

EL GOUNA FILM FESTIVAL

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EL GOUNA STAR

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GF

A SAFE EXIT & A GRAND ENTRANCE!

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Today

Celebrating Joanna Hogg's Cinema



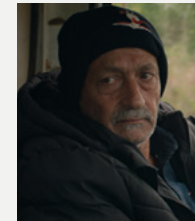
One of the most distinctive voices in contemporary British cinema, **Joanna Hogg** takes center stage at the **GFF** today. The acclaimed writer-director and **President of the ninth edition's Feature Narrative Competition** Jury joins the festival's Artistic Director, **Andrew Mohsen**, for a special masterclass.

From *Unrelated* and *Archipelago* to *The Souvenir* and *The Eternal Daughter*, **Hogg** has earned international acclaim for her deeply personal vision and remarkable ability to transform intimate experiences into cinema. **Joanna Hogg: Life into Film** takes place today, from **1:00 to 2:30 PM** at **CineGouna Theater**.

Meet the Filmmaker

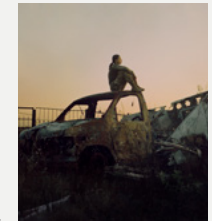
PIPES

Director:
Karim Kassem
Actor:
Ghassan Saad
Sea Cinema 1
4:00 PM



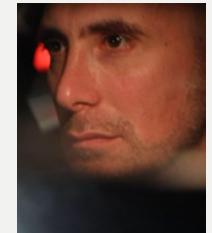
MARIINKA

Director:
Pieter-Jan De Pue
Producer:
Yelyzaveta Atanova
Sea Cinema 2
2:15 PM



WHO KILLED ALEX ODEH?

Director:
William Lafi Youmans
Protagonist:
Helena Odeh
Sea Cinema 2
12:00 PM



Cannes Highlights at GFF Tonight

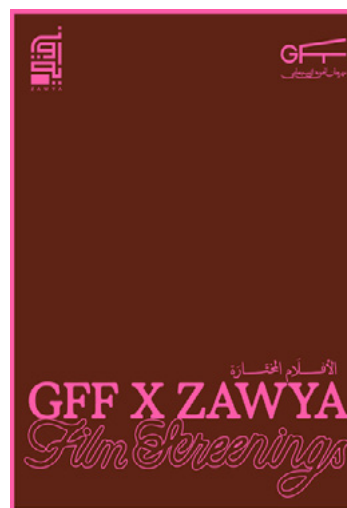
Missed them the first time? Tonight is your second chance to catch two major winners from this year's **Cannes Film Festival**! *All of a Sudden* – directed by the Oscar-winning Japanese filmmaker **Ryusuke Hamaguchi** and winner of the **Best Actress Award**, shared by **Virginie Efira** and **Tao Okamoto** – is screening **5:00 PM** at **Audimax (Manara School)**. Later, **Cristian Mungiu's** *Fjord*, winner of the **Palme d'Or**, screens **9:00 PM** at the same venue. Two acclaimed filmmakers, two films worth catching on the big screen.



GFF X Zawya

Now in its **fourth consecutive year**, the **GFF** is continuing its collaboration with Cairo's **Zawya Cinema**, with **seven films** from the festival's lineup set to screen at the independent cinema **from October 18th to the 24th**, giving Cairene audiences a chance to experience festival highlights while the festival continues in **El Gouna**.

The program features *Fatherland*, *American Doctor*, *Hold Onto Me*, *Mariinka*, *Pipes*, *Rose*, and *Citizen Osama*, extending the festival's reach beyond **El Gouna** and bringing its films to a wider audience in the capital.



Sawiris Screenplay Showcase

Four Egyptian feature film projects will be presented to producers and industry professionals today, as the **Sawiris Cultural Screenplay Award Showcase Program** concludes at **CineGouna Funding**.

Organized in collaboration with the **Sawiris Foundation for Social Development**, the **GFF**, and **CineGouna Funding**, the program has supported the projects through script development and pitching preparation under the guidance of **Sard – Mariam Naoum**.

The selected projects are *Attendance Sheet* by **Shaimaa Gohar**, *They Said I Can't Make This Film* by **Sondos Shabayek**, *Court of Crows* by **Mohamed El Samman**, and *The Land Beyond* by **Nadine Salib** and **Abdullah Al-Ghali**.



Kentucky Gaza and More

From **Cannes** and **Berlin** to **Clermont-Ferrand**, the **GFF's Short Film Competition Program 3** features acclaimed films from the international festival circuit. **Roddy Dextre's** *Nobody Knows the World* received a **Special Mention** at the **Berlinale**, while **Omar Rammal's** *Kentucky Gaza* screened at **Clermont-Ferrand**. **Anders Davidssen's** *Stolen Memories* won **Best Screenplay** at the **Norwegian Short Film Festival**, **Tamara Todorovic's** *Nobody Said Anything* screened at **Cannes**, and **Susa Monteiro's** *Vagabond* was featured at the **Riga International Film Festival**.

Yousry Nasrallah: Stories Begin with Emotion

Written by Bishoy Emad

For **Yousry Nasrallah**, cinema begins with people, their emotions, their struggles, and the places they inhabit or lose. During his masterclass yesterday, **A Cinema of Reinvention**, the acclaimed Egyptian director reflected on the personal experiences and creative instincts that have shaped his distinctive approach to filmmaking.

Nasrallah recalled his early fascination with the people behind the camera and his decision to leave the film institute, where technical instruction offered little experience of making a complete film. He also spoke about spending four formative years in Beirut – an experience that changed how he saw the world.

The relationship between people and

place emerged as a recurring theme. “There is no such thing as a place that is truly yours; anyone can take anything away from you,” he said, explaining how displacement informs characters who lose their sense of belonging and struggle to create worlds of their own.

For **Nasrallah**, a film often begins with a scene that moves him emotionally, gradually developing around marginalized characters searching for purpose. Ideas alone, he emphasized, cannot sustain cinema without genuine feeling.

Discussing his work with actors, he stressed that memorable performances are never accidental. They grow out of close collaboration, careful attention to detail, and a shared understanding of the characters and their emotions.



Bearing Witness: American Doctor in Focus



Written by Sarah Samy

How do you document a war as it unfolds, with filmmakers working across continents? Yesterday, director and producer **Poh Si Teng** and producer **Reem Haddad** discussed the creative and ethical challenges behind *American Doctor*, in a panel moderated by **Amra Bakšić Čamo**.

After 22 years in the industry, **Poh** stepped into directing to tell the story from her own perspective. Choosing three American doctors working in Gaza was a deliberate decision to reach audiences who might otherwise dismiss the film's subject. “If we're going to tell a story, we're going to tell it from our position in the US,” she explained.

Haddad reflected on her experience at **Al Jazeera**, noting that coverage of Palestine often reached audiences already familiar with the issue. *American Doctor*, however, sought to engage viewers in the US and the West.

Producing the documentary remotely brought considerable challenges. The team in Gaza faced danger and displacement, while footage was reviewed daily as events unfolded. Securing financing was equally difficult, with traditional funders initially hesitant.

The discussion also addressed the responsibility of depicting violence without exploiting suffering. The filmmakers emphasized amplifying Palestinian healthcare workers' voices while remaining faithful to the realities they documented.

Breaking the Divide: Festivals and Audiences

Written by Farida Galal

Can a film succeed at festivals while connecting with wider audiences? Directors **Khaled Mansour** and **Ayten Amin** explored this question in a panel titled ‘**Breaking the Divide**,’ moderated by Head of CineGouna Funding **Ahmed Shawky**.

Amin argued that reaching audiences does not mean sacrificing artistic identity. “A film that reaches a wide audience does not necessarily have to be commercial; there is room for films that appeal to audiences while offering a distinct artistic vision.” She cited *Sabea Gar* as an example of how relatable stories can resonate despite limited production resources.

Mansour emphasized the importance of taking creative risks, recalling how his film *Seeking Haven for Mr. Rambo* reached the **Venice International Film Festival** despite early doubts. “Experimenting with new ideas takes courage, but it opens the door to new possibilities in cinema,” he said.

The discussion also addressed rising production costs, financing challenges, and the need for partners willing to support unconventional projects. Both filmmakers stressed the importance of challenging assumptions about audience preferences and finding ways to combine artistic ambition with broader appeal.





Yassine El Idrissi, Director of *Halima*: It is About Her Struggles and Moral Questions

Written by Nahed Nasr

"CineGouna has been part of *Halima*'s journey from the beginning. It was the first major platform to select the film at an early stage, and that gave us a real boost. The visibility the film gained here was equally valuable. Now we are returning with the finished film for its **MENA premiere**. In a way, it feels like coming back to where an important part of the journey began, and I'm very happy to share the finished film with the **GFF's** audience."

Why was *Halima* the story you wanted to tell in your first feature?

The subject came from my experience as a photojournalist. While reporting on people working in cannabis fields, I wondered why we didn't have more films exploring their lives from a human perspective. Changes to Morocco's legal framework around medical cannabis made the subject more urgent, but I wasn't interested in making a film simply about cannabis or the law. I wanted to explore the people, their choices, struggles, and moral questions.

What did you see in Khadija Amari that reminded you of Halima? And how did you work together to build the character?

Physically, **Khadija** was very close to the Halima I had imagined. She has roots in the Rif region, where the story takes place, and something in her face, presence, and energy immediately made me see the character in her.

But I also needed an actress who could carry the film's emotional weight. We visited **Khadija** in

Marrakech and stayed nearby for several days. I wanted her to study the character, embody her presence, and see how she interacts with the world. She did an extraordinary job, and Halima simply could not have worked without an actress of her strength.

The locations are among the film's most striking elements. How did you find the houses, and were they adapted for the film?

With our budget, building sets was simply not possible. We had to find existing houses close to what I had imagined for the film and adapt them with very limited means.

I wanted an isolated house that reflected Halima's solitude and the hidden world she lives in. In Morocco, most rural houses are part of a village or surrounded by others, so finding that isolation wasn't easy.

We travelled around Morocco for several months searching for the two main locations, one in the mountains and the other by the sea. We made only the necessary changes, repairing or removing certain elements.

How did you approach the conflict between Halima's beliefs and her need to survive without judging her choices?

We all face choices between what we believe is right and what we feel is necessary to survive. For me, this tension is at the heart of human drama. I didn't want to

judge Halima or justify her choices, but to understand the difficult space between her beliefs, her circumstances, and her need to survive. Sometimes life puts us in situations where there is no completely right choice, and I think that is where the real drama begins.

What made music and sound essential elements in Halima's world?

Part of my maturity as a filmmaker is that I've started writing music and sound into the script itself, to get a feeling for the film's atmosphere before making it.

With our sound designer, **Rachad Kardouh**, we decided that the radio, especially the ham radio, should be a natural part of Halima's life. Living almost alone, cut off from the outside world, the radio becomes one of her connections to it, almost like a presence in the house.

Halima premiered at Shanghai, where you won Best Director and Khadija Amari Best Actress. Did the response of the Chinese audience surprise you?

I was curious about how the Chinese audience would react to a film so deeply rooted in the culture and way of life of the Rif. I wondered whether the humor and small details would connect with them.

There was a funny moment I was particularly waiting for, and when the audience laughed exactly where I had hoped, I felt a real sense of relief; the feeling had travelled. Despite the cultural differences, they understood the moment and connected with the characters.

It showed me that a story can be very local and specific while still communicating something universal.

I needed an actress who could carry the film's emotional weight



“I didn't want to judge Halima or justify her choices, but to understand the difficult space between her beliefs

Ahmed Hassouna,

Director of *Citizen Osama*:

The Human Being Behind the Camera

Written by Nahed Nasr

"Having *Citizen Osama*'s MENA premiere at GFF means a lot to me because the region is closely connected to the story the film tells and to Arab audiences who have followed what has been happening in Gaza. I hope the film reaches Arab audiences and allows them to see Osama and Palestinians in Gaza beyond the daily images and news reports."

How was the film received by audiences and critics at the Venice Film Festival, and what stood out to you most in the reactions to it?

The reception in **Venice** was a powerful experience for me, combining pride, sadness, and joy. I was proud to represent Palestine with a film about Gaza, while carrying a tragic story I had personally lived through.

What stood out most was that many people saw the film as more than a story about war. They connected with **Osama** as a human being, a father, a husband, and a journalist living through this experience.

***Citizen Osama* highlights the vital role of journalists in documenting Gaza. Why did you choose to focus on the journalist rather than what he documents?**

I wanted to show the human being behind the camera. **Osama** is not only a journalist, but also an average citizen who became a first-time father during the war.

While many journalists had been displaced from Northern Gaza, **Osama** was among the few who stayed and continued working, putting himself and his family at risk, especially as journalists were being directly targeted. Some civilians even feared standing near journalists for that reason.

Through **Osama**, I wanted to show not



only what a journalist sees, but also the human cost of continuing their work.

The film relies on images to tell its story. How did you develop its visual language and decide what to include or exclude, both during filming and in the edit?

We didn't have a fixed script. The war itself shaped the film's structure. We lived through events and decided what we could film and when. Sometimes I filmed **Osama**, and sometimes he filmed himself when I wasn't there.

The visual language emerged directly from reality, without staging or recreating scenes. Everything in the film comes from experiences we lived through. In the edit, I tried to build a coherent human story while allowing the images to speak for themselves.

You were filming under bombardment while documenting a journalist working under the same conditions. How did this affect the filmmaking process?

The danger was part of the filmmaking process itself. We were not observing the war from outside; we were living through it. One of our camera crew members, **Hatem Salmi**, was injured while filming. Others had to leave or stop working to support their families.

At one point, a serious threat near my home forced me to evacuate my family while I was away. My only

concern was getting them to safety. I didn't even think about the footage stored at home until they had been evacuated. The house next door was then bombed, but when I returned, I found the footage intact.

I also stopped filming for a period after my brother was killed. We could never follow a normal production schedule. The war determined when we could film and when we had to stop.

Osama documents Gaza through journalism, while you document his experience through cinema. What can filmmaking convey that journalistic images cannot?

I studied journalism and worked in the field, but over time I realized that journalism reports what is happening, while cinema can stop and look at the human being experiencing it. News stories are quickly replaced, but a film can preserve memory and remain a witness to human experience.

Osama is a close friend of yours. How did your friendship affect the distance you would normally maintain as a filmmaker from the person you are filming?

The fact that **Osama** is a close friend made our relationship during filming different. I wasn't dealing with a stranger I had met solely for the purpose of making a film. I knew him, his family, and his life.

There were moments when it felt natural to put the camera down and simply be his friend, especially when what was happening mattered more than filming itself.

For me, that is also part of a filmmaker's responsibility: Knowing when to film and when to stop, and simply be there as a human being for the person in front of you.

“The war determined when we could film and when we had to stop”

“There were moments when it felt natural to put the camera down and simply be his friend”



