

**EL GOUNA
FILM FESTIVAL**

9TH EDITION — 15-23 OCTOBER 2026

EL GOUNA STAR

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GFF

ON CLOUD 9TH

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GFF's 9th Edition Takes the Stage

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Film is not simply the story of an individual artist, but a record of collective experiences, preserving the stories of the present for future generations

Yasmina El-Abd

The El Gouna Film Festival (GFF) opened its **ninth edition** on Thursday, October 15th, with an evening of theatrical performances, music, singing, and celebrations at **Festival Plaza**. Bringing together Egyptian, Arab, and international filmmakers, stars, cultural figures, and journalists, the ceremony marked the beginning of another edition dedicated to celebrating cinema and the stories that connect people across generations and borders.

Among those attending were H.E. Governor of the Red Sea **Walid Abdel-Azim El-Barqi**, Founder of El Gouna and Chairman of the GFF Board of Directors **Samih Sawiris**, GFF Co-Founder and Executive Director **Amr Mansi**, GFF Artistic Director **Andrew Mohsen**, Chairman of Orascom Development Egypt **Eskandar Tooma**, CEO of El Gouna and Managing Director of Orascom Development Egypt **Mohamed Amer**, Megastar Member of the Festival's

International Advisory Board **Yousra**, and Former Festival Director and member of the International Advisory Board **Intishal Al-Timimi**.

The celebrations began on **the red carpet**, welcoming filmmakers, celebrities and festival partners before Egyptian actress **Yasmina El-Abd** took the stage to host the ceremony. Through a theatrical performance, she explored cinema's ability to make time stand still, drawing audiences into the lives and emotions of characters on screen. Film, she suggested, is not simply the story of an individual artist, but a record of collective experiences, preserving the stories of the present for future generations. Her performance introduced this year's festival theme, **Cinema for Humanity: Archiving Narratives**.

The evening continued with a musical medley bringing together Egyptian and international tracks and compositions, conducted by Egyptian



composer **Mohamed Nawara**. Audiences were also introduced to the festival's competitions and jury members through a special presentation of film trailers. This year's program features **77 films** across the **Feature Narrative** and **Feature Documentary Competitions, Short Film Competition, Out of Competition Official Selection**, and **special presentations**, alongside **retrospective screenings**.

One of the evening's special moments was the tribute to veteran lighting technician **Hassan El-Sayed**, whose four-decade career includes work on *The Thief of Joy*, *In Search of Sayed Marzouk*, and *The Heaven of Devils*. Cinematographer and actor **Sameh Selim** presented him with the festival's **Special Tribute Award**, recognizing a career devoted to the visual craft of filmmaking.

The celebration continued with the presentation of the **GFF Career Achievement Award** to Egyptian actress **Mona Zaki**, honoring more than three decades of performances that have brought a wide range of characters, including the experiences and stories of Egyptian women, to the screen. In a surprise appearance, director **Mohamed Shaker Khodeir** took the stage to present her with the award.

With the award in hand, **Zaki** confided that fear has been her constant companion throughout her career, but it is the support and guidance of the audience and industry that helped her put aside



her fears and doubts, saying, "I hope I will always be surrounded by an artistic family like you. So often, you were the ones who helped me find my footing and courage. I thank you, and I thank every director, writer, and everyone behind the camera. You have taught me so much. You are my extended family."

Before stepping off, she urged the young filmmakers and talents in attendance and beyond not to give in to their fears. "Learn to stifle and quash your fears, because they hold you back. It's a battle we have to fight within ourselves so that we can get back on our feet and keep going. And God willing, I will keep going too."

The festival also introduced the jury members of its ninth edition, including **Khaled Hammad, Shawkat**

Amin Korki, Nahed El Sebai, Yeşim Ustaoglu, Aboozar Amini, Julie Frères, Reta Guetg, Gladys Joujou, and **Samir**. British filmmaker and President of the Feature Narrative Competition Jury **Joanna Hogg** addressed the audience on behalf of her fellow jurors.

The ceremony concluded with a dance performance followed by a surprise appearance by the American Egyptian soprano **Shereen Ahmed**, who took to the stage in Arabic for the very first time, performing her rendition of the beloved Egyptian song *Helwa ya Baladi* ('You're Beautiful, My Country'), bringing the opening celebrations to a musical close and marking the start of nine days of screenings, conversations, and encounters through cinema.

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Learn to stifle and quash your fears, because they hold you back. It's a battle we have to fight within ourselves so that we can get back on our feet and keep going
Mona Zaki

Today Screening Highlights

At **7:00 PM**, **Festival Plaza** will host the **screening** of *All About Corinne*, the **opening film of the ninth GFF**. Written and directed by Marc Fitoussi, this French dramedy stars **Isabelle Huppert, Sandrine Kiberlain, and Anne Marivin**. The film premiered at **Locarno** and is holding its **MENA premiere** as part of the **GFF's Out of Competition Official Selection**.

At **9:30 PM**, **Festival Plaza** will host the **red carpet** for *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep*, attended by director **Rakan Mayasi**, producer **Jennifer Ritter**, and the festival's celebrity guests and creative talents. The film premiered at **Cannes' Un Certain Regard** and is competing in the **GFF's ninth Feature Narrative Competition**.



Meet the Filmmaker

GURIA
Director:
Levan Koguashvili
Sea Cinema 3
2:00 PM

DISPLACEMENT FILM FUND PROGRAM

Super Afghan Gym
Art Director:
Aarzoo Burhani

Allies in Exile
Director:
Fadi Al Halabi
Sea Cinema 3
5:00 PM



Poh Si Teng, Director of *American Doctor*: The US Could Have Stopped the Genocide in Gaza

Written by Nahed Nasr

"It's an honor to bring American Doctor to the GFF. We had been waiting for the right moment and place to share the film with MENA audiences, and when Artistic Director Andrew Mohsen reached out, we knew this was it. With the genocide in Gaza still unfolding, screening in Egypt, so close to where our story takes place, means a great deal to our team. We can't wait to sit in the theater with this audience."

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We wanted *American Doctor* to go beyond showing what was happening in Palestine and bring it home to the US

The GFF marks the film's MENA premiere. How do you expect regional audiences to respond differently from American or European audiences?

This is *American Doctor*'s first screening in the Arab World. The film has traveled across continents, but sharing it with audiences in this region matters to us. In the US and Europe, many viewers learn about their governments' active participation in genocide. Here, I expect audiences to bring their own knowledge and connection, and I'm curious what they'll see that others have missed.

After years as a producer, why did the war in Gaza compel you to return to directing and tell this story yourself?

For the first time in over two decades in film, I felt everything I'd done as a journalist, documentary commissioner, grants director, and studio executive could come together to serve one film on Palestine. I reached out to the best people I'd worked with over the years, bringing together a team spanning eight countries. We knew we had one shot to make a film that could cut through the noise and shift culture and politics.

Why did you choose three American

doctors with such different backgrounds and personalities, and how did their differences shape the film?

I live in New York, where my friends and colleagues come from different backgrounds and faiths. When the genocide began, I found it increasingly difficult to speak my mind and remain effective. Then I came across **Mark, Thaer, and Feroze**: Three friends with very different backgrounds and personalities. I wondered how they managed to work together despite their differences. I felt I could learn something from them, and maybe audiences could too.

Was the film's transition from saving lives in Gaza to influencing US policy in the halls of Congress planned from the start?

From the start, we wanted *American Doctor* to go beyond showing what was happening in Palestine and bring it home to the US. We wanted audiences to understand that the US could have stopped the genocide long ago, but instead continues to take part in the massacre and destruction of a people. Even in development, we knew the film had to live in two places: **The Nasser Medical Complex** in Gaza and **the Halls of Congress**.

By placing American responsibility at its heart, do you think *American Doctor* could contribute to changing how US audiences respond to the ethnic cleansing in Gaza?

Thanks to our distributor Watermelon Pictures and its co-founders, our

Executive Producers Hamza and Badie Ali, *American Doctor* has screened in more than 150 theaters across the US and Canada for over seven weeks.

It still feels surreal. The outpouring of support has come not only from Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab communities, but also from Jewish, white, Asian, Black, and brown audiences, healthcare workers, veterans, students, and people across generations and political perspectives.

With filming beginning in December 2024, how did you develop the story as events unfolded and decide when to end it?

We didn't have the luxury of time. I wanted to finish the film within a year, so we built a potential arc around the doctors' journey: Going into Gaza, coming home, and taking their fight to Congress. During development, you get a sense of where the tension, conflict, and transformation might come from. But life unfolds on its own terms; often more surprising, challenging, and beautiful than anything planned.

Drawing on your experience at The New York Times and Al Jazeera, what can documentary cinema do differently when images alone have failed to change the discourse on Gaza?

Images of violence and facts alone won't change people's minds. What matters is whether audiences can connect with the people of Palestine, if they haven't already.

So we made *American Doctor* using the storytelling techniques of a medical drama – a film language Americans know and trust. Doctors in Gaza are no different from doctors in the US. We believe and trust doctors, and none of us accept hospitals being targeted or healthcare workers being kidnapped, tortured, and killed.



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We knew we had one shot to make a film that could cut through the noise and shift culture and politics

Amr Mansi

Executive Director

A More Stable and Impactful 9th Edition

With new and expanded partnerships with Zurich, Venice, Durban, and Rotterdam, is the ninth edition marking a shift toward a more sustainable international network?

We have made significant progress in restoring the festival's international presence, and our focus has now shifted toward building lasting partnerships that benefit both the festival and filmmakers. Our partnership with the **Zurich Film Festival** reflects this approach, facilitating the exchange of films, guests, and expertise; opening European networks to Egyptian and Arab talent; and connecting international partners with the region's film industry.

The **GFF** brings to these partnerships an extensive regional network of filmmakers, projects and industry professionals, deep knowledge of the local film landscape, and an industry platform developed over **nine editions**. We aim to build collaborations that support filmmakers throughout the year.

How is the festival working toward a more sustainable funding model?

Funding remains a challenge, particularly with rising organizational costs and uncertain economic conditions. We have worked to diversify our sponsors and partners, reaching beyond the film industry and encouraging companies to support specific film projects and filmmakers rather than simply seeking brand visibility.

Our approach is to build partnerships that align with sponsors' objectives while making a tangible contribution to the industry. As the festival expands, we can offer different forms of collaboration, allowing partners to see the impact of their support.

Traditional sponsorship remains important, but relying on a limited number of funding sources carries risks. Although funding challenges persist as our programs grow, our goal is to develop a more diverse and flexible model that ensures their continuity while allowing us to launch new initiatives.

As El Gouna Plaza becomes the center of the festival's expanding activities, how has it evolved this year?

What we have developed at **El Gouna Plaza** over the past editions has proved successful. This year, our focus has been on improving the overall experience as the festival grows, making **the Plaza** more comfortable, engaging, and interactive.

The Plaza now hosts most festival activities, including **CineGouna Funding, Forum, Market, and Emerge**, alongside the **open-air cinema, gala screenings, red-carpet events, and opening and closing ceremonies**. We have developed these spaces to accommodate the expanding programs and growing demand.



Beyond individual venues, we have focused on creating an interconnected environment that encourages spontaneous encounters between filmmakers, industry professionals, emerging talents, and audiences. Open spaces, seating areas, and easy movement between events are essential to this approach.

The **CineGouna Market** is integrated into this environment rather than isolated from other activities, allowing professional exchanges to continue through screenings, discussions, and informal meetings. Our growing network of partners also helps us improve facilities and services.

Ultimately, we want **the Plaza** to function as one lively, connected space where interaction continues beyond scheduled events.

How has the GFF's audience evolved in recent years, and how has its growing diversity influenced your approach to programming and the overall festival experience?

One of the festival's most important developments has been the growing diversity of its audience. Alongside filmgoers, we now attract students, emerging talents, industry professionals, and people interested in cultural activities. This diversity matters as much as audience growth itself.

The strong attendance at **CineGouna** events shows increasing interest in engaging with the film industry, learning from professionals, and building networks. We want audiences to explore different aspects of the festival rather than remain within the activities that initially attracted them.

This shapes how we develop our programs, events, and spaces, particularly **the Plaza**, where we encourage interaction between different groups. Our aim is not simply to attract more visitors, but to create

a more inclusive, engaging experience that fosters relationships and collaborations beyond the festival.

Which indicators are most meaningful in measuring the GFF's success and its impact on filmmakers, the industry, and audiences?

One of the most important indicators is what happens after the festival ends: When a supported project reaches major international festivals, an emerging filmmaker returns with a completed film, or a partnership continues to develop. The growing number of established filmmakers choosing **CineGouna** also reflects confidence in our platform.

Ultimately, success means creating a lasting impact on filmmakers, the industry, and audiences beyond any single edition.

Where do you see the GFF today in its development?

After **nine editions**, we have accumulated considerable experience, relationships and programs. The next challenge is to turn these achievements into a sustainable structure that can evolve from one edition to the next while remaining flexible and responsive to changes in the industry. This is the key transition of **the ninth edition**.

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Our focus has now shifted toward building lasting partnerships that benefit both the festival and filmmakers



