



## Love Comes Alive at 8th GFF

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A new talent has arrived, and the GFF witnessed it first

Last night, Festival Plaza shimmered with energy as the world premiere of *Love Imagined* opened to cheers and camera flashes. The film marks the dazzling debut of director **Sarah Rozik** and screened within the **Out of Competition Program** of the **8th GFF**.

**Sarah Rozik** walked the red carpet alongside **Omar Rozik, Mayan El-Sayed, Ahmed El-Saadany, Farida Ragab**, and the film's creative team, turning the night into a vibrant celebration of youth, cinema, and first-time brilliance.

*Love Imagined* explores how love and loss intertwine in the lives of three characters – Noah, a college student; Warda, his heartbroken girlfriend; and Youssef, their introverted professor grieving a personal tragedy. With rhythm, emotion, and authenticity, Rozik brings a fresh voice to Egyptian cinema.

Born in Egypt, **Sarah Rozik** first earned a music diploma from the Higher Conservatoire Institute in 2009 before pursuing filmmaking at the Cinema Institute, where she received a BA in directing in 2013, and

a postgraduate diploma in 2015.

She went on to direct several short films, most notably *The Other Pair* (2013), which won more than **30 awards** at festivals around the globe.

Alongside her directing work, **Rozik** has built extensive experience as an assistant director on films, television series, and ads, collaborating with prominent directors. *Love Imagined* marks her debut feature as both the writer and director.

A new talent has arrived, and the **GFF** witnessed it first.

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# Today

## Red Carpet



At 9:30 PM, Festival Plaza comes alive for the world premiere of *The Gentlemen* by Karim El Shenawy, screening as an Official Selection – Out of Competition at the 8th GFF.

The red carpet will feature the film's cast and crew – including Mohamed Mamdouh, Ashraf Abdel Baky, Mohamed Shahin, Hanady Mehanna, and Taha Desouky – joined by festival stars, filmmakers, and industry guests celebrating this gripping world premiere.

## Meet the Filmmaker

### HALFAOUINE

**Director:** Férid Boughedir  
**Sea Cinema 3**  
11:30 AM

### BETTER GO MAD IN THE WILD

**Director:** Miro Remo  
**Composer:** Adam Matej  
**Sea Cinema 2**  
2:15 PM

### TWO PROSECUTORS

**Actor:** Oleksandr Kuznetsov  
**Producer:** Maria Choustova  
**Sea Cinema 1**  
3:30 PM

### TALES OF THE WOUNDED LAND

**Director:** Abbas Fahdel  
**Producer:** Nour Ballouk  
**Actress:** Camellia Ibrahim  
**Sea Cinema 2**  
4:15 PM

### ANIMALS IN WAR

**Producer:** Roman Klymush  
**Sea Cinema 2**  
7:00 PM

### WE BELIEVE YOU

**Director:** Arnaud Dufey  
**Producer:** Arnaud Ponthiere  
**Sea Cinema 3**  
7:45 PM

### SHORT PROGRAM 1

#### OF BURNING MEMORIES & WOUNDS

**Director:** Suha Soliman  
**Producer:** Salma Sharnouby  
**Cast:** Gehad Hossam  
Menha El Batrawi

#### CLOSE YOUR EYES HIND

**Director:** Amir Zaza  
**Actress:** Sundus Al-Bashah  
**Audimax**  
11:00 AM

### SHORT PROGRAM 2

#### A BEAR REMEMBERS

**Directors:** Hannah Palumbo  
Linden Feng

#### AMBUSH

**Director:** Yassmina Karajah  
**Cast:** Joanna Arida  
Yazan Eid

#### Sereen Khass

**Producer:** Rula Nasser

#### HYENA

**Cinematographer:** Hu Yinghai

#### CITIZEN-INMATE

**Producer:** Sara Sagai

#### S THE WOLF

**Director:** Sameh Alaa  
**Producer:** Ehab Rehan  
**Sea Cinema 1**  
1:00 PM

## CineGouna Forum Today

Today at the GFF, the CineGouna Forum witnesses a lineup of bold conversations shaping the future of cinema. The day kicks off at 11:00 AM with *Meet the Rising Stars* in the Forum Room, showcasing the new wave of Arab and African filmmakers, while the CineGouna Theater hosts *Film Criticism at FIPRESCI 100*, celebrating a century of global film critique.



Later, the spotlight shifts to *Arab Producers Changing the Scene*, where leading producers discuss how they're reshaping the industry. Over at the Island Stage, *El-Podcasters with YouTube* dives into the influence of digital creators, followed by *Empowering Adolescents On-Screen and Beyond*, exploring youth representation in film. A full day of fresh voices, sharp ideas, and cinematic evolution at the heart of El Gouna.

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## Life After Siham

At 7:00 PM, Festival Plaza welcomes to the red carpet Life After Siham's Arab World premiere, directed by Namir Abdel Messeeh, screening in the Feature Documentary Competition of the 8th GFF.

A CineGouna Platform alumnus, Messeeh returns with a film that delicately weaves grief, memory, and creation into one.

## Youssra: 50 Years of Light & Grace

At the CineGouna Theater, the GFF celebrated half a century of Youssra's artistry in a warm and emotional In Conversation session moderated by Strategic Partner Manager at Meta Mohamed Omar, who shared how the tribute began as a simple idea during Ramadan and became a celebration of a woman who has shaped Arab cinema for five decades.

With her signature elegance and humor, Youssra reflected on the weight of fame: "I've known joy, pain, and fear, but the audience has a right to me. I can't show them my sadness, even when life is heavy. Still, I can't give the world my entire private life, especially today, when everything is judged and exaggerated."

She also spoke of changing media landscapes, from respectful press to the chaos of modern social media, and of her exhibition at the GFF: "It felt like watching the movie of my life. Without people's love, nothing means anything." Friends and stars, like Elham



Shaheen and Hala Sedky, also shared heartfelt tributes, describing Youssra as a beacon of strength, generosity, and pure love. Youssra left the audience with one final truth: "Reaching success is hard – staying there is harder. Keep your heart clean, be grateful, forgive, and keep growing."

## Sherif Arafa: Cinema Is an Act of Love, Not Strategy



**Youssef Sarhan**

**Yesterday at the CineGouna Theater**, the **GFF** hosted a heartfelt **In Conversation** with **Sherif Arafa**, offering a rare window into the mind of one of Egypt's most influential filmmakers. Moderated by writer and actor **Abbas Abo El-Hassan** and introduced by screenwriter and Head of the CineGouna Forum **Mariam Naoum**, the session traced **Arafa's** journey from political and social comedies to landmark films like *El Gezira* before shifting into more intimate, character-driven cinema.

**Arafa** spoke candidly about his philosophy – that cinema is not built

on long-term planning, but instinct, emotion, and truth. “You don’t make films to be famous,” he said; “You make films because you love them.” Visual storytelling, he added, is the soul of cinema – like music, it should move people without explanation.

Reflecting on Egyptian cinema’s legacy, he praised filmmakers like **Youssef Chahine**, **Naguib El Rihani**, and **Atef Salem**, emphasizing that the power of a film lies not in its theme, but in the humanity of its characters. To young filmmakers, his advice was clear: Talent is not enough; discipline, culture, and curiosity are what shape a true artist.



## The Green Frame: Cinema Talks Sustainability

**Farah El Zayatii**

**Yesterday at the Island Stage**, the **GFF** hosted a panel titled *‘The Green Frame: Crafting a Sustainable Future One Scene at a Time,’* which covered how cinema, business, and finance can work together to build a greener future. Moderated by producer Doaa Saber, the panel gathered three unique voices: **Yassir Max Corpataux** (Nespresso), **Tawfik Laham** (Middle East Glass), and **Mohammed Azhar Rauf** (International Finance Corporation - IFC).

**Corpataux** described sustainability as a story – something to be felt, not just explained – drawing a poetic link between filmmaking and coffee farming, both of which depend on nurturing their roots and respecting the “soil of creation.” **Laham** emphasized that sustainability is no



longer a side initiative but a long-term business strategy; **Middle East Glass's** shift from plastic to recyclable glass is proof that environmental responsibility and profit can align.

From the financial side, **Rauf** reaffirmed the **IFC's** commitment to the **Paris Agreement**, noting that over \$1bn have been invested in creative industries to that end; and there's more on the way, because without finance, sustainability cannot scale.

# 8 Editions Questions



**Hayat Aljowaily**  
Program Director,  
CineGouna Emerge

• **If GFF were a person, what kind of friend would they be?**

The kind of friend that you don't see for a while, but the second you're reunited, you feel like no time has passed!

• **What tradition from past editions feels most rooted in GFF now?**

The Hangout – though it's only in its second year, it's already a cornerstone of the GFF experience.

• **And what's the boldest new beginning this year?**

For CineGouna Emerge, it is our Take Two Track, where Emerge alumni return as peer mentors.

• **The highlight of your department this year in one line?**

Expanding the regional film ecosystem by bringing over 150 young and emerging filmmakers, professionals, journalists, and photographers to be part of the festival.

• **Biggest challenge you've faced this year & how you beat it?**

Going through over 1,000 impressive applications for our programs was tough – selecting just 10% wasn't easy, but we're proud of the ones we chose and excited to welcome the rest in future editions.

• **In eight years, how has GFF changed film culture in Egypt and the region?**

The GFF has become a home for the region's best films – from projects that began in our funding program to those that premiered in our lineup.

• **How would you like audiences to remember the 8th edition?**

As the edition where Cinema for Humanity became more than a slogan; it became the ethos through which we approach everything.

• **Name one thing you hold most dear in the 8th edition (a film, or a corner, or a guest, etc) and why?**

El Gouna Library, where we host our CineGouna Emerge Meet the Experts Sessions – it's always magical to see our talents engaging with top industry experts from Egypt and around the world.

Namir Abdel Messeeh, Director  
of *Life After Siham*:

# I Am a Passenger Between Generations

*"The GFF has become a key ally for Arab filmmakers and producers across development, production, and distribution. My film, a French-Arab coproduction, was supported during development and post-production by three Arab festivals: Marrakech, Cairo, and El Gouna. The GFF's support came at a critical time, when financing in France was particularly difficult, and it proved invaluable. Another great strength of the festival is the people you meet there – it's where I met Baho from Redstar Films, who became a co-producer after a chance conversation at the airport."*

**Nahed Nasr**

**Your film shows a distinct, layered narrative style. Was that instinctive or a deliberate shift in your cinematic approach?**

I try to make films that reflect who I am. As a teenager, I struggled a lot with feeling different. Cinema gave me the opportunity to create stories that reflect how I feel, think, and see the world. As I evolve, so does my work, but I always try to be true to myself. What I used to see as flaws in how I function, I've learned to accept, and I believe that's what gives my films their style.

**Why did you choose to mirror Youssef Chahine's cinema in *Life After Siham*? What did his vision of exile and love bring to your story?**

I am both Egyptian and French, and I love both countries – they shaped who I am. France taught me to think critically and be demanding; Egypt gave me warmth, adaptability, and humanity. Sometimes, I feel the tension between these two heritages, but I try to build bridges instead of divisions. What I admire most about **Chahine**, beyond his brilliance and pioneering subjectivity, is how he embodied that connection between



East and West. That continues to inspire me deeply.

**Editing seems central to your film's vitality. What guided your approach to it?**

Editing is my favorite part of filmmaking. Writing and shooting are about gathering materials, but the real storytelling begins in the editing room. I spent almost a year working with my editor. We kept asking ourselves, "What is the film really about?" and dug through the material to find its hidden core. We were guided by two instincts: Searching for meaning and staying connected to my childlike side. Editing lets you experiment freely, follow emotions over logic, and that's where many of the film's most essential ideas emerged.

**From 2005 to 2025, you've created three films that explore your roots, your family, and the shared history between Egypt and France. What has this journey taught you, and where do you see it leading next?**



In 2004, I began my first personal documentary as a son, filming my retired father. My most recent film ends with me, now a divorced father, filming my own son. Perhaps the next step will be my children filming me when I become an old, retired father.

The future belongs to them. I feel like a passenger between generations.

My parents are Egyptian, my children are French, and I stand in between, ensuring the past is not lost while leaving space for new voices to build on it.

I still have more films to make and more to learn, from both my ancestors and my children. But for now, I need time to find the next spark.

**What were the biggest challenges you faced in making *Life After Siham*, and how did you overcome them?**

The entire film was a challenge. Making something so personal requires distance and time, and the writing evolved alongside me – it felt endless.

But finding funding for a constantly evolving project was difficult. When I accepted we wouldn't have the full budget, I asked myself, "If I could only film one scene, which would it be?" That question changed everything. We decided to shoot just that scene, and once we began editing, it revealed a new direction. In the end, we didn't need the film I had originally imagined – the story found its own shape.

**After *El Gouna*, where do you see *Life After Siham* traveling next, and what are your hopes for its journey?**

The film will screen at several Arab and international festivals and be released in France next January. My hope is for it to reach wide audiences across the Arab World, because our region has incredible storytellers with unique voices. I'm tired of seeing the same narrative codes repeated everywhere – cinema still has vast, unexplored territories.

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“ Hair became a way to express childhood, love, loss, and even the social pressures of masculinity



## Sameh Alaa, Director of *S The Wolf*: Winning the Palme d'Or Freed Me

**Nahed Nasr**

**Why did you choose minimal black-and-white animation for such a deeply personal and visually rich story?**

I felt the story would be told best in a black-and-white animated format. The lines themselves felt like strands of hair slowly disappearing through the film, and that fragility fit the story better than live action.

***S The Wolf* is very different from your earlier films, yet it continues your focus on human vulnerability. Why does this theme matter to you?**

I don't think much about themes; I think about stories that touch me

personally. When something moves me, I want to tell it. I don't plan ahead – I just express what I feel in the moment.

**Hair carries themes of childhood, love, loss, and masculinity. Did you use it playfully to question manhood, or as a universal symbol?**

What interests me most is the hidden side of my characters – their psychology; the things they cannot say directly. Hair became a way to express childhood, love, loss, and even the social pressures of masculinity, but I approached it from within the characters rather than as commentary on society.

**Do you see *S The Wolf* as a bridge or testing ground for your first feature film?**

I don't see *S The Wolf* as connected to my feature. I feel sorry when filmmakers treat shorts as teasers for features. A short is a complete piece of art. If I can say something in 15 minutes, why spend years stretching it into 90? Each project is its own world, and I want to surprise both myself and my audience.

**Your award-winning shorts, including the Palme d'Or winner *I Am Afraid to Forget Your Face*, traveled widely. How did they shape your approach to *S The Wolf*?**

Winning the Palme d'Or is the best thing that happened to me as a filmmaker, and it came early in my career. I hope other filmmakers can experience that feeling, because nothing compares to it. It freed me. I no longer feel I need to prove anything. I enjoy making films in different formats – shorts, animation, and now even a video game. I'm not rushing toward a feature just for the sake of it; I'm enjoying the process of telling stories.



“ I don't think much about themes; I think about stories that touch me personally”



## Frames of Resilience

**Bishoy Emad**

**Yesterday, in the Forum Room,** a candid panel titled '*Not Fiction Feature: Struggle of Docs, Shorts & Animation*' confronted the realities facing filmmakers working outside commercial feature films. Moderated by **Sona Karapoghsayan**, the session brought together **Soleil Gharbieh** (AFAC), filmmakers **Abdallah Dnewar** and **Hala Galal**, and programmer **Celine Roustan**.

The panelists agreed on one core truth – these formats are often rich in creativity but poor in resources. **Gharbieh** highlighted that funding remains scarce and centralized

in only a few Arab countries.

**Galal** stressed that shorts are vital “proofs of concept,” yet still struggle to secure sustained support. And **Roustan** pointed to distribution as the biggest hurdle, saying “Sometimes finding an audience is harder than making the film.”

Co-productions with Europe were described as a double-edged sword – offering financing but sometimes at the cost of creative autonomy. Streaming platforms, once hailed as saviors, were critiqued for burying short films in endless catalogues. Yet, there was hope. The panelists emphasized collaboration,



community, and conviction. As **Galal** said, “Independent cinema is driven by belief, not profit.” Their message was clear: Even in the smallest formats, stories endure.

