



## From Istanbul to El Gouna — With Kaan

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I'm glad fame came slowly. When it arrives too fast, you don't have time to understand who you are

**Menna Elnakib**

**Yesterday** at the **CineGouna Theater**, Turkish actor and WFF Ambassador **Kaan Urgancıoğlu** sat down for an intimate conversation moderated by Egyptian presenter **Sherif Nour Eldin** – but it was **Kaan's** quiet honesty that took center stage.

Speaking about his roots, he said: “My mother's family came from Syria and settled in Izmir. I grew up between cultures – maybe that's why I've always felt close to Arab audiences.” When asked whether he'd act in Arabic, he didn't hesitate: “I'd love to. It's a challenge, but one I'd embrace.”

Acting, he admitted, was never the plan. “I actually studied brokerage. Acting was supposed to be temporary – until I had to choose if this was truly my life.” That choice led him to the **Stella Adler Studio** in New York – an experience he described as liberating: “No one expected anything from me there. I only had one responsibility – to discover who I was.”

But for **Kaan**, everything still begins in **Turkiye**. “My acting roots are in Istanbul. That city taught me to look beyond the lines; to search for the silence beneath the words.”

On fame, he was disarmingly candid: “I'm glad it came slowly. When fame arrives too fast, you don't have time to understand who you are.”

And about his unforgettable role in *Kara Sevda*, he revealed, “I never played Emir as a villain. He loved someone more than himself – that was my key into the character.”

Still and composed, **Kaan** left the audience with a thought that lingered long after the lights dimmed: “Success matters only when you know where you stand – and where you want to go next.”

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# Today

## Red Carpet



At 8:00 PM tonight, Festival Plaza hosts the red carpet for Mohamed Rashad's debut fiction feature *The Settlement*, competing in the **Feature Narrative Competition** of the eighth GFF. Supported by **CineGouna Funding 2024**, the film held its world premiere at the **Berlinale**. Walking the carpet are **Mohamed Rashad, Hala Lotfy, Mahmoud Lotfi**, and members of the cast and crew, joined by stars, filmmakers, and festival guests.

## Meet the Filmmaker

### A WORLD NOT OURS

**Director:**  
Mahdi Fleifel  
**Sea Cinema 3**  
12:30 PM



### LIFE AFTER SIHAM

**Producer:**  
Camille Laemle  
**Director:**  
Nimir Abdel Messeeh  
**Audimax**  
2:00 PM



### LOVE IMAGINED

**Cast & Crew**  
**Audimax**  
6:30 PM

### SHORT PROGRAM 3



### BREAKING OUT OF ALI AND MAHER'S BASE

**Director:**  
Abanoub Youssef  
**Cast:**  
Nassar Gerges  
Beshoy Hana  
**Producer:**  
Yasine Tbsi



### LOYNES

**Director:**  
Dorian Jespers

### WATER GIRL

**Director:**  
Sandra Desmazieres

### THE DEVIL AND THE BICYCLE

**Director:**  
Sharon Hakim  
**Audimax**  
11:00 AM

### SHORT PROGRAM 4



### SAMRA'S DOLLHOUSE

**Director:**  
Maissa Lihedheb  
**Cast:**  
Mariam Alferjani  
Mansour Kllila  
**Producer:**  
Katherine Li Johnson

### RESERVOIR

**Director:**  
Deokgeun Kim

### CASA CHICA

**Director:**  
Lau Charles

### MY BROTHER, MY BROTHER

**Director:**  
Abdelrahman Dnewar  
**Producers:**  
Abdallah Dnewar  
Hesham Marold  
Karim Marold  
**Sea Cinema 1**  
1:00 PM

## AI in Creation

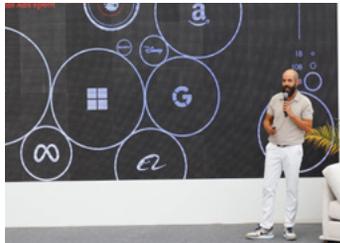
### Youssef Sarhan

**Yesterday**, a panel titled *'The Creation Process Powered by AI'* explored how AI is reshaping art, media, and storytelling.

**Ali Cheikhali** from Google MENA highlighted **GenAI**

as a tool that amplifies human creativity, not replaces it, revealing that **Google's Gemini 2.5 Flash** generated **50bn** images in two months. He also introduced **SynthID**, which watermarks AI-generated content to ensure authenticity.

**Moustafa Khater** and **Farida Ragab** from CubitCode discussed the booming creator economy – now worth \$125bn – with social media turning content creators into global brands. "AI is fast," **Cheikhali** said, "but human vision remains at the core."



## Tonight: CineGouna's Awards Ceremony

Tonight, **CineGouna** wraps up with the announcement of **this year's funding winners**. From over **290 submissions**, **12 projects were selected**, with **two main awards** – **Best Project in Development** and **Best Film in Post-Production** – each receiving a **CineGouna certificate** and **\$15,000**. Additional prizes will be presented in collaboration with regional and international partners.

## Power of Collaboration



### Sara Azer

**Yesterday**, a panel titled *'Collaborations and New Partnerships in the Media Industry'* brought industry voices together to discuss how cooperation – not competition – is becoming the backbone of modern media. The panel featured CEO of DigiSay **Ahmed Abbas**, Co-Founder of ASAP & Partner at Pro Productions **Amin El Masry**, and Deputy Executive Director of GFF **Sara Bissada**, and was moderated by producer and TV host **Lana El Jundi**. **Abbas** noted that partnerships between platforms and production

companies are now essential to survive in a fast-changing market dominated by AI, streaming, and digital consumption. "You can't sustain production or reach global audiences without strong networks," he said.

**Bissada** explained that for the **GFF**, partnerships go beyond sponsorships: "They're about shared value – bringing expertise, visibility, and impact to the industry."

**El Masry** then stressed that Egypt must open further to co-productions and make international shoots easier if it wants to compete.

## From Local Voices to Global Screens

**Rowan Ashraf Amer**

At **CineGouna Theater**, a panel on *The Art and Impact of Casting for Foreign Roles* explored why Arab and Egyptian actors are still underrepresented in global productions – and how that can change.

The speakers included President of the Global Chapter of the Casting Society of America (CSA) **Cassandra Han**, CSA Secretary **Claudia Blunt**,



and Egyptian actor-writer-producer **Rosaline Elbay**, moderated by actress **Gehad Hossam El Din**.

Starting off, **Han** noted the global shift after *Parasite* and *Squid Game*, saying, “The world is now more open to foreign-language talent – my goal is to make Egyptian actors visible. It’s about fairness and access.”

**Blunt** then discussed how digital platforms and self-tapes removed geographic barriers. “What matters now is training, professionalism, and how actors present themselves,” she asserted.

Moving on, **Elbay** spoke about stereotypes. “When I say I’m Egyptian, many still imagine Cleopatra, often played by non-Egyptians. Visibility helps us reshape that narrative,” she reflected.



## Arab Stories, Global Screens

**Farah Alaa Sadek**

**Yesterday**, a panel titled ‘*From Originals to Formats: Bringing Arab Productions to the International Scene*’ explored how local stories can successfully travel worldwide. Moderated by **Ziad Srouji**, speakers included screenwriter and Head of CineGouna Funding **Mariam Naoum**, O3 Medya’s **Irmak Yazim**, and BlueBee Productions’ **Mohamed Mashish**.

**Naoum** stressed that every adaptation must “preserve the soul of the original while reshaping it for



a new culture.” **Yazim** added that authenticity and emotional truth are essential when adapting Syrian, Iraqi, or Saudi stories. Finally, **Mashish** highlighted that formats only work when they fit local audiences.



## When Business Strategy Meets Cinematic Vision

**Youssef Sarhan**

A panel titled ‘*Corporate Storycraft: When Business Strategy Meets Cinematic Vision*’ explored how storytelling drives both cinema and brands. Moderated by Executive Director and Co-Founder of the GFF **Amr Mansi**, the panel featured C-suite executives Mohamed Abou Ghaly (Abou Ghaly Motors), Karim Khedr (PepsiCo Egypt), and Hisham Mahran (Orange Egypt).

Each speaker began with their brand’s story: “From **Mobinil** to **Orange**, our connection with people has never changed,” started **Mahran**. Then, **Khedr** highlighted **PepsiCo’s 75-year presence** in Egyptian life, noting Chippy as its only fully local global brand. And **Abou Ghaly** spoke of transforming his company into a mobility solutions provider to “be part of people’s daily lives.”

# 8 Editions Questions



**Racha Najdi**  
CineGouna Market  
Manager

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

Like a younger brother – no matter what he does, I love him, want to protect and support him, and feel proud watching him grow.

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

The joy – whether attending, watching, or working – has always stayed the same. That spirit feels most rooted in the GFF.

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

All beginnings are bold, aren’t they?

• **Highlight of your department this year in one line?**

I’m really excited about all the new sections, especially bringing the Cinematography Corner showcases directly to the audience.

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

Balancing motherhood and work was the hardest part, but the festival was incredibly supportive – and that made all the difference.

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

Bringing all this corporate attention to movie making and the industry is a huge gap that the GFF is filling

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

As the edition that opened them up to new and fruitful networking possibilities that push their projects to completion.

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

I’m very excited for the Salon du Marche and Cinematography Corner; they bring fresh energy, new people, and different industry dynamics. Cinema isn’t just directors and actors, and these spaces finally reflect that.

Mohamed Rashad, Director of  
*The Settlement*:

# Industrial Spaces Shaped My Visual Memory

Nahed Nasr

**How was *The Settlement* received internationally – and what do you expect from Egyptian audiences?**

The *Settlement* premiered in Berlin as part of a new official competition for first features, where it was the only Arab film selected. I was very anxious during the first screening, even though my team and friends told me it was received well. I only relaxed after the second screening, when I walked into the Q&A and saw how the hall was almost full.

Overall, the feedback has been positive – the film got good press, built a solid reputation, and most audience reactions have been encouraging, even if not everyone agreed on it. The biggest surprise was winning the Audience Award from the Youth Jury at a festival in Milan. I always thought the film was too dark and heavy for younger viewers, so the fact that they embraced it genuinely moved me.

**Nearly 10 years passed between *Little Eagles* and *The Settlement*. What were the main challenges in making the new film?**

There were around nine years between *Little Eagles* and *The Settlement*. In between, I spent about four years trying to develop another film that had to be put on pause. During those years, I also worked as a producer on two documentaries – *El Shoghla*, a feature by Ramez Youssef, and *Behind a Transparent Concrete Wall*, a short by Amr Bayoumi.

Work on *The Settlement* itself took five years. The biggest challenge, without question, was funding. As for the crew, that part was clear to me from the beginning. I knew exactly who I wanted to collaborate with,



especially the department heads. Casting, however, took more time and effort.

**Your film is based on a true story – what drew you to the world of *The Settlement*? And how did your documentary experience help?**

I've always had a fascination with industrial spaces – their structure, atmosphere, and how visually cinematic they are. I'm not sure where this obsession comes from – maybe because my father worked in a factory and I used to visit him there, or because I grew up near cotton storage and loading warehouses.

These places shaped my visual memory, but I never found a cinematic entry point – until I met someone who briefly told me the real story that inspired the film: His father was a construction worker who died on the job, and instead of facing legal consequences, the company offered him a job. That was the seed of *The Settlement*.



My background in documentary – both making *Little Eagles* and producing documentaries – definitely influenced my approach. For example, many of the people who appear in the film are real workers, not actors. That documentary sensibility helped me stay truthful to the world, its textures, and the people who inhabit it.

**How challenging was it to work with first-time actors, including a child? How did you prepare them?**

Casting was honestly one of the toughest parts. I had specific faces in my mind; faces I wanted to see on screen, ones that felt unique and real. I eventually found almost everyone, except for the child who would play Maro.

I had seen around 100 kids, but none of them felt right for the role – until one of the actors, Sayed Osama (who plays Mezo), told me about a boy from his neighborhood in Matariya. We set up a meeting, and on the first day, I wasn't completely sure. But the next day, I just knew – this kid was Maro.

With all the actors, my approach was to build a history for each character. I would sit with every actor and talk about who their character is, what their relationships are with others, and how they fit into the story. Sometimes I asked them to help build that backstory themselves. Specifically for Hossam and Maro, I left them together for long periods so they could influence each other naturally.

**After GFF, where do you see the film heading next? And what's your upcoming project?**

I hope *The Settlement* continues its journey through festivals before we eventually release it in cinemas. As for what's next, I'm currently working as a producer with Hala Lotfy on Nadine Salib's debut narrative feature *The Distant Land*.

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“ I thought the film was too dark and heavy for younger viewers; the fact that they embraced it genuinely moved me

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My hope is that the film resonates not as a ‘foreign story,’ but as a shared experience



‘Abbas Fahdel, Director of *Tales of the Wounded Land*:

## Films Can’t Stop War, But Resist Erasure

*“The GFF has become a vital meeting point in the region – a space where Arab cinema meets the world, and where genuine exchanges happen. Presenting **Tales of the Wounded Land** here feels like bringing the film home. It was born in South Lebanon, but it speaks to the entire region, touching the shared wounds and silences that connect us.”*

**Nahed Nasr**

**As the Pardo winner for Best Direction at Locarno, how did European audiences and critics respond, and what do you expect from Arab viewers?**

In Locarno, in addition to the Pardo for Best Direction, the film also received the Independent Critics’ Prize. The audiences were struck by the mix of intimacy and politics in the film. Critics spoke of how the film weaves memory, landscape, and testimony into a unique cinematic form. Here, I expect something more direct, emotional. Audiences in the Arab World and in Egypt already know war and loss. My hope is that the film resonates not as a “foreign story,” but as a shared experience.

**You often handle many roles in your films; why does this all-in-one approach work best for you?**

It’s a way to stay very close to the film, to give it a sense of unity. By being behind the camera, handling sound, and editing, I keep an organic link with the people, places, and rhythm of the story itself. Of course,

it’s a huge weight, but it allows me to avoid the filter of intermediaries and to preserve the coherence of one gaze. I see myself more as a craftsman than as a “team leader.”

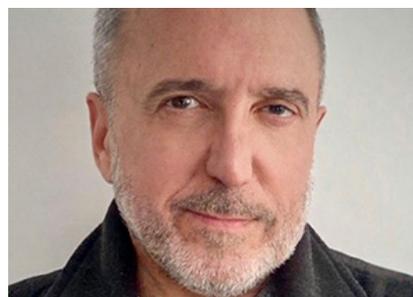
**What role does cinema play in war – documentation, memory, voice, or witness?**

Cinema cannot stop a war, but it can refuse erasure. When villages disappear, when families are silenced, images keep a trace. They testify, they challenge, they transmit to future generations. For me, cinema is a fragile but vital counter-power: It prevents the world from later saying, “we did not know.”

**Ordinary people – farmers, women, children – are always at the heart of your films, not politicians or leaders. What do their voices add to our understanding of war?**

Because they carry war on their shoulders. Politicians make decisions from a distance, but ordinary people live its consequences – they wake up to drones, lose their homes, and bury their loved ones. By placing them at the center, I try to strip war of its abstractions and bring it back to the level of lived experience.

Their words and silences convey truths no speech at the UN could ever capture: The stubborn resilience of a farmer replanting his land, the quiet



strength of women keeping families together in ruins. Through them, war ceases to be a headline or a statistic and becomes human, intimate, and universal.

**Your film sheds light on the destruction in South Lebanon overlooked by the media. Can cinema fill this silence and challenge such bias – or does it risk repeating it?**

The silence around South Lebanon is not accidental – it is the result of selective attention, of media systems shaped by political agendas. Entire villages can vanish without a single headline, while other events are magnified endlessly. Cinema has the privilege – and the duty – of resisting that erasure. Unlike the news cycle, it is not bound by immediacy; it can return to places the media abandoned; it can linger and listen. In that sense, cinema can fill the void, give voice to the voiceless, and challenge dominant narratives.

But it also carries risks; cinema too can become trapped in clichés, reproducing the same images that anesthetize rather than awaken. That is why we need to invent new ways of seeing, to approach people and landscapes not as symbols of suffering but as full human beings with dignity, agency, and memory. Only then can cinema counterbalance bias instead of mirroring it.

**What were the biggest challenges you faced in making this film?**

The challenges were many. Filming in a region under constant surveillance and intermittent bombardment meant working in conditions of fragility and danger. At times, it was not clear whether it was even possible to continue shooting.

On an emotional level, it was perhaps even harder; walking through villages reduced to rubble, hearing families recount unbearable losses, seeing my own child grow up under the permanent hum of drones. As a filmmaker, you carry that weight with you, and it can paralyze you.

The only way I could overcome it was to hold onto the conviction that these stories needed to be preserved – that if I didn’t film them, they might vanish without a trace. That thought gave me the strength to keep the camera steady, to transform grief into images, and to make the film a place where memory could survive, even when the physical landscape had been erased.

“

Cinema is a fragile but vital counter-power: It prevents the world from later saying, ‘we did not know’

