



CineGouna Backs the Future

Editor in Chief
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Archive
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\$300K, 17 Dreams: CineGouna Crowns its Winners

Sarah Azer

CineGouna Funding, the GFF's industry sidebar, announced the full list of winners of its **eighth edition**, with total awards exceeding \$300,000 in the form of financial and in-kind awards provided by the festival and its prestigious sponsors.

The **jury** – consisting of Spanish producer **Isona Passola**; Egyptian writer, director, and producer **Ahmed Amer**; and Moroccan producer Lamia Chraibi – after consulting with the sponsoring companies, distributed 29 valuable awards to **17** out of the **19** projects that competed in the program this year.

Co-Founder and CEO of the GFF **Amr Mansi**, expressed his happiness with the great diversity of this year's awards, saying: "Throughout the year, we proudly observed the repeated successes achieved by **CineGouna** alumni films. This success is reflected in the interest of filmmakers and sponsors in the platform, which has become a major hub for the Arab film industry."

Commenting on this year's program, Head of CineGouna Funding **Ahmed Shawky** said, "During this edition, the filmmakers of the **19** projects held **114** individual meetings with companies, institutions, and international festivals participating in the festival. They benefited from a training program designed according to the needs of each project, which makes everyone a beneficiary, whether they win one of the platform's prizes or not."

Here is the full list of this year's CineGouna Funding awards:

Cinegouna Platform Award – \$15,000 in cash for a project in development: *The Salt of the South* | Tunisia, France, Belgium, Denmark,



Muna Al-Kadhimi & Tamara Amer
\$10,000 cash grant from the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development and Drosos Foundation: *American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga* | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$8,000 cash grant from Big Bang Studios: *Blue Card* | Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Mohammed Alomda** | Producer: **Amjad Abu Alala**
\$5,000 cash grant from Red Sea Foundation: *Your Turn, 203* | Lebanon, France | Director: **Cynthia Sawma** | Producer: **Georges Schoucair & Matthew Gledhill**

\$5,000 cash grant from Red Sea Foundation: *Pipes* | Lebanon | Director & Producer: **Karim Kassem**
\$5,000 cash grant from New Century Production: *Occupational Hazards* | Jordan, UK, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Bassel Ghandour** | Producer: **Rula Nasser**

\$5,000 cash grant from Rise Studios: *Your Turn, 203* | Lebanon, France | Director: **Cynthia Sawma** | Producer: **Georges Schoucair & Matthew Gledhill**

Qatar | Director: **Rami Jarboui** | Producer: **Ramzi Laâmouri**

Cinegouna Platform Award – \$15,000 in cash for a project in post-production: *The North Wind* | Lebanon | Director: **Eliane Raheb** | Producer: **Cynthia Choucair**

\$10,000 cash grant from Film Square: *I am Afraid to Meet You Someday* | Egypt | Director: **Khaled Mansour** | Producer: **Rasha Hosny**

\$10,000 cash grant from Abou Ghaly Motors: *American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga* | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$10,000 cash grant from Arab Radio & Television (ART): *Your Turn, 203* | Lebanon, France | Director: **Cynthia Sawma** | Producer: **Georges Schoucair & Matthew Gledhill**

\$10,000 cash grant from Blue Bee Productions: *Besso* | Iraq, Denmark | Director: **Muslim Habeeb** | Producer:

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Our success is reflected in the interest of filmmakers and sponsors in CineGouna, which has become a major hub for the Arab film industry

\$5,000 cash grant from Sard:

American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$5,000 worth of Script Development Services from Sard:

Asaa | France | Director: **Valentin Noujaïm** | Producer: **Manon Messiant**

\$50,000 as MG for sales and distribution from MAD Solutions:

Asaa | France | Director: **Valentin Noujaïm** | Producer: **Manon Messiant**

\$13,000 worth of post-production services from Bee Media Productions:

Halima | Morocco | Director & Producer: **Yassine El Idrissi**

\$13,000 worth of post-production services from Bee Media Productions:

Four Tales of Love | Egypt | Director: **Maged Atta** | Producer: **Omnia Swedan**

\$12,000 worth of full DCP Package services from Shift Studios:

Animals | Egypt | Director: **Morad Mostafa** | Producer: **Sawsan Yusuf**

\$12,000 worth of full promotion package services from Shift Studios:

American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$6,000 worth of post-production services from Big Bang Studios:

American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$6,000 worth of post-production services from Big Bang Studios:

Four Tales of Love | Egypt | Director: **Maged Atta** | Producer: **Omnia Swedan**

\$5,000 worth of sound services from The Sound of Egypt:

American Dream: The Return of Captain Kabonga | Egypt, Saudi Arabia | Director: **Amir El-Shenawy** | Producer: **Ahmed Abdelsalam**

\$5,000 worth of sound services from The Sound of Egypt:

Four Tales of Love | Egypt | Director: **Maged Atta** | Producer: **Omnia Swedan**

An Invitation to an Arab producer to attend Rotterdam Film Lab from Arab Cinema Center:

Gezira, On the Line | Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan | Director: **Rana Matar** | Producer: **Lama Jamjoom**

An Online Invitation to TFL NEXT from Torino Film Lab & IEFTA:

Holy Cow | Morocco | Director & Producer: **Asmae El Moudir**

An invitation to a French film festival from the French Embassy and French Institute in Egypt:



Animals | Egypt | Director: **Morad Mostafa** | Producer: **Sawsan Yusuf**

An invitation to MediMed lab 2025 from MediMed:

Concrete Land | Jordan, Palestine | Director: **Asmahan Bkerat** | Producer: **Ban Maraga**

Invitation to Durban Film Mart:

Holy Cow | Morocco | Director & Producer: **Asmae El Moudir**
One-Year Free Membership to Documentary Association of Europe:
Disappeared | France, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq | Director: **Anas Zawahri** | Producer: **Ahmad Alhaj**

“ 29 awards were handed out to 17 out of the 19 participating projects this year

★ **CineGouna’s Emerging Winners!**

In a celebration of fresh voices and bold visions, the GFF announced yesterday the winners of **CineGouna Emerge**.

This year’s winners are:

- **The French Institute Prize – Chaima Gharsallaoui, George Adel, Aya Elhussieny, Mina Nabil Fahem**
- **Sawiris Foundation Award for Best Feature Film in Competition – *Where the Wind Comes From* by Amel Guellaty**
- **EU in Egypt Award for Best Feature Documentary – *Life After Siham* by Namir Abdel Messeeh**
- **Drosos Foundation Award for Best Short Film – *My Brother, My Brother* by Saad & Abdelrahman Dnewar**
- **CineGouna Emerge x ESLSCA Scholarship – Dalia Ghaleb & Rawan El Sayed**

CineGouna Emerge serves as the



festival’s umbrella for supporting young and emerging filmmakers through initiatives like **Emerge**, **See Me**, and **Perspectives**. This year also marks the launch of **Emerge: Take Two**, bringing former participants back as peer mentors. Alongside **CineGouna Rising Stars**, the platform continues to spotlight the filmmakers redefining the future of Arab and African cinema.

GFF Honors Asian Cinema and Emerging Voices

At **CineGouna Funding’s closing ceremony**, the GFF announced the winners of the **NETPAC** and **FIPRESCI Awards**, spotlighting outstanding Asian films and debut talents.

The **NETPAC Jury** – led by **Dr. Anne Démy-Geroe** (Australia), and including **Jean-Marc Théroutanne** (France) and Egyptian director **Hala Khalil** – selected two winning films from what they described as an “exceptionally high standard of competition” – **Deming Chen’s** *Always*, which won **Best Asian Non-Fiction Film**, and **Tanushree Das** and **Saumyananda Sahi’s** debut feature, *Shadowbox*, which received **Best Asian Fiction Film**.

The **FIPRESCI Award**, presented by the **International Federation of Film Critics**, was also awarded to *Always*, which the jury praised as “a poetic, finely crafted cinematic work and an intimate prayer to the future.”

The **GFF** then reaffirmed its commitment to championing new cinematic voices across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

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The surveillance isn't just external; it's internalized



Yassmina Karajah, Director of *Ambush*:

My Film Explores Amman Through the Eyes of its Youth

"The GFF has become a rare bridge as it showcases talent in the Arab region, yet speaks an international cinematic language, so I'm really honored to be showing my film here this year. It's extra special because it'll be the first time it's screened in an Arab country, and given the film is inspired by the city of Amman, I am very curious about how it'll be received."

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I approached the editing process like writing music – keeping the tempo, repetition, and silence in mind

Nahed Nasr

Your film premiered in Toronto – how was it received there, and what do you expect from Egyptian and Arab audiences now?

When I set out to make *Ambush*, I knew it was a risk. It doesn't lean on familiar East-West theme; it's distinctly Ammani. I wondered if it would connect beyond the city, but audiences have found something universal in its portrayal of class, desire, and the clash between old and new.

I hope the film takes viewers on a visceral ride through Amman, one chaotic night that captures its beauty, contradictions, and longing, and makes them reflect on their own desires and relationships with their cities.

Your film shows Amman in a new light, embracing its contradictions and hidden beauty. How do you see the city as a cinematic subject?

In many ways, *Ambush* feels like an ode to my hometown; a way to

explore Amman through the eyes of its youth across different classes and backgrounds – something I felt hadn't been fully tapped into. It's never easy to reveal all the layers of a city or capture its spirit on film, let alone in a short one. After years of living and making films in Canada, I moved back to Amman to rediscover myself and find the story that could do just that.

Your film uses surveillance and voyeurism to connect the city's contradictions – where did this idea come from, and why make it central to the story?

The film was inspired by a night at a rooftop club; a moment of being seen and seeing. At first, it felt like we at the club were being ambushed, watched by the neighborhood as if in a live film, but the more I explored the social and economic layers, the more I wondered if we were the ones ambushing their space instead.

That mutual voyeurism became the film's core – two worlds watching each other, their tension ebbing and flowing like the city itself. The gaze in *Ambush* was born from living in cities where you're always being watched, by cameras, by neighbors, and by your own sense of self-policing. The surveillance isn't just external; it's internalized.



What elements did you rely on to create the film's fast, tense rhythm and capture the city's contradictions?

I think that breathless feeling comes from wanting to pull the audience through the city's many layers in one escapist night. Amman itself is full of contradictions: Class, desire, restraint, and the film mirrors that constant bombardment. The characters act as satellites moving through these worlds, but for me, the real tension lies in the collision of the worlds themselves.

Editing plays a leading role in your film. How did you approach the editing process, and what concept guided you?

I approached the editing process like writing music – keeping the tempo, repetition, and silence in mind. The cuts created the rhythm of breathing, suffocation, and escape. Sometimes the edits were abrupt; sometimes they lingered just long enough to create unease. Abdallah Sada, our editor, was a real game-changer in bringing all these elements to life.

In a film so deeply rooted in the raw, hidden world of men – with all its brutality and vulnerability – how did you, as a female director, prepare to enter and portray it so truthfully?

It's interesting you mention that; I've noticed that thread myself. There's often a strong masculine presence in my short films, but I don't really see it as masculine versus feminine. I'm drawn to what feels raw, unguarded, and human. Part of that pull comes from wanting to explore Arab male tenderness, which we rarely see on screen. Arab men are so often portrayed through toughness or authority, but there's a quiet vulnerability there that fascinates me.

The process of getting to that truth is rooted in co-authorship for me; in stepping out of the comfort of the director's chair and into real spaces with the people whose lives shaped the film. It wasn't about observation from a distance, but about trust and collaboration. It's not always comfortable, but that discomfort is what opens up something real, something that feels lived rather than constructed.

A Poet: Words of Silence

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Soto occasionally capitalizes on moments of opportune dark comedy



Hani Mustafa

After winning the jury prize at the Un Certain Regard of this year’s Cannes, Simón Mesa Soto’s Colombian film *A Poet* finds itself in the running of the Feature Narrative Competition of the 8th GFF.

The film’s drama centers on Oscar (Ubeimar Rios) – a middle-aged man who once achieved acclaim as a poet, having published two collections in his youth. Several scenes effectively illustrate Oscar’s current reality: He is unemployed and living with his elderly mother, while his wife has left him, taking their daughter with her. The film depicts a significant part of his life spent in bars, getting blackout drunk with his friends, and engaging in heated debates about literature and the identity of the greatest Colombian poet.



One of Oscar’s most interesting quirks is his love for the Colombian poet and novelist José Asunción Silva – a prominent 19th-century writer – at times identifying with him; a trait that Soto occasionally capitalizes on for moments of opportune dark comedy, voicing out Oscar’s insincere thoughts on committing suicide, inspired by the real tragedy of Silva’s death, when he shot himself in his bed in 1896.

The drama reaches its peak when he gets a job as a literature teacher at a high school where he discovers

a talented student in his class, Yurlady. However, Oscar’s already unfortunate existence takes a turn for the worse when he is accused of harassing her during a party with the school’s poetry class, ultimately leaving his relationship with his daughter in ruins, his freedom at stake, and his life in shambles.

What Soto has created here is an entertaining melange of tragedy and satire, complemented most intriguingly by Rios’s natural and eloquent portrayal of the eccentric yet intellectual Oscar.

The Art Behind Songs Written for Screens



Menna Elnakib

Yesterday, the GFF held its final panel: ‘*The Secret Recipe: Creating Songs for Drama and Cinema*’ at the **Island Stage**, bringing together lyricist and creative director **Menna El Keiy** and songs producer **Ahmed Tarek Yehia**, who shared how music written for film and TV must serve the story first – not the singer or the charts.

“A drama song belongs to the narrative more than the artist,” **El Keiy** said, emphasizing how lyrics must echo a character’s emotions and timing.

In a packed audience that included Egyptian actors **Hanady Mehanna** and **Youssef Othman**, along with rapper **Ziad Zaza**, the duo turned theory into performance. They created an imaginary film, cast its stars, and composed a song live from Menna’s handwritten lyrics to Ahmed’s evolving melody.

“If it doesn’t sound like real emotion, it won’t move anyone,” said **El Keiy**, driving the point home.

Eighth GFF Announces Winner of its 2nd Eish Short Film Competition

Yesterday, the **UN World Food Program (UNWFP)** in Egypt, **GFF**, and **Zest** announced filmmaker **Ahmed El Hawari** as the winner of the **second Eish Short Film Competition**, emerging victorious from a pool of 290 contestants and receiving a **production grant** for his film project.

Inspired by the festival’s ethos, **Cinema for Humanity**, this initiative – the title of which means both ‘bread’ and ‘life’ – invites filmmakers to explore food security through cinema.

Reinforcing that vision, GFF Artistic Director **Marianne Khoury** said: “**Eish** is not just a competition, but a window into realities that must be seen and voices that deserve to be heard.”

Adding to that, **Jean-Pierre de Margerie** of the **UNWFP** said, “Storytelling can turn food insecurity from a statistic into a human experience – and inspire action,” while **Zest’s Abdallah Dnewar** noted that “Food is memory, struggle, emotion – and cinema is how we bring these stories to life.”



