



El Gouna Rising Stars

Youssef Sarhan

At the CineGouna Forum Room in the GFF Plaza, directors Dessil Mekhtigian (Egypt), Faris Alrajoob (Jordan), Leila Basma (Lebanon), Mohammed Almughanni (Palestine), and the Lebanese duo Noel and Michelle Keserwany, along with producer Rasha Hosny (Egypt), celebrated the launch of the inaugural GFF Rising Stars Program. Titled "CineGouna Emerge: Rising Stars," the event honored emerging filmmakers from the Arab world and North Africa who are making significant strides both regionally and internationally.

Moderated by Melanie Goodfellow, the panel discussion "New Talents: Lights on Rising Stars" explored the filmmakers' journeys into cinema. Mohammed shared, "The first film I ever watched was *Aboud Ala El Hedoud*. Cinema moved me emotionally. I would wake up at 5 AM before school just to watch my favorite cartoons." Michelle added, "We started making political videos on our mobile phones, compelled by the events unfolding around us in the region."

Rasha Hosny discussed the challenges of financing films in the Arab region, stating, "Finding funding sources is almost miraculous.

We often have to look beyond our borders for support." Faris echoed her sentiment, expressing frustration with Western financing approaches. He stated, "The true power lies within our region. We must build a robust infrastructure for the film industry." He emphasized that filmmakers should focus on creating compelling works that provide genuine value to the market.

The GFF's dedication to nurturing and promoting new talent in the film industry is vital, fostering an environment where these rising stars can thrive and contribute to the future of Arab cinema.

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Editor in Chief
Mohamed Kandil

Editorial Manager
Nahed Nasr

Art Director
Ahmed Atef Megahed

Editor & Proof Reader
Neda Hegazi

Graphic Designer Manager
Ahmed Mokhtar

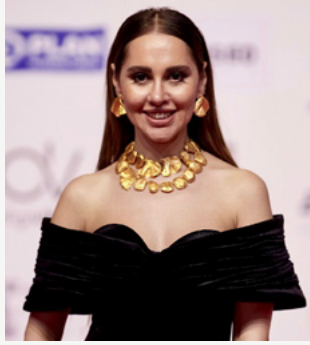
Graphic Designer
Waleed Gamal

Photographer
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Archive
Mahmoud
Abdelmegied

Today

Red Carpet



Yasmin Raeis embraces life's dramatic turns, a journey mirrored in her rise in film. Her breakout role in Mohamed Khan's *Factory Girl* garnered her four Best Actress awards, including accolades from the Dubai International and Malmo Arab Film Festivals. Raeis now stars in Jaylan Auf's *The Inevitable Journey to Find a Wedding Dress*. Join us today at **7:00 PM** in **GFF Plaza** for the cast and crew red carpet appearance at the world premiere.

Meet Joana & Khalil

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



Meet the Filmmaker

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 2
12:00pm

SHORT PROGRAM 3

DAWN EVERYDAY

Director:
Amir Youssef
Cast:
Selim Mostafa
DOP:
Amir Youssef

DANCING IN THE CORNER

Director:
Jan Bujnowski

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT REMAIN SILENT

Producer:
Bostjan Virc

AN ORANGE FROM JAFFA

Director:
Mohammed Almughanni
Cast:
Kamel El Basha
Sea Cinema 1
2:00pm

EVERYBODY LOVES TOUDA

Director:
Nabil Ayouch
Writer:
Maryam Touzani
Cast:
Nisrin Eradi
Sea Cinema 3
2:00pm

CILAMA

Director:
Hady Zaccak
Sea Cinema 2
4:00pm

Nutshell

Director:
Khairy Beshara
AudiMax
4:30

GIRLS WILL BE GIRLS

Cast:
Preeti Panigrahi
Kesav Binoy Kiron
Sea Cinema 1
4:30pm

THE MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORKING CLASS INTO FOREIGNERS

Director:
Samir
Sea Cinema 3
6:30pm

A NEW KIND OF WILDERNESS

Protagonists:
Nik Payne
Falk Payne
Sea Cinema 2
6:45pm

DISORDER

Directors:
Lucien Bourjeily
Bane Fakh
Areej Mahmoud
Wissam Charaf
Producers:
Pierre Mouzannar
Bechara Mouzannar
Sea Cinema 2
9:15pm

Two Businesses

How can the corporate world contribute to art and culture? This question will take center stage at today's discussion panel, "The Two Businesses", held at **3:00 PM** in the **CineGouna Theater**. Moderated by Amr Mansi, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the El Gouna Film Festival, the session will feature an engaging lineup of leaders, including Mohamed Amer, CEO of El Gouna; Mohamed Aboughaly, CEO of Abou Ghaly Motors; and Yasser Shaker, CEO of Orange Egypt.



Mathilde Rouxel on Film Restoration

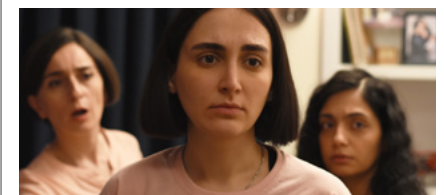


Mathilde Rouxel, a professor at New Sorbonne University, is an associate researcher at IREMAM-CNRS and serves as the artistic director of the Franco-Arab Film Festival Noisy-le-Sec. In 2019, she founded the Jocelyne Saab Association to preserve Lebanese film heritage and organizes restoration workshops across Arab countries. Join her today at **11:00 AM** in the **Forum Room** for the panel titled "Film Restoration: A Longer Life," moderated by Ahmed Nabil. The panel will feature experts including director Khairy Beshara and GFF Artistic Director Marianne Khaoury.

Arab Critics' Award Winner

Last night at the 7th El Gouna Film Festival, *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*, directed by Mohammad Rasoulof, won the Arab Critics' Award for Best European Film. Presented by the European Film Promotion (EFP) in collaboration with the Arab Cinema Center (ACC), this award celebrates outstanding European cinema from an Arab perspective. The sixth edition of the award featured 22 European films, all recognized at international festivals, and evaluated by 89 critics from 15 Arabic-speaking countries via the Festival Scoop platform.

Established in 2019 by EFP and ACC, the Arab Critics' Awards aim to promote diversity in regional film. *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* will screen today at **9:15 PM** in the **GFF Plaza**, with a second showing on October 31st at **11:00 AM** in **AudiMax**.



Norah Elkhateeb, producer of *Dawn Every Day*: I Am Driven by Persistence and Innovation

"I respect **GFF**'s foundation; in just seven years, it's supported filmmakers in funding, creating, and showcasing their work, standing out among larger festivals. Screening our film here is an honor and a proud milestone, especially among this year's strong lineup of short films."

Nahed Nasr

How did you meet the director of *Dawn Every Day*, and what attracted you to collaborate with him?

We were introduced through a friend when Amir was looking for an Egyptian producer. His poetic and magical script was impossible to turn down. I was captivated by how Amir portrayed the small world of children against the

larger political circumstances they couldn't change or understand.

How did your diverse experience in various formats and genres influence your approach to producing this film?

I have 15 years of experience in commercials and music videos, along with a Master's from London Film School's International Film Business program. This is our fourth short film through Cats Films. My background in commercials has enhanced my skills in the visual craft and in understanding industry dynamics, which was valuable for this project.

What challenges did you encounter during production?



Casting was definitely the most challenging aspect. Working with kids requires a lot of patience, and finding the right cast was even harder. Amir wanted the children to be spontaneous and authentic, so we brought them to the office every day, allowing them to hang out and engage in activities to create genuine friendships before filming began.

What key challenges do women filmmakers face in the industry, and how have you navigated them in your career?

Women filmmakers in Egypt face challenges like limited funding, fewer leadership roles, and societal expectations. These obstacles have sparked resilience and creativity, with many women succeeding by sharing stories that challenge norms. In my career, I've focused on quality and built a strong network. Persistence and innovation have driven me, helping to create meaningful films that reshape the industry.

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Working with kids requires a lot of patience, and finding the right cast was even harder



Amir Youssef, director of *Dawn Every Day*: Dedicated to My Father

"**GFF** is a wonderful platform, and I'm grateful to premiere my film here. Set in the 1950s, it captures a shared nostalgia from classic films and stories of older generations. I'm excited to share this with the Egyptian audience."

Nahed Nasr

How did you capture the complexity of a pivotal moment in Egypt's history through the innocent eyes of an 8-year-old?

I focused on seeing the world through his eyes, centering on simple human connections. The story is about

the boy's pure friendship with his neighbor. While external factors exist, children don't dwell on them. In this narrative, our focus is on the ease of human connection despite the complexities of any given time.

How personal is this project for you, and in what ways does it allow you to revisit your own past?

This film is dedicated to my father and is deeply personal, it is inspired by his childhood. Through months of conversations, I relived his memories of growing up in the 50s. While we often know our parents as adults, I discovered a lot about him as a child, which made me reflect on my own childhood memories.

How did you approach casting and guide Selim Mostafa and Cleopatra in portraying such emotional roles?

I discovered Selim through auditions and was blown away by his talent and ability to navigate complex scenes. I met Cleopatra through a friend shortly before production, and her presence was perfect for the role. While working

with child actors presents challenges due to their complex characters, gaining their trust and allowing them to enjoy the experience helped everything to naturally fall into place.

What challenges did you encounter while filming in an Egyptian vintage house?

The spacious house had authentic architecture that suited the story. The main challenge was its busy, noisy setting in Abasseya, while Heliopolis in the 1950s was quiet. Sound designer Moatza Al Qammari helped us eliminate unrealistic sounds in post-production.

From your perspective, why do you believe it's important to revisit and engage with this particular era in today's world?

This film showcases an innocent friendship amid a complicated time. Today, it's clear that external events often divide us, a cyclical aspect of history. Empathy and connection define our humanity and can break this cycle, bringing us together.

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External events often divide us, empathy and connection can break this cycle



Anas Zawahri, director of
My Memory Is Full of Ghosts:

I Rediscovered Myself While Rediscovering Homs

“Having my film selected for the El Gouna Film Festival is a pivotal career moment, offering a valuable opportunity to connect with influential figures in regional cinema.”

“ I am now a completely different person from who I was before making the film

“ I carried the same memories of this city as the characters did

Nahed Nasr

What draws you to connect people to their cities and places in your films?

My films are portrait pieces that capture the soul of harsh, worn-out cities shaped by conflict. Despite their suffering, these cities embrace marginalized groups who choose survival. I resonate with their struggles, feeling that when I discuss their pain, I'm reflecting my own.

How did the idea for the film begin, and how did it evolve during the creative process?

The project began three years ago when young people in Homs established the “Harmoni Cultural Forum” as a safe space to foster peace through art. The film emerged from collaboration with forum volunteers to highlight our stories and concerns, serving as a healing process for the characters and others by providing a platform for self-expression.

Was it challenging to settle on the characters who appear in the film? How did you choose them? Were you led by the story or by the characters themselves?

What guided me in making the film was documenting the city of Homs after the war—the city where I was born and lived all my life before leaving. My main concern was how to capture the story of this city that had experienced war, death, and displacement. The characters in the film are just a small part of the city's story.



How did you develop the creative approach of weaving these separate yet connected stories? Was this decision made in editing or during filming?

The project began in 2019 by creating a safe space for youth in Homs, exemplified by the Harmoni Cultural Forum, which promotes peace through art. The personal stories in the film aid in healing post-war trauma for the people of Homs. Sharing these stories with forum volunteers sparked the idea for the film. As a local, I visualized it beforehand, which shaped my narrative vision. Creative decisions were made in the preparation phase, while filming and editing focused on executing our plan.

Your film's cinematography emphasizes the connection between characters and their environments, using still images for deeper exploration. What was your vision behind these choices?

The style I adopted in making the film was a result of not having the necessary tools to make the film, so I relied on a single camera and a tripod during the shoot. The use of still shots and long takes was the best way to express the state of the city—miserable and slow-moving. Cinema itself began with a stationary camera and long takes that mimic the movement of people within the frame, capturing the essence of that period, like in *Workers Leaving the Factory*.

What challenges did you face during the process?

The shooting took about six months in total. The biggest challenge was obtaining the necessary permits to film in the streets of the city, and on

the other hand, securing financial support and finding the right partners.

How did you manage the psychological burden of addressing the stories of those affected by their city's transformation?

From the beginning, I didn't position myself as a filmmaker trying to make a film about this psychological burden. Instead, I became a close friend to everyone, sharing many conversations and confiding in each other for days. Especially since I was born and raised in Homs, I carried the same memories of the city as they did, which helped me a lot during the filmmaking process to overcome this weight alongside them.

What did you discover during your journey of rediscovering Homs?

Over the years of war, I became hardened, focused solely on survival, and accustomed to pain. However, during the filmmaking journey, I rediscovered myself and transformed into a different person. Living closely with the characters and my city deepened my awareness of our tragedy and reignited lost emotions, especially with recent events in Palestine. I also recognized the incredible strength of ordinary people and their desire to live and persevere, which surpasses death and pain.

What's your next step?

My next step is to continue my filmmaking journey by preparing two projects—one documentary and one narrative. The El Gouna Film Festival offers a valuable opportunity to network and collaborate with cinema professionals to pitch these projects and advance their completion.

Summer Shesha & Amani Al Jameel: The Rise of Saudi Cinema



Bashayer AlBaker

In the Forum Room at the GFF Hub, an engaging panel titled “In Conversation with Summer Shesha & Amani Al Jameel” explored the evolution of Saudi cinema and the transformative role of women. Moderated by Zahra Rami, Director of Drama Production at NRJ Egypt, the session highlighted the impact of family support and cultural influences on their artistic journeys.

Zahra began by reflecting on her own path, crediting her father’s encouragement to explore global cultures, which fueled her passion for storytelling. Summer Shesha shared her journey, describing her initial hesitation before fully embracing the arts, inspired by her mother’s unwavering support. She emphasized the growth of Saudi cinema and the new opportunities for women, calling art a journey of exploration and authenticity.

Amani Al Jameel discussed her beginnings as a playwright and the increasing creative freedom for Saudi women, highlighting the importance of government support. Both artists spoke about their experiences with Netflix, noting the rewards and challenges of bringing Saudi stories to a global audience. Shesha concluded, “The world of Saudi cinema is just beginning—and it’s filled with potential.”

Short Film: Unlocking the Future

Bashayer AlBaker

A vibrant discussion on the significance of short films unfolded during the session titled “Short Film: Unlocking the Future; Not Shorts on Talents and Creativity,” emphasizing their role in nurturing talent and creativity. Moderated by Aya Dowara, the session featured insights from director Sameh Alaa, Creative Projects Manager Safi El Din Mahmoud, Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival programmer Camille Varenne, and distributor Simone Bardoni.

Safi shared his journey, highlighting the challenges of production and the rewarding experience of showcasing his work at the Dubai Festival, noting

that short film directors often juggle multiple roles. Sameh discussed the advantages of shorter budgets and shooting timelines, sharing an anecdote about a unique film shot from a balcony, which exemplified the creative freedom inherent in short films.

Camille revealed the rigorous selection process for short films, stressing the importance of strong narratives, while Simone praised the evolving landscape of distribution and the vital role of film festivals. The session reinforced the idea that short films are essential to cinema, offering diverse narratives that resonate globally and nurturing future creativity.

Challenges in Documentary Filmmaking

Aya El-Haddad

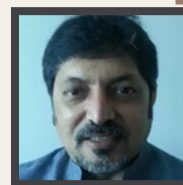
On day six of the Gouna Film Festival, the panel “The Two Journeys of Documentary” explored the artistry and challenges of documentary filmmaking. Filmmakers Mohamed Sallam, Hala Galal, Palestinian producer May Odeh, Jo Christophe Muhlberger from EFP Germany, and Emmanuel Chicon from Visions du Réel

joined moderator and film critic Ola Salwa for an engaging discussion.

Mohamed Sallam likened the process to solving a puzzle, guided by each character’s narrative, often requiring years to complete. Hala Galal emphasized the importance of the filmmaker’s personal voice, which distinguishes documentaries from news. “It’s about expressing my perspective, not societal expectations,” she noted. May Odeh discussed how documentaries evolve over time, highlighting the need for trust in both the story and its characters.



7 Editions Questions



Raman Chawla
GFF Programmer

- The most exciting highlight of the programming department is the genuine love for cinema that everyone shares. Our passion for films and their stories makes everything we do feel meaningful and exciting.
- The secret behind **GFF**’s success over seven editions is our belief that we have the best job in the world. We’re living our passion daily, and that joy and sense of purpose fuel our growth.
- **GFF** has opened doors for regional filmmakers, showcasing their stories globally. It’s incredible to see films from the region celebrated internationally, and we’re proud to be part of that journey.
- For me, **GFF** is like a family, and Egypt feels like a home away from home. The sense of community here, both within the team and with the filmmakers, is what makes it so special.
- A standout moment was how our team united when we faced challenges just before **GFF** 2023. Everyone pulled together, reminding me that it’s not just about films; it’s about the people.
- For the next 7 editions, I hope that **GFF** keeps growing and gets better than itself with every edition, but more importantly, I hope we stay true to our spirit—celebrating films and filmmakers with the same passion and heart.
- To the **GFF** audience: Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support and enthusiasm make a difference, and we look forward to sharing more unforgettable moments with you in the years ahead.



