



Egypt-Saudi Film Connection

Youssef Sarhan

On Sunday, October 27th, CineGouna Theatre hosted a pivotal panel titled “Egypt and Saudi Arabia: Bridging Cinema’s Legacy with Ambitious New Frontiers.” Moderated by Gamal Guemel, a media investment expert and board member of Film Clinic, the discussion featured prominent industry figures, including Zeinab Abu Alsamh, General Manager at MBC Studios and CEO of MBC Academy and MBC Talent; Emad Eskandar, Head of the Red Sea Fund; Mohamed Waffa, General Manager at Egypt Rotana Studios; and Ahmed Badawy, Producer and Founder of Film Square. The panel reflected on the deep-rooted cinematic ties between Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the potential for collaboration. Ahmed Badawy remarked, “Egyptian films have

always embraced Arab audiences.” Zeinab Abu Alsamh noted that while Saudi audiences grew up watching Egyptian films, “today’s market seeks stories that highlight our local culture.” The conversation further explored how Saudi Arabia could enhance Egypt’s cinematic output, with Kattan stating, “The Saudi market has untapped talent that can strengthen the regional production cycle.”

Emad Eskandar emphasized the pivotal role of the Red Sea Fund, highlighting that their investment exceeds \$1 billion, with 30% dedicated to supporting Egyptian films, including 56 independent productions.

The panelists also addressed challenges in co-production opportunities. Mohamed Waffa

stated, “Our market is still evolving, and it’s difficult to predict which films will succeed.” Zeinab added that a lack of expertise and the industry’s nascent identity present barriers for new entrants. Kattan acknowledged the complexities of crafting narratives that resonate across cultures, urging Saudi filmmakers to pursue cross-border opportunities.

Looking ahead, Ahmed Badawy revealed plans to distribute over 20 Egyptian films in Saudi Arabia, including *El Set* by Marwan Hamed, *Dai* by Haytham Dabbour, and *Happy Birthday* by Mohamed Diab. Additionally, Mohamed Waffa announced that new editions of *The Blue Elephant* will be filmed in AIUla, Saudi Arabia. The session was attended by actress Mais Hamdan, Dr. Maha Abou Ouf, director Karim El-Shenawy, and writer Ahmed Mourad.

“The Saudi market has untapped talent that can strengthen the regional production cycle

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Today

★ Red Carpet



Join us at **7:00 PM** for the star-studded red carpet of *Everybody Loves Touda* at the **GFF Plaza!** Directed by Nabil Ayouch and co-written by Maryam Touzani, the film features a stellar performance by Nisrin Erradi, all of whom will be joining us in Gouna. After premiering at Cannes, it now competes in the GFF Feature Narrative Competition. Don't miss the screening that follows!

★ Upshot

Today at **2:30 PM** in **Sea Cinema 1**, don't miss the MENA premiere of Maha Haj's *Upshot*, a Locarno Pardino d'Oro winner featured in the GFF shorts competition. The showcase includes 16 films across four captivating programs. The story follows an aging couple who retreat to a remote farm to escape their devastating loss, only to be confronted by a stranger who reveals a shocking truth.



★ Meet the Filmmaker

BORJ ROUMI

Director: Moncef Dhouib
Cast: Eskander Dhouib, Shawki Khouja, Bilal Slim
Sea Cinema 3
1:15 pm

DEATH WITHOUT MERCY

Director: Waad Al-Kateab
Sea Cinema 2
2:00 pm

SHORT PROGRAM 1

EBB & FLOW

Director: Nay Tabbara

MY MOTHER IS A COW

Producer: Patricia Gomes

UPSHOT

Producer: Hanna Atallah
Sea Cinema 1
2:30 pm

OUT OF THE CAVE

Director: Christian Gandini
Producers: Valentina Lattuada, Pier Luigi Lattuada
Sea Cinema 3
3:45 pm

CRICKETS, IT'S YOUR TURN

Director: Olga Korotko
Cast: Inzhu Abeu
Sea Cinema 2
4:15 pm

WE ARE INSIDE

Director: Farah Kassem
Producer: Cynthia Choucair
Line Producer: Noor Jarraus
Sea Cinema 3
6:00 pm

DUST TO DUST

Director: Kósaí Sekine
Fashion Designer: Yuima Nakazato
Sea Cinema 2
6:45 pm

WHO DO I BELONG TO

Cast: Mohamed Grayaa, Sarra ben Hassen
Sea Cinema 2
9:00 pm

★ GFF Celebrates Moon Knight Crew

Sara Salah El-Din

Celebrating the global success of *Moon Knight*, the 7th El Gouna Film Festival hosted an engaging panel featuring crew members Mohamed Diab, Sarah Gohar, Reem El-Adl, and Ahmed Hafez, moderated by Mohamed Bassiouny.

Diab and Gohar discussed the challenges of collaborating as a married couple on such a significant project, with Diab emphasizing the importance of team alignment. El-Adl reflected on the differing experiences of costume design between Egypt and the U.S., while Hafez shared his initial nerves when pitching to Marvel and his learning curve with new editing tools.

Gohar highlighted Marvel's CEO's appreciation for her curated selection of Arabic music, fulfilling her goal of reaching global audiences. Following the success of *Moon Knight*, Diab and Gohar are now focused on an independent Hollywood project that highlights Arab culture and women's stories.



Timeless!

Although produced in 2001, *Snakes and Ladders*, directed by Tarek Alarian, remains a beloved classic and a hallmark of Egyptian cinema. Join us today at **3:00 PM** in the **CineGouna Theater** for a reunion with the cast and crew, who will discuss the film's enduring appeal.



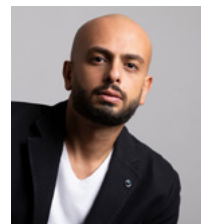
Almodóvar's Latest!

Don't miss the MENA premiere of Pedro Almodóvar's latest gem, *The Room Next Door*, at **9:30 PM** in **Sea Cinema 1**. Starring John Turturro, Julianne Moore, and Tilda Swinton, this film won both the Venice Golden Lion and the Brian Award. As part of the GFF Official Selection Out of Competition, it marks Almodóvar's first full-length feature film in English. The next screening will be on October 30th at **10:00 PM** in **AudiMax**.

Film Financing

Explore film financing and distribution today at the **CineGouna Forum** in the CineGouna Theater. Join us for two insightful sessions: "Finance Your Film" at **11:00 AM** and "Platforms: What Are They Seeking?" at **3:30 PM**. Each session will feature a panel of industry experts and practitioners sharing their insights and experiences. Don't miss this valuable opportunity!

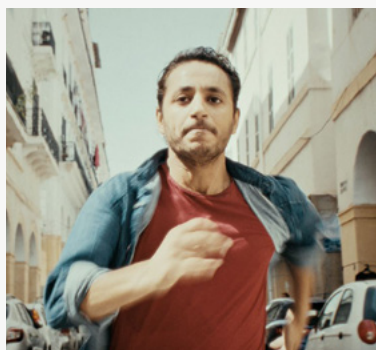
From Book to Screen



What comes to mind when you hear the names Ahmed Mourad, Mariam Naoum, and Tamer Habib? Surely, countless unforgettable films, TV series, novels, and short stories! Join us today at **1:00 PM** in the **CineGouna Theater**, where film critic Rami Abd El Razek will lead an open conversation with these renowned writers, exploring the powerful connection between film and literature.

Tomorrow

★ Red Carpet



Despite being his debut feature, Chakib Taleb Bendiab's *Algiers* has been selected as Algeria's official entry for the 2025 Oscars. The cast and crew of this investigative thriller will walk the red carpet at the **GFF Plaza** tomorrow at **9:30 PM**. Join us for the screening of this Rhode Island Grand Prize winner, which is competing for awards in the GFF Feature Narrative Competition.

★ Saudi Voices



Are you interested in exploring the evolving film scene in Saudi Arabia? Don't miss this opportunity to meet two prominent voices in the industry: Summer Shesha and Amani Al-Jameel, a talented mother-daughter filmmaking duo. Join us tomorrow at **11:00 AM** at the **CineGouna Theater** for a genuine and intimate discussion about their experiences, as well as the exciting developments in Saudi cinema.

★ Documentary Insights!



Explore the journeys of discovering stories, securing funding, and overcoming distribution challenges in documentary filmmaking. Join talented directors Hala Galal, Emmanuel Chicon, May Odeh, and Mohammed Siam tomorrow at **11:30 AM** in the **Forum Room, GFF Plaza**. Don't miss this valuable opportunity to engage with industry experts!

7 Editions Questions



Andrew Mohsen
Head of GFF
Programming

- We've curated a balanced program, featuring award-winning titles like Pedro Almodóvar's *The Room Next Door*, winner of the Golden Lion, alongside hidden gems like Jonathan Milles' *Ghost Trail*—a key highlight of **GFF's 7th** edition.
- **GFF's** success over seven editions stems from its ambition. Since its strong debut, the festival has continuously evolved and grown.
- **GFF** has greatly impacted the regional film industry by offering vital financial and artistic support and by providing a premier platform for showcasing outstanding Arab cinema.
- What I enjoy most about **GFF** is collaborating with an international team of diverse experts. Their knowledge and connections inspire confidence in our efforts.
- A memorable moment for me was meeting Intishal Al Timimi, the former **GFF** director and now an Advisory Board member, at the first edition. I witnessed how he took the time to care for nearly every guest, including me; his support was truly invaluable.
- In the coming seven editions, I look forward to seeing the filmmakers supported by this year's Short Film funding return with their feature films. Their presence at the festival will showcase the continued credibility of **GFF**.
- To the **GFF** audience: I hope you enjoy the lineup that the programming team spent nearly a year curating. Your feedback is invaluable to us.

Palestinian Shorts

Join us tomorrow at **5.00 PM** at **Sea Cinema 3** for the second edition of **Window on Palestine** at GFF, featuring impactful films from and about Palestine. Enjoy *A Short Film About Kids* by Ibrahim Handal, *Khaled and Nema* by Dahdal Sohail, *Maqluba* by Mike Elsherif, *Undr* by Kamal Aljafari, *The Key* by Rakan Mayasi, and a special screening of *The Dupes* by Tewfik Saleh. Don't miss it!



Unlocking Shorts!

Whether you're navigating the intricacies of short film production or eager to learn more about the behind-the-scenes process, our panel discussion, "Short Films: Unlocking the Future of Talent and Creativity," is perfect for you! Join us tomorrow at **1.00 PM** at the **CineGouna Theater**. Don't miss out!

El Gouna Stars

Join us tomorrow at **3.00 PM** in the **Forum Room, GFF Plaza**, to celebrate CineGouna Emerge: Rising Stars. This new award honors emerging Arab and North African filmmakers making a mark regionally, and internationally. Meet GFF's 7 rising talents and witness the future of Arab cinema!

Waad AlKateab, director of
Death Without Mercy:

Our Region Is Filled With Stories of Resilience

"The screening of *Death Without Mercy* at the El Gouna Film Festival is especially meaningful because of the region's resonance with the themes of my film. I hope its connection to the audience here will contribute to a larger conversation about human strength in the face of devastation."



“
My hope is that viewers let the intensity fuel their empathy and drive for change

“
Editing *Death Without Mercy* was an emotionally challenging process

Nahed Nasr

In an event so heavily covered by the media, what made you believe that a film was the best way to explore and share the depth of this tragedy?

While the earthquake was a headline for a brief moment, the human toll and emotional aftermath are far deeper than any news story can convey. *Death Without Mercy* provides a window into the lived experiences of survivors, like Fouad, Safa, and Fadi, offering a more intimate understanding of their pain, struggles, and resilience. The film allows for a prolonged engagement with these stories, giving audiences time to absorb the enormity of what happened—not just at the moment of the earthquake, but in the long, difficult journey afterward. I believe this depth can spark a more profound empathy and, hopefully, action.

What drew you to the individuals and families featured in your film, and did any survivors resist revisiting traumatic memories?

The choice to feature Fouad, Safa, and Fadi was a natural one. Their stories resonated with me deeply, not only because I knew them personally, but because their experiences represented the wider tragedy. What surprised me was how generously they opened up, despite the immense pain of revisiting those moments. They shared intimate memories, videos, and personal footage, not just to help me tell a story but to honor their loved ones and ensure that the world would remember them too. This collaboration became a way for them to process their grief and turn it into something meaningful.

The visuals in the film are incredibly varied. How did you manage to integrate footage from such diverse sources, and how long did it take to compile everything you needed?

We had an incredible range of footage—Instagram videos from Fouad, the first moments after the earthquake captured by Fadi, and deeply personal recordings, including Safa's goodbye message from under the rubble. We also integrated CCTV footage, news coverage, and personal videos from survivors. Merging these diverse elements to create a cohesive narrative was challenging, but it was essential to paint a full picture of the disaster. It took us about eight months to complete the editing, which was tight, but necessary to deliver the film on time.

How do personal recordings, like home footage, differ from traditional filmmaking in impact? Does personal footage uniquely capture memory?

Home and personal footage carry an undeniable weight, especially in a film like this. These clips, often captured before the tragedy, are raw, intimate, and deeply human. They show not just the loss but also the lives and memories that were shattered. Everyone has small, personal videos of loved ones, and it's these universal memories



that connect the audience to the tragedy in a profound way. Personal footage allows for a more intimate connection, making the loss feel closer and more relatable to viewers, wherever they are in the world.

Editing must have been delicate given the material's weight. What guided you in balancing different narratives?

Editing *Death Without Mercy* was an emotionally challenging process. The responsibility to honor those who perished and their families weighed heavily on me. I worked closely with my editor, Aggie, and we focused on giving dignity to those lost while balancing the emotional impact for viewers. It was crucial to let the story unfold naturally, while also ensuring that the film remained clear and didn't overwhelm the audience. At every step, I had to take a step back and think about how to make this experience real for viewers without detracting from the core message—an incredibly delicate balance.

How did you navigate your role as a filmmaker amidst the emotional weight of the survivors' grief?

There were many moments when I felt overwhelmed by the intensity of the material, but I knew that this was the reality I needed to convey. While it was impossible to mitigate the enormity of the tragedy, I focused on the personal, intimate stories to bring the audience closer to the survivors. I reminded myself constantly that my role as a filmmaker was to guide the audience through this difficult journey, not to shield them from the truth but to help them understand it in a way that inspires empathy and, hopefully, action.

Toxic: Warm Dreams in a Cold World

“
The filmmaker is keen to illustrate the cruel and cold atmosphere of village life

Saule Bliuvaite's debut film *Toxic* premiered at the Locarno International Film Festival, winning the Golden Leopard Award for Best Feature, this achievement follows her work directing short films and co-writing a narrative feature.

Toxic, screening in the Feature Narrative Competition at the 7th El Gouna Film Festival, follows two teenage girls in a Lithuanian village as they strive to become models and escape their surroundings, highlighting the Soviet architecture of their impoverished community.

The story begins with Marija (Vesta Matulyte), a poor tall girl who arrives in town with her grandmother. Her clothing and movements set her apart from



other girls, hinting at a traumatic past, though little is revealed. The only visible sign is a limp in her leg, which leads to bullying at school. The early scenes explore her friendship with Kristina (Ieva Rupeikaite), initially marked by conflict when Kristina steals Marija's jeans. The film captures their shared feelings of alienation in the village, culminating in a moment of intimacy, as if experimenting with their emotions. The main conflict of the story is when the two girls attempt to get accepted in a modeling contest. The two teenagers dreamed of traveling

after being recruited to countries like Japan and France. This was their only temptation to continue their extreme practices, which included not eating, or inserting a tapeworm into one of the girls' intestines to make her lose weight easier. The filmmaker is keen to illustrate the cruel and cold atmosphere of village life, asserting the loneliness the main characters suffer from. However, their only escape was hanging out with two slightly eccentric friends, a short boy and a tall boy. The filmmaker intends to create a minimalist drama of young dreamers in a dystopian community.



Hani Mustafa

★ Hend Sabry: Reflections



Roba Hesham

At the CineGouna Theater, acclaimed star and producer Hend Sabry shared insights from her 30-year career during a conversation with festival expert Chadi Zenedine, expressing her affection for El Gouna and its vibrant growth.

Reflecting on her beginnings, Hend recounted her debut in *Samt El Qosoor* at age 14. Although she initially dreamed of becoming an ambassador, acting unexpectedly became her true path. Self-taught and mentored by Mufida El-Talatly, she embraced the art wholeheartedly.

A turning point came when director

Inas El Degheidy invited her to join *Mozakerat Morahqa*, fulfilling Hend's dream of working in Egypt, which she viewed as an ideal environment for creativity. She acknowledged that her early career posed challenges to her ego. However, Tunisian cinema taught her the value of collaboration, enabling her to connect more deeply with audiences.

Among her notable works, she highlighted *Mowaten w Mokhber w Haramy*, a classic that still resonates today, and *Ahla El Awqat*, which marked a breakthrough with Arab audiences. She also fondly recalled her collaboration with the late Khaled Saleh in *Ba'ad El Fouraqa*.

Known for tackling bold themes, Hend has embraced projects like *Ayza Atgawez* and *Asmaa*. Looking ahead, she seeks stories that resonate personally, prioritizing meaningful storytelling.

Balancing her career with motherhood, Hend emphasized the importance of self-care and encouraged others to recharge amidst life's demands.

“3eish” Winner

At the 7th edition of the El Gouna Film Festival (GFF), the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Egypt, in collaboration with GFF and Zest, announced Mahmoud Assi as the winner of the “3eish” short film competition. This initiative invited filmmakers from Egypt and the Arab world to create short films focused on food security.

The competition drew inspiration from WFP's key programs in partnership with the Egyptian government, which address issues such as women and youth empowerment, rural development, school feeding, and nutrition for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The esteemed judging panel included Egyptian producer, director, and GFF Artistic Director Marianne Khoury, acclaimed scriptwriter Tamer Habib, and producer Muhammad Taymour, who emphasized the importance of highlighting food security issues through cinema.

Jean-Pierre de Margerie, WFP Egypt Representative, underscored the role of film in raising awareness about food challenges. The event also featured screenings that illustrated food's impact on Egyptian cinema, attended by notable figures including GFF's Executive Director, Amr Mansi.

