige's photographs of Beirut. As Alex sifts through the items, the directors recreate the transporting workings of memory: Grainy photos turn into buoyant stop-motion animations that lead us into pop-scored flashback sequences.

But when Maia excitedly develops a roll of film from 25 years ago, the pictures show up blank. Memories, whether human or technological, have their limits. But in sharing them, as "Memory Box" movingly demonstrates, we can

discover them anew.

## **Memory Box**

Not rated. In English, French and Arabic, with subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 42 minutes. In theaters.