

**EL GOUNA
FILM FESTIVAL**

9TH EDITION — 15-23 OCTOBER 2026

EL GOUNA STAR

5TH ISSUE — TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026



GFF

BIG BOYS ON THE GFF STAGE!

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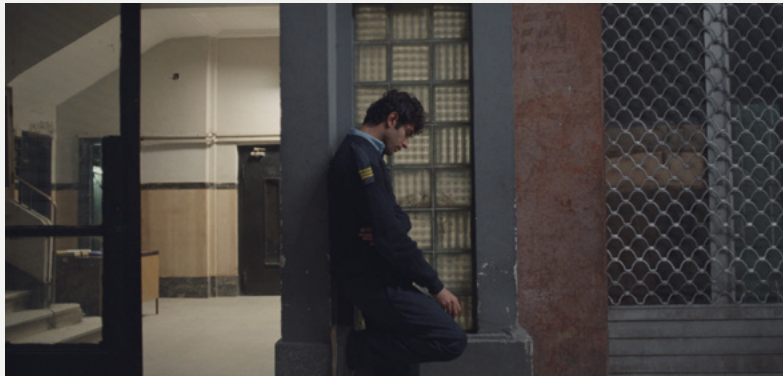
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Today

Red Carpet



The **Festival Plaza red carpet** welcomes **two premieres** tonight, with filmmakers, cast members, and festival stars and guests in attendance! **Mohammed Hammad's** Egyptian film *Safe Exit* celebrates its **MENA premiere** following its debut at the **Berlinale** in February. Competing in the **GFF's Feature Narrative Competition**, the film brings **Hammad** together with producer **Kholoud Saad** and actors **Marawan Waleed**, **Rodaina Foad**, **Hazem Essam**, and **Magda Mounir**. Meanwhile, Turkish director **Ozcan Alper** celebrates the **world premiere** of *Spring in Imroz*, screening **Out of Competition**, alongside producers **Emre Oskay** and **Mehmet Korutürk** and stars **Meryem Uzerli** and **Halit Ergenç**.

Meet the Filmmaker

A WAR ON WOMEN

Director:

Raha Shirazi
Sea Cinema 2

12:30 PM

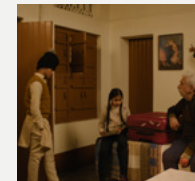


REHMAT

Director:

Gurvinder Singh
Sea Cinema 2

3:00 PM



DREAM OF EUPHORIA

Director:

Julian Rosefeldt
Sea Cinema 3

1:00 PM



HEAT

Director:

Jacqueline Zünd
Cinematographer:
Nikolai von Graevenitz
Sea Cinema 3

3:15 PM



A Personal History of Resistance

For Canadian Iranian filmmaker **Raha Shirazi**, *A War on Women*, screening at **GFF tonight**, is also a deeply personal project. The daughter of a women's rights activist, **Shirazi** draws on a history closely connected to her own family. Her first feature-length documentary follows earlier shorts *Four Walls* and *Acqua*, both of which premiered at the **Toronto International Film Festival**. The film also incorporates footage secretly recorded inside Iran by collaborators whose identities remain protected for their safety. This follows screenings at **Hot Docs** and **Doc Edge**, where it received the **Fearless Wahine Award**.

The Making of American Doctor

CineGouna Forum explores the making of *American Doctor*, a documentary following three American physicians providing medical care in Gaza, in a case study held **today**. Featuring director **Poh Si Teng** and producer **Reem Haddad**, and moderated by **Amra Bakšić Čamo**, the discussion will address the creative and ethical challenges of documenting the war, alongside questions of access, trust, financing, and responsibility towards those being filmed.

The English-language session takes place **today from 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM in the Forum Room**.



Meet Yousry Nasrallah

Egyptian filmmaker **Yousry Nasrallah** reflects on his evolving cinematic language in a masterclass today, **October 20th, from 3:00 to 4:30 PM at CineGouna Theater**. Moderated by **Ahmed Amer**, the session draws on films like *Summer Thefts*, *Mercedes*, and *Brooks*, *Meadows* and *Lovely Faces* to explore **Nasrallah's** approach to writing, directing, working with actors, and taking creative risks.



GFF Hangout at Mistiq

Back once again by popular demand, and now a festival staple, the **GFF Hangout** brings festival guests together every evening at **Mistiq**, offering a relaxed space to unwind after a full day of screenings, catch up with friends, and continue conversations beyond the cinema.

Last night's gathering featured a DJ set by **Lydie the Djette**, a French DJ with **10 years** of experience behind the decks. Her open-format set brought together **hip-hop**, **R&B**, **Afrobeats**, **dancehall**, **amapiano**, and **funk**, mixing sounds and rhythms from different cultures. With no dress code or formalities, the daily event offers festivalgoers a casual way to end their day at **GFF**.

Investing in Stories: Financing the Future of Film

Written by Farida Galalf

What makes a film worth investing in? This question was at the heart of **Investing in Stories: Financing the Future of Film**, a CineGouna Forum panel held yesterday. Moderated by producer **Sherif Fathy**, the discussion brought together filmmakers **Shahinaz Akkad**, **Andrea Iervolino**, **Gamal Guemeih**, and **Ahmed Hamouda**. The panel explored how producers

and investors assess projects, considering not only the strength of a story but also financing, creative teams, and audience expectations, while preserving filmmakers' original visions. The discussion also highlighted the importance of investment in supporting emerging talent and bringing new stories to the screen, alongside the practical challenges of securing financing, finding investors, and turning promising ideas into completed films.



Challenging the Western Gaze



Written by Nada Moustafa

Outside the Expected Frame, a CineGouna Forum panel held yesterday, discussed the pressure on Arab filmmakers to meet Western expectations while balancing artistic authenticity with commercial success. Moderated by Head of CineGouna Forum **Ahmed Amer**, the session brought together director **Karim El-Shennawy**, **Jessica Khoury**, and **Robyn Citizen**, the Director of Programming and Platform Lead at the Toronto International Film Festival. Discussing his film *Daye*, **El-Shennawy** spoke about finding a middle ground between commercial and arthouse cinema, balancing audience appeal with artistic authenticity. **Khoury** stressed the importance of authentic storytelling despite growing financing challenges. "We somehow wait for the approval of the West," she said, questioning the pressure on Arab filmmakers to meet international expectations. Citizen then challenged assumptions about what audiences want to see. "We underestimate the intelligence of audiences sometimes," she noted, emphasizing the importance of diversity in festival programmings.

Who Gets to Make the Next Short?

Written by Sarah Azer

From developing an idea to securing funding and finding an audience, making a short film comes with its own set of challenges. These were the focal points of yesterday's **CineGouna Forum panel, Who Gets to Make the Next Short?**, featuring filmmakers **Asja Krsmanovic**, **Mohamed Taymour**, and **Jad Chahine**, and moderated by **Amra Bakšić Čamo**.

The panel explored the journey of short films from initial development to production and distribution, addressing the difficulties young filmmakers face in gaining recognition and finding platforms for their work. Speakers also discussed short films as a space for creative experimentation, where emerging filmmakers can develop their storytelling approaches and artistic identities.

The conversation highlighted the importance of collaboration, industry connections, and knowledge sharing in helping new filmmakers navigate the industry and bring their projects to the screen.



Producing Against the Odds

Written by Bishoy Emad

As part of the fourth day of the **ninth GFF**, the festival hosted a panel titled '**Producing Against the Odds**,' exploring the challenges facing independent film producers in Egypt, from rising production costs and limited funding to the difficulties of reaching audiences. The panel featured filmmakers **Soleil Gharbieh**, **Mark Lotfy**, **Mai Odeh**, and **Safie Eldeen Mahmoud**, and was moderated by **Rasha Hosny**.

The discussion examined the growing economic pressures on independent productions, increasing competition for funding and support, and the need to develop more flexible and sustainable production models. Speakers highlighted the importance of building new partnerships, managing budgets effectively, and exploring alternative funding opportunities for film projects. The conversation also addressed the challenges films face after

production, emphasizing that completing a film does not necessarily guarantee that it will reach its intended audience. Limited screening opportunities, distribution challenges, and the difficulty of building a consistent audience remain key obstacles for independent filmmakers.





Muhammad Mustapha, Director of *Big Boys Don't Cry*: I Wanted the Camera to Convey My Own Gaze

Written by Nahed Nasr

"Having the world premiere of *Big Boys Don't Cry* at the GFF feels like coming full circle. I pitched the project here at CineGouna in 2020, and now, **six years later**, I'm returning with a finished film. It's very fulfilling. I still find it difficult to introduce myself as a filmmaker because it took me so long to finish the film. Maybe after the screening, I'll feel more confident calling myself a director. We'll see."

How did *Big Boys Don't Cry* begin? What initially drew you to this world and inspired you to make a film about it?

I've always been fascinated by male-dominated spaces and power dynamics between men. For me, filmmaking is also an excuse to spend time with people I wouldn't normally meet and enter worlds I wouldn't otherwise have access to. The camera is my key to those worlds.

But why was I so fascinated by this particular world? I honestly didn't know. Making the film was my way of understanding my attraction to these hypermasculine clichés and exaggerated performances of masculinity. Maybe if I had known the answer from the beginning, I wouldn't have made the film.

The film explores different perceptions of masculinity, questioning both how men see themselves and how the camera represents them. Which of these layers was most central to you?

Men are constantly told to look strong, hide their weaknesses

and vulnerabilities, and maintain a tough exterior. Again, images, performances, acting. What is visible and what is concealed, and the performativity of gender; these were my entry points into masculinity and the central theme of the film.

Initially, I wanted to make an observational character study. But whenever a camera is introduced into "reality," that reality changes. People begin to perform in front of it. And here I was making a film about gender as performance, with men who literally perform their masculinity for a living.

Simply observing them was not enough. That is why I didn't want to hide the camera or pretend it wasn't there. I wanted its physical presence to reflect my position toward the characters. Through handheld camerawork, voyeurism, digital zooms, and other techniques, I wanted the camera to convey not the reality of that world, which I knew was impossible, but my own gaze.

The film celebrates the beauty of the male body while revealing the harsh economic realities behind it. How central was this contrast to your vision?

From the beginning, I was aware of how these men are often reduced to their bodies, which is unusual because when we think of objectification, we tend to think of women. Objectifying these men was the last thing I wanted to do.

At the same time, I'm a fan of bodybuilding. There is poetry in sculpting bodies through pain, and the result has its own beauty. But in admiring that beauty, I was also objectifying them. That was the paradox. I wanted to walk the line between fascination, admiration, and objectification.

Your protagonists embody exaggerated ideals of masculinity, while you also confront expectations of what it means to be a man. How do you see the relationship between the body, masculinity, and self-image?

I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, but I was a nerd who went to medical school and later studied cinema. In my neighborhood, I was seen as soft or inadequate in fulfilling the masculine role. But in medical school, I was seen as loud and aggressive. That's how I came to understand that becoming a man is a performance that depends on context.

My research began as an anthropological study rather than a film project. When I realised I shared this experience of context-dependent masculinity with the men I was studying, I thought, okay, there's a film here that I can make.

How did making this film change your perceptions of these men and affect you personally?

In terms of empathy, I think it was there from day one. I can't imagine how a documentary could be made without it. I found beauty in sculpted bodies and notions of friendship and brotherhood worth embracing. I also learned that these bodies are not abstract aesthetic forms, but deeply rooted in a socioeconomic context.

But if you want the honest answer, I gained 15 kilograms while making this film, and now I wrestle four days a week. The film literally took a toll on my body.



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These bodies are not abstract aesthetic forms, but deeply rooted in a socioeconomic context

HAYAT ALJOWAILY

Head of CineGouna Emerge

MAKING ROOM FOR NEW TALENT

How has CineGouna Emerge evolved since its launch in 2023, and what have been the key changes in its support for emerging film professionals?

I'm proud to say this is the first year all **150** participants are fully funded and staying in **El Gouna**. We try to enrich the program each year, and this year we're introducing workshops, one-on-one sessions, and peer-to-peer sessions for the first time.

Although **Emerge** is still focused on access, it's also becoming more and more about talent and career development, as reflected in the number and quality of applications we receive.

With over 1,000 applications this year, what does Emerge's growing popularity reveal about young film professionals, and how have applicants' profiles changed?

I think it shows there's a real hunger for programs like **Emerge**. The number of applications reflects the program's growing reputation, much of it driven by word of mouth from alumni who have benefited professionally.

We're seeing more applicants from the diaspora, the wider region, and Africa, alongside participants from across Egypt. More applicants are also interested in the program's professional value rather than just its financial support. The large number of first-time applicants shows that we're reaching people who haven't previously engaged with the festival.

With so many applications and limited places, what are the main selection challenges, and how do you balance talent, potential, diversity, and professional development needs?

The selection process is always heartbreaking. I wish we could select all these amazing talents!

But we have a lovely review committee in place, made up of young talents themselves, and what we look at in applications is a mix of things: The applicant's potential (how much we think they can grow), their motivation (how much they seem to want the opportunity), and the benefit (how much we think this opportunity will actually support them).

Then we also look at factors like refugee or migrant backgrounds, financial need, and whether someone comes from a governorate outside of Cairo, to ensure equity and fairness for underrepresented communities.

What inspired the new Meet the Experts Podcast, and could it be a step toward making Emerge's resources accessible beyond the festival?

The idea came out of conversations with one of our lovely partners, the **DROSOS Foundation**. We wanted to find a



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“I hope Emerge can grow from a one-week program into a community that's active all year round”

way to make some of the benefits of **Emerge** accessible to as many people as possible, and that's how the podcast idea was born.

We're very excited that it's launched, and the publication that goes with it will be launching on **October 16th**, as well.

How does bringing together professionals from different creative fields shape Emerge, and what collaborations have emerged from this diversity?

At **Emerge**, we believe supporting the next generation means supporting all film professionals, not just directors, writers, and actors, but also technicians, programmers, critics, and academics. Bringing these different talents together helps build a stronger industry and creates opportunities for collaboration. We've already seen directors connect with producers and actors for new projects, and critics write about fellow participants' films.

How do you follow Emerge participants' careers after the festival, and which achievements or collaborations among alumni stand out?

We strive to keep the spirit of the **Emerge** community alive year-round through our WhatsApp community, where we share new opportunities and participants support each other. We also introduce them to industry leaders and help them land internships, projects, or roles in films. We're adding exchange programs

and prizes that offer year-round support. This year, **two alumni** attended **Talents Durban**, while others will benefit from the **Two-Five Program**, training at **3alam Tany**, grants from the **Institut Français**, and scholarships from **ESLSCA**.

How have partnerships shaped Emerge?

Our partners are really at the heart of **Emerge**. They're the reason we can fully fund all **150** participants this year, and they've helped shape the program well beyond the festival week. Each partner brings its own expertise and network, from scholarships and training to grants and exchange programs.

Looking ahead to the GFF's tenth edition, what are your plans for Emerge, and could it evolve into a year-round platform for professional development and collaboration?

I'd love to keep building the program and supporting our alumni year-round through more partnerships. I also want to expand regionally, welcoming more participants from across the Arab World and Africa, and perhaps exchange participants from abroad.

As the **GFF** approaches its **tenth edition** and a new **decade**, I hope **Emerge** can grow with it: From a program people attend for one week in October into a community they belong to all year round.

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“More applicants are interested in the program's professional value rather than just its financial support”

