



Everybody “Loved” Touda

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Nabil Ayouch is renowned for his significant contributions to Moroccan and Arab cinema

Last night, the GFF Plaza hosted the MENA premiere red carpet of *Everybody Loves Touda*, featuring award-winning Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch, co-writer and director Maryam Touzani, actress Nisrin Erradi, and producer Amine Benjelloun. Following its premiere at Cannes, the film is now competing in the GFF Feature Narrative Competition, with the red carpet event leading into its screening. *Everybody Loves Touda* tells the story of Touda, who dreams of becoming a Sheikha—a traditional Moroccan performer. She sings in the bars of

her provincial town under watchful eyes, hoping to escape to Casablanca in pursuit of fame and a better future for her son.

Nabil Ayouch is renowned for his significant contributions to Moroccan and Arab cinema. A member of both the Academy of Motion Pictures and the César Academy, as well as a co-founder of the Arab Film Academy, he champions regional cinema. Ayouch’s career began with *Les Pierres Bleues du Désert* (1992), which featured actor Jamel Debbouze. His films *Mektoub* (1997) and *Ali Zaoua: Prince of the Streets* (2000) represented Morocco

at the Oscars, while *Horses of God* (2012) garnered multiple awards, including recognition at Cannes. In 2023, he produced *The Blue Caftan* by Maryam Touzani, which was shortlisted for the Oscars—a historic milestone for Moroccan cinema. Through his company, Ali n’ Productions, Ayouch actively supports emerging talent, further enriching the cinematic landscape. The second screening of *Everybody Loves Touda* will be on October 30th, at 2:00 PM in Sea Cinema 3.

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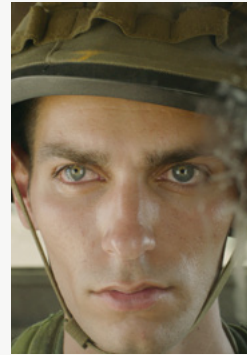
Red Carpet



In *Algiers*, an investigative thriller by Chakib Taleb Bendiab, the abduction of a young girl stirs tension in the city. Psychiatrist Dounia and Inspector Sami dig into haunting past secrets. Algeria's 2025 Oscar entry, *Algiers* will have its MENA premiere tonight at **9:30 PM**, with cast and crew gracing the **GFF Plaza** red carpet. The film is competing in the GFF Feature Narrative competition.

The Watchman

Following his exploration of political landscapes in Lebanon and Sudan with *The Digger* (2013), *The Disquiet* (2015), and *The Dam* (2022), Lebanese director Ali Cherri completes his tetralogy with *The Watchman* (2024). This short film, set in Lourujina, northern Cyprus, delves into themes of waiting and disappointment as Sergeant Bulut encounters mysterious lights and ghostly soldiers. As part of the GFF's 7th short program, *The Watchman* will screen today at **2:00 PM** in **Sea Cinema 1**.



Meet the Filmmaker

SHORT PROGRAM 1

EBB & FLOW

Director:
Nay Tabbara

MY MOTHER IS A COW

Producer:
Patricia Gomes

UPSHOT

Producer:
Hanna Atallah

Sea Cinema 2
12:00pm

SHORT PROGRAM 2

A PROMISE TO THE SEA

Director:
Hend Sohail
Producer:
Nourhan Yasser
Cast:
Nabil Botros

A CHAIR FOR HER

Director:
Ahmed Ibrahim
DOP:
Tarek Hefny
Cast:
Mozhan Navabi

MERMAIDS

Director:
Sarah Malléon
Sea Cinema 1
2:00pm

MY MEMORY IS FULL OF GHOSTS

Director:
Anas Zawahri
Sea Cinema 2
2:15pm

ON FALLING

Director:
Laura Carreira
Sea Cinema 3
2:30pm

TATA

Directors:
Lina Vdovii
Radu Ciorniciuc
Sea Cinema 2
6:15pm

STRANGER

Director:
Zhengfan Yang
Cast:
Jing Jin
Shengze Zhu
Sea Cinema 1
6:30pm

THE BRINK OF DREAMS

Directors:
Nada Riyadh
Ayman El Amir
Sea Cinema 2
8:30pm

Challenging Narratives

Aya El-Haddad

In the GFF Hub, a profound conversation unfolded about how drama shapes, reflects, and challenges societal norms. Moderated by Mina El Naggar, founder of Medfest Egypt, the panel featured notable figures from Egyptian cinema, including actress Nelly Karim, actor Youssef El Sherif, author Sherif Abdel Messih, UNICEF child protection specialist Salma El Fawal, and director Karim El Shennawy. They explored how their work brings social issues to the forefront, sparking awareness and dialogue.

Nelly emphasized her commitment to emotional depth in storytelling, highlighting *Segn El Nessa* and *Taht El Saytara* as examples that encourage empathy around issues like addiction. Youssef discussed the societal impact of storytelling, stating, "As actors, we carry the responsibility to both entertain and educate." Karim added that while drama reflects reality, creators should collaborate with specialists to ensure accuracy, asserting, "We reflect reality, but we're not claiming to have all the answers."



The Key

In *The Key* by Rakan Mayasi, an Israeli family's fragile balance unravels as a mysterious key turns in their apartment door each evening. Part of the GFF's "Window on Palestine" short film program, the film will screen today at **5:00 PM** in **Sea Cinema 3**.

Two Journeys



Hala Galal, an acclaimed Egyptian filmmaker with 18 directed films and over 15 produced, co-founded SEMAT Production and Distribution and currently serves as president of the Ismailia International Film Festival. Her films have been showcased worldwide, earning numerous awards. Today, she will participate in the "The Two Journeys of Documentary" panel at **11:30 AM** in the **Forum Room, GFF Plaza**, alongside filmmakers and experts May Odeh, Mohammed Siam, Jo Christoph Mühlberger, and Emmanuel Chicon, moderated by film critic Ola Salwa.

A Mother-Daughter Conversation

Amani Al-Jameel, a Saudi artist, transitioned to acting and screenwriting after retirement. She appeared in *Basma* (2024) and *Crashing Eid* (2023), she also wrote the upcoming short film *Ghomra*. Amani shares a special bond with her daughter, actress and screenwriter Summer Shesha. Meet them today at **11:00 AM** at the **CineGouna Theater** for an intimate discussion on Saudi cinema.

Rising Stars

Directors Dessil Mekhtigian (Egypt), Faris Alrajoub (Jordan), Leila Basma (Lebanon), Mohammed Almughanni (Palestine), and Noel and Michelle Keserwany (Lebanon), along with producer Rasha Hosny (Egypt), are selected for the GFF Rising Stars Program. Join us today at **3:00 PM** in the **Forum Room** at the **GFF Plaza**, to celebrate "CineGouna Emerge: Rising Stars," honoring emerging Arab and North African filmmakers making their mark, both regionally and internationally.

Tomorrow

★ Red Carpet

Wearing a wedding dress is a pivotal moment for a bride, often as important as the wedding itself. But what if she struggles to find her dream dress? Join us for the world premiere of *The Inevitable Journey to Find a Wedding Dress* tomorrow at **7:00 PM** in the **GFF Plaza**, featuring a red carpet event with the cast and crew, followed by the film's screening.



★ Nutshell

Join us tomorrow at **4:30 PM** in the **AudiMax Cinema** for a special screening of *Nutshell* (1995) by acclaimed director Khairy Beshara. This landmark film holds a cherished place in Egyptian cinema and features a song that resonates with generations. The screening will be followed by a Q&A with the cast and crew.



★ Joana & Khalil

Join us tomorrow at **11:00 AM** in the **CineGouna Theater** for a conversation with acclaimed filmmakers Joana Hadji Thomas and Khalil Joreige. They explore the fabrication of images and the rewriting of history across documentary and fiction. Their award-winning films are featured in prestigious collections. The discussion will be moderated by renowned film critic, John Michel Frodon.

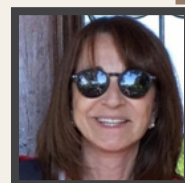


Film Restoration

Restored films play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, allowing audiences to experience timeless stories in their original glory. Join us for the panel discussion, "Film Restoration: A Longer Life," tomorrow at **11:00 AM** in the **Forum Room**. Our speakers will include Mathilde Rouxel; director Khairy Beshara;

Marianne Khaoury, GFF Artistic Director; Tamer Saeid, Artistic Director of Cimatheque; Béatrice de Pastre, Head of CNC Collection of French Film Archives; and Nuria Sanz Gallego, UNESCO Regional Director. The panel will be moderated by Ahmed Nabil, Film Director and Programmer.

7 Editions Questions



Nicole Guillemet
GFF Programmer

- After over twenty years of programming, the highlight is always the same: The thrill of discovering new talent, new work by masters like Almodóvar, or a powerful documentary that opens our eyes. Programming is about sharing these discoveries with audiences and other filmmakers.
- The secret behind **GFF's** success over 7 editions is the dedication and "esprit de corps" of the team, the passion each team member brings to our mission, and our commitment to the highest quality in programming, presentation, and production.
- **GFF's** most important contribution is elevating the world-wide visibility of talented young filmmakers from Egypt and the MENA region, some of whom went on to present their finished films at major festivals. It does this through the programs of the **CineGouna** that directly support young filmmakers.
- What I enjoy most is to be part of an ongoing journey with a team and leadership that keeps taking on new challenges, a team that dares to dream.
- Too many memorable moments to share – work hard and laugh heartily.
- For the next seven editions, I hope **GFF** maintains its mission, grows steadily and sustainably, and continues to push its boundaries.
- To the **GFF** audience: Welcome! Go and watch films you know you would never be able to watch in your local theater. Experiment, take risks and have fun.



Nabil Ayouch, director of
Everybody Loves Touda

I Have Always Admired Strong Women

You paint the portrait of a woman of today, determined, bold, passionate, and illiterate all at the same time. Did she exist?

Touda is the successor of the heroines in rebellion against all established powers, the Sheikhs. Their voice was their weapon and their style of singing, the Aita, their ammunition. That's who Touda is. She wants to transcend borders and prohibitions; she fights all forms of contemporary dominations. The film is driven by this spirit of rebellion.

Your film is disconcerting, like walking a tightrope while portraying a young woman who sings. How did you maintain this delicate balance?

Sheikhs have long intrigued me, and I wanted them to be central to one of my films. Growing up with a strong mother, I've always admired powerful women and aimed to give them a voice. Many Sheikhs have shared their paradoxes and heartbreaks with me, revealing how they carve out their own space while facing domination from a patriarchal society that seeks to commodify them. I'm interested in their resistance to this modern world, as the Aita represents a powerful song of defiance.

How did you approach portraying the complex male figures in the film, and why depict Touda's deaf-mute son as belonging to the world of silence?

The nightlife world isn't all black and white; there are men who protect and love these women. For Touda, her son Yassine is everything. An old violinist supports her dream, her father stands by her despite disgrace, and her brother's rejection. Touda finds strength in Yassine, singing to express his dreams. Though he can't hear her, he feels her presence. Their bond transcends words, and all she does is for him—especially in her relentless search for a school to give him the education she never had.

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I accept and love my part of femininity, It has also been nourished by the gaze Maryam has of these women

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Nisrin Erradi turned down other offers to fully dedicate herself to the role of Touda. Even now, she feels deeply connected to the character



Does Nisrin Erradi, the actress who plays Touda have star status in Morocco?

Nisrin is a well-known actress in Morocco, first discovered in Maryam Touzani's film *Adam*, for which she received a César Revelations nomination. She is a powerful performer, fiery and intense, with a strong presence on stage. For this film, she trained with professional Sheikhs for a year and a half, mastering singing, rhythm, percussion, dance, and their mannerisms. Despite the film being shot in stages, she turned down other offers to fully dedicate herself to the role of Touda. Even now, she feels deeply connected to the character.

Your shots are magnificent and bright. You are like a painter who looks at his country and its contemporaries carefully.

Working with Virginie Surdej, a remarkable director of photography, and Adil Ayoub, the camera operator, has been inspiring. We carefully crafted each shot to reflect Touda's journey, balancing beauty—her son and singing—and ugliness—money, degrading men, and the night. The film thrives on these contrasts and paradoxes, blending text and image.



Is the film similar to the screenplay you wrote with your wife, Maryam Touzani, also a director?

Of course... yes, and no! What is really wonderful about making a film is to let yourself be surprised by the characters and especially by the actors. The story hasn't changed but I allowed myself to navigate on several paths, always talking about it with Maryam. Working with her is a constant joy. Her gaze, full of decency and tenderness, is precious to me. It is so special. Maryam is an exceptional human being who continually challenges me to explore and question what I truly want to express. I accept and love my part of femininity, it has also been nourished by the gaze Maryam has of these women.

How long did the shooting take?

A year and a half, over four seasons. I shot in several stages. We started in October 2022 and finished in April 2023. I wanted to film the changes in nature, the changing colors, the evolving landscapes, I wanted that to be perceptible on the screen without being too present. I wanted this journey through the seasons, through the country, to also be the expression of Touda's inner journey.

How do you view the status of women in Moroccan society?

Moroccan society is divided between progressives who seek to advance laws, review the family code, and enhance the role of women—a commission has just submitted a report to the king on this matter—and conservatives who reject any form of progress and the emancipation of women. Their resistance manifests in various forms, including violent expressions. It is a struggle.

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The image quality and formats emphasize the scenes' archival nature



Caught by the Tides The Melancholic Treasures of Time

Jia Zhangke's latest film is a powerful blend of a woman's personal journey and the broader story of contemporary China. *Caught by the Tides* masterfully captures the world across time, using both fiction and documentary to depict China's profound transformation. Central to this narrative is actress Zhao Tao, whose roles, starting with *Platform* (2000), reflect both personal and national change.

In the early 21st century, Jia, along with cinematographer Yu Lik-wai and Zhao,

filmed extensively with small digital cameras or 16mm/35mm cameras during improvised shoots. They traveled to Shanxi and rural areas, capturing spontaneous, unscripted moments as Zhao walked through these locations, allowing fiction to emerge. During the 2020 pandemic, Jia revisited this archive, revealing a narrative of love and abandonment involving Zhao and actor Li Zhubin.

Caught by the Tides, composed of footage shot over twenty years without the aim of making a feature

film, captures the intertwined fates of a Chinese woman, played by Zhao Tao, and China itself. It's a poignant tale where the woman's silences reveal inner strength amid the era's violence and male mediocrity. The film centers on three key locations: Datong, the mining town from *Unknown Pleasures*; Fengjie, site of the ecological disaster in *Still Life*; and Zhuhai, the heart of globalized China, before returning to Datong. The varying image quality and formats highlight the archival nature of the scenes, with the actors' aging adding authenticity. No prior knowledge of the film's creation is needed to appreciate its narrative and echoes.

Jia Zhangke has long embraced the voices, songs, and dances of popular culture across generations. These moments punctuate the film, underscored by a Chinese rocker's opening line: "Even the wildest fire cannot make everything disappear." The film reveals how capitalist acceleration has profoundly altered society—often catastrophically, but not entirely.

Caught by the Tides presents a nuanced human story that balances collective experience with individual uniqueness, demonstrating how fiction can serve as a rich archive of human experience.

*A version of this article originally appeared in French in *Salte*.



Jean-Michel Frodon



From Book to Screen

Youssef Sarhan

The panel discussion "From Book to Screen: Bridging Literature and Cinema" at the GFF CineGouna hub offered insights into adapting literature for film. Moderated by Ramy Abdelrazek, it featured writers Mariam Naoum, Ahmed Mourad, and Tamer Habib, who discussed balancing respect for original narratives with creative reinterpretation.

Mourad highlighted the complexities of adaptation, mentioning misinterpretations by both screenwriters and audiences. Naoum reflected on skepticism regarding her abilities, especially after *Zat*, and emphasized the benefits of long-form storytelling.



Habib discussed modernizing classic novels, citing *La Totfe' Al-Shams* as a successful example.

They addressed the lengthy adaptation processes that can take years, and the emotional challenges for authors. With notable attendees like Marwan Hamed and Maha Abo Ouf, the discussion resonated deeply within the filmmaking community.

Snake & Ladders

Aya ElHaddad

Celebrating 25 years since the release of *Snake and Ladders* by Tarek El Eryan, a reunion took place yesterday at the GFF Plaza Hub with the film's cast and crew. The panel, moderated by Andrew Mohsen, GFF Head of Programming, featured director Tarek El Eryan, lead actress Hala Shiha, screenwriter Mohamed Hefzy, and composer Hisham Nazih, who discussed the film's enduring legacy.

El Eryan noted that the film's lasting appeal stems from the "realism of romance" they aimed to portray. Hala Shiha praised El Eryan's directorial approach, stating, "It was the best team I've worked with," emphasizing the authentic dynamic among the cast.

Hefzy reflected on the initial struggles at the box office but remained optimistic that the film would eventually gain a following—and it did. Nazih described his transformative musical collaboration, blending styles to enhance the film's emotional depth. Ultimately, *Snake and Ladders* remains a timeless reflection on love and youth.

