

**EL GOUNA
FILM FESTIVAL**

9TH EDITION — 15-23 OCTOBER 2026

EL GOUNA STAR

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GFF

TAKE NINE CINEGOUNA!

Editor-in-Chief

Mohamed Kandil

Editorial Manager

Nahed Nasr

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Today

Red Carpet



From **CineGouna Funding** to the **red carpet**! After receiving support at last year's edition, *The Return of Captain Kabonga* is holding its **world premiere** as part of the **ninth GFF**, competing in the **Feature Documentary Competition**. Director **Amir El-Shenawy** and the film's protagonist **Ashraf Kabonga** will be joined by the film's crew and festival stars and guests on the **Festival Plaza's red carpet at 7:00 PM**.

Meet the Filmmaker

DEAR AJAYI

Producer:

May Odeh

Director:

Damilola Orimogunje

Sea Cinema 1

1:00 PM

3 WEEKS AFTER

Producer

Branislav Trifunovic

Sea Cinema 1

4:00 PM

THE CALF DOLL

Director:

Ankur Hooda

Producer:

Ayushi Gupta

Cinematographer:

Anish Sarai

Sea Cinema 2

12:30 PM

THE LUMINOUS LIFE

Actor:

Francisco Melo

Sea Cinema 3

4:30 PM

THE FALLING HOUSE

Producer:

Odessa Rae

Sea Cinema 2

5:00 PM

DOLPHINS: MY CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Director:

Barry Revill

Audimax (Manara School)

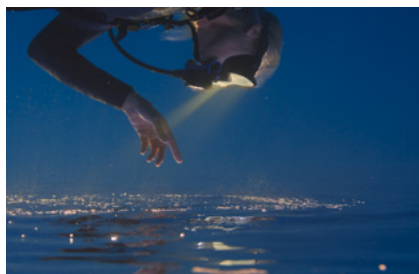
6:00 PM

To Mohamed Khan

Ten years after his passing, **Mohamed Khan (1942–2016)** returns to the big screen at the **ninth GFF**. The festival celebrates one of Egyptian cinema's pioneering filmmakers with screenings of *The Street Player* (1983), starring **Adel Emam**, today, and *A Dinner Date* (1981) on **October 19th**. The tribute continues with **two CineGouna Forum panels on October 18th and 19th**: *The Unlikely Hero: Men in the Cinema of Mohamed Khan* and *Her Own Story: Women at the Heart of Mohamed Khan's Cinema*. Bringing together filmmakers, critics and actors, the discussions revisit **Khan's** distinctive portrayals of men and the complex women at the heart of his films.



From Zurich to El Gouna



After its **world premiere in Zurich**, *Dolphins – My Close Encounters*, directed by **Barry Revill** and partly filmed in Hurghada, returns to the Red Sea today for its

Middle Eastern premiere at the GFF. The screening marks the start of a new partnership between **the Gouna and Zurich film festivals**, bringing exchanges of films and guests, with more collaborations planned. Director of the Zurich Film Festival **Rita Geutjes** is also serving on a **GFF jury** this year.

From a Blank Page to a Song

Written by Farida Galal

The GFF welcomed lyricist **Menna El-Kiey**, along with composer and music producer **Ahmed Tarek Yehia**, to a session titled 'From a Blank Page to Theme Song' on the **first day** of its **ninth edition**. Inspired by the spirit of the festival, the audience became part of the creative journey, sharing words that captured the beauty of togetherness. Suggestions included "sweet laughter," "the sea breeze," "the good old days," "dreams coming true," and "friendship." Actors **Sherif Mounir** and **Hassan El-Raddad** also added "laughing our hearts out," and

"let's have some fun," respectively.

El-Kiey and **Yehia** then took the audience behind the scenes of songwriting, exploring how simple ideas and everyday feelings can grow into lyrics and melodies. They also explained how the bridge connects the verse and chorus, bringing the different parts of a song together.

The session concluded with a song made and performed spontaneously on stage by actors **Youssef Gabriel**, **Mohamed El Sharnoubi**, **Yasmina El-Abd**, and **Lina Sophia**, with the audience singing along.

Co-Producing the Region

Written by Malak Sherif

Yesterday, the CineGouna Forum held a panel addressing the challenges and possibilities of Arab film co-productions titled '*Co-Producing the Region*.' Moderated by Head of CineGouna Funding **Ahmed Shawky**, the discussion brought together producers **Rula Nasser**, **Ziad Srouji**, and **Mohamed Al Omda**, filmmaker **Mohamed Siam**, and Founder and Head of the Kurdistan Film Commission **Bavi Yassin** to explore ways to strengthen collaboration across Arab film industries and reach wider audiences.

The discussion explored why Arab co-productions remain limited compared to European partnerships. **Nasser** emphasized the importance of exchanging expertise and opening Arab markets to one another, while

Srouji highlighted that financing alone is not enough without effective distribution to connect films with audiences.

Siam then reflected on his filmmaking journey, revealing that each of his films took at least nine years to complete, highlighting the time and resources required throughout development, production, and post-production. **Al Omda** shared his experiences with Arab and European partners, raising an interesting question: "Does every co-producer's contribution have to be financial?" The conversation also highlighted opportunities for collaboration through sharing equipment, services, and expertise, alongside the need for clear frameworks governing relationships between producers.



Beyond Stardom



Written by Sarah Azer

Kicking off the first day of the **CineGouna Forum** with a masterclass titled '*Beyond Stardom*,' presented by **GFF** Artistic Director **Andrew Mohsen** and moderated by film director **Mohamed Yassin**, Egyptian actress **Mona Zaki**, recipient of this year's **GFF Career Achievement Award**, gave an intimate look at the experiences, fears, and artistic choices that have shaped her career, stressing that "Not every endeavor has to succeed; what matters is doing it with sincerity and a clear conscience."

The masterclass explored her preparation process, from building a character's personal history to leaving room for spontaneity. She explained that she imagines a character's upbringing, family relationships, and emotional experiences, including details that may never appear in the screenplay. She added that she finds memorizing dialogue too rigidly can diminish its meaning and that allowing space for instinct can make a performance feel more natural.

Defining Film Festivals Today

Written by Sarah Samy

What defines a film festival beyond its screenings? This question drove *What Is a Film Festival Today?*: A **CineGouna Forum** panel moderated by film producer **Amra Bakšić Čamo**, featuring Director and Co-Founder of the **Amman International Film Festival** **Nada Doumani**, Director of International Programs at the **Red Sea International Film Festival** **Fionnuala Halligan**, and **Martin Horyna**, a programmer associated with the **Karlovy Vary International Film Festival**.

Doumani highlighted **Amman's** mission to support emerging Jordanian filmmakers, while

Halligan stressed the importance of a clear festival strategy.

Horyna contrasted the stability of established festivals with the greater freedom newer ones have to experiment.

Turning to cinema and politics, **Doumani** recalled the decision to proceed with the **Amman International Film Festival** during the **War in Gaza**, but without red carpets or evening parties, preserving a space for cinema and culture while acknowledging the circumstances.

Horyna discussed how changing political and social contexts can affect films between selection



and screening, requiring festivals to reconsider programming decisions. **Halligan** emphasized their responsibility toward a film's journey and its audience, particularly in deciding where and how it should be presented.



Rakan Mayasi, Director of *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep*: I Carry My Grandmother's Story

"Having my film's Arab World premiere at **the GFF** is a great honor. Egypt is not only the Mother of the World, but also the Mother of Arab Cinema and a major reference point for me. My short film *The Key* previously screened at **the GFF**, but I couldn't attend. This will be my first time at the festival in person, with my debut feature. I'm excited to be part of a festival known for its support of Arab filmmakers."

How did your short, *Trumpets in the Sky*, evolve into your debut feature, *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep*, and what is your personal connection to the story and its community?

The film grew very organically from *Trumpets in the Sky*. That short was, in many ways, a first gesture; a way of approaching something deeply personal without fully articulating it. My grandmother's story had always been present in me, not as a narrative I wanted to recount, but as a quiet weight that shaped how I look at the world.

Returning to the Bekaa Valley felt less like a decision and more like a continuation. I wasn't trying to build a story around the community, but to spend time within it, to observe what emerges when you don't impose too much. The feature became an extension of that process, more patient, more open, allowing the film to find its own rhythm.

My connection is both intimate and distant. I come from this world, but I've also always felt slightly outside of it. That distance allowed me to approach it not with judgment, but

with a kind of attentiveness, trying to understand how people inhabit these inherited structures rather than explain them.

The film brings traditional gender roles into dialogue with modern views on marriage and courtship within the Bedouin community. What interested you in this coexistence?

I didn't approach it as a balance to construct. It was already there, within the community itself. What interested me was precisely that coexistence; the way different temporalities overlap without necessarily resolving.

Tradition is not static, and modernity doesn't arrive as a clean break. They exist in gestures, in conversations, in hesitations. Rather than framing them in opposition, I tried to remain close to how they are lived, often quietly, sometimes contradictorily.

The film doesn't seek to position itself. It observes how individuals move within these currents, how they negotiate space for themselves, even in very subtle ways.

You trained with Abbas Kiarostami and, more recently, Béla Tarr. How have they influenced your filmmaking, and which other directors inspire you?

What I carry from **Abbas Kiarostami** and **Béla Tarr** is less a style than an attitude toward cinema. **Kiarostami** taught me to trust reality, create space for ambiguity, and allow

viewers to participate rather than be guided. With **Tarr**, I discovered a different relationship to time, staying with an image long enough for something unscripted to emerge. Both taught me to step back and resist the urge to control meaning.

Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* was an important reference while conceiving the film. I also feel close to **Chantal Akerman** for her attention to space and interiors; **Bahman Ghobadi** for his work with non-professional actors and the coexistence of the visible and invisible; and **Hou Hsiao-hsien** for his film language and naturalistic performances.

These influences remain quiet, more like companions than references.

How did working without a script and with non-professional actors shape the performances and filmmaking process?

There is a vulnerability in that process, for everyone involved. Without a script, we are all slightly exposed. We don't fully know what will happen. But that uncertainty creates a different kind of attention.

The actors are not performing something external; they are drawing from their own rhythms and silences. What emerges is often very fragile. A hesitation, a glance, the way someone occupies space: These are things that can't be constructed. They can only be received.

Our role as filmmakers becomes more about creating the conditions for something to appear, and then recognizing it when it does.



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“Both of them, in very different ways, taught me to step back, to resist the urge to control meaning

Andrew Mohsen Artistic Director

BUILDING ON PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND BROADENING THE FESTIVAL'S REACH

Written by Nahed Nasr

What are the main developments at the GFF this year, and how do they reflect your vision as Artistic Director?

Since becoming artistic director, my priority has been to build on the festival's achievements and strengthen its programs and team.

I believe the current structure of **CineGouna** is close to ideal, with **Ahmed Amer** joining as Head of **CineGouna Forum**, **Amra Bakšić Čamo** as International Strategies Advisor, and **Norah El-Khatib** as Head of the **CineGouna Market**.

Another priority is creating a more integrated ecosystem in which the festival's different sections work together while retaining their own identities. One example is **Safe Harbor**, an initiative supporting displaced and at-risk filmmakers that connects the work of **CineGouna Funding** and **CineGouna Forum**.

How is CineGouna responding to the industry's evolving needs?

One way we are responding is through the launch of **CineGouna Series**, headed by **Mariam Naoum**. The new program supports Arab television projects, connecting their creators with industry professionals in response to the sector's growth.

We also aim to strengthen the forum's international dimension by combining Egyptian industry experience with international expertise. Around 50% of this year's sessions will feature international speakers, covering topics including AI.

CineGouna Funding, headed by **Ahmed Shawky**, continues to gain filmmakers' confidence. Several established directors are presenting projects through **the GFF** for the first time, and we have a larger number of fiction projects, particularly in development. We are also launching the **Egyptian Voices Initiative**.

At the **CineGouna Market**, **El-Khatib** brings experience in both production and advertising. We have improved the market's facilities, expanded its network of participating companies, and introduced activities that encourage exhibitors to engage with other **CineGouna** programs.

CineGouna Emerge, headed by **Hayat Aljowaily**, is developing longer-term support for young filmmakers. Yemeni director **Asim Abdulaziz**, a former participant, returns this year with his film *I Broke a Vase* in the **Short Film Competition**. Our partnership with **the Durban International Film Festival** also continues through



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Across nine editions, the GFF has screened the Cannes Palme d'Or winner in seven editions

exchanges of emerging filmmakers.

What are the main highlights of this year's film program?

One of the things that makes me happiest this year is the return of a strong Arab film presence. This year, we have **Danielle Arbid's** *Only Rebels Win*, which premiered at **Berlin**; **Karim Kassem's** *Pipes*, which premiered at **Karlovy Vary**; and **Yassine El-Idrissi's** *Halima*, which won **two awards** at **Shanghai**. The latter two received **CineGouna Funding** support, and several Arab films are also participating in the **Documentary Competition**.

We also have a strong Egyptian presence: **Mohamed Hammad's** *Safe Exit*, **Mohamed Mostafa's** *Men Don't Cry*, **Amir El-Shenawy's** *Captain Kabonga*, and **Gad Shaheen's** *The Wicked*; the three of which received support from **CineGouna**. Seeing these films return to **the GFF** after their development and international journeys reflects filmmakers' growing confidence in the festival and our ability to maintain relationships with projects beyond their initial development.

Internationally, we continue to present major award-winning films. Across **nine editions**, **the GFF** has screened the **Cannes Palme d'Or winner** in **seven editions**, reflecting distributors' confidence in the festival. This year's selection includes **Ali Asgari's** *A Bit of Light*, following its **Venice premiere**; **Palme d'Or winner Cristian Mungiu's** *Fjord*; and **Ryusuke Hamaguchi's** *All of a Sudden*, which won the **Best**

Actress Award at **Cannes**.

We are also delighted to welcome British writer-director **Joanna Hogg** as President of the **Feature Narrative Competition Jury**. Her participation marks her first major media appearance in some time, as she prepares for her next film.

The **ninth edition** also commemorates the **tenth anniversary** of **Mohamed Khan's** death through screenings of his films and discussions about his career.

What can audiences expect from the ninth GFF?

The **ninth edition** promises audiences a very full schedule through which they can continue discovering some of the year's most important films. Whether they are interested in competition films or those selected by their countries as **submissions for the Oscars**, they will find what they are looking for.

Documentary enthusiasts will find several deeply affecting films representing some of the latest work in the field, while those interested in Arab cinema will discover films that offer a good picture of the regional film landscape this year. The short film program also offers remarkable diversity.

For producers and filmmakers, the selected projects, **CineGouna Forum** sessions and discussions, together with **CineGouna Series**, collectively offer a broad view of the directions the industry may take over the next two years.

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