



Mostafa Abdel Aty

Meeting the challenge

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this year's
edition, will be
held in a space
of 10,740 square
meters.

One of the most anticipated events this year will be the inauguration of Gouna Conference and Culture Center (GCCC), which will take place in conjunction with the opening of the 4th edition of El Gouna Film Festival.

The construction of the center, a brainchild of Samih Sawiris, founder of Orascom Development Holding and El Gouna, started in 2019. The center will be the new home of

the festival and will host the opening and closing ceremonies; the traditional “Cinema in Concert” event; in addition to the red carpet evenings, other premieres and film-related events that were previously held at the Marina Theater.

The center, although ready for use now, will be complete in all aspects in 2021. It is situated in the vicinity of other festival venues, including the Technical University

(TU Berlin) and the Sea Cinemas. It also houses an opera hall that can accommodate an orchestra of 120 musicians, as well as 600 seats for the audience. The opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the Gala screenings of the 4th edition of GFF, will take place at the central square (The Plaza) that can accommodate up to 1,400 people.



El Gouna Film Festival: The Culture of Achieving Dreams

Holding El Gouna Film Festival this year will not only represent the success of the powerful institution that GFF has grown to be from one edition to the next, but it will also render it a model for the artistic and cultural events that are scheduled to be held in the region, including film festivals. "The Culture of Dreams" is the slogan of the 4th edition of GFF, reflecting the ability to achieve dreams with the power of persistence, regardless of the obstacles.

According to GFF Founder, Engineer Naguib Sawiris, the 4th edition of the festival constitutes a strong desire to challenge the pandemic. He stated: "We don't want to stop the wheel. Egypt needs to open its doors for tourists from all around the world; the greatest source of income for this country. So we decided to take the necessary precautions and organize the festival this year. I think we can call GFF the festival of determination, because the whole world is afraid. Disease spreads depression, but people yearn for joy."

As for Engineer Samih Sawiris, Founder of El Gouna, he believed that the difficulty this year lay within striking a balance between organizing the festival and maintaining the necessary precautionary measures. "I was a firm believer that as long as the Venice and San Sebastian film festivals didn't cancel their editions this year, we could do the same thing," he explained, adding: "We have received

the attendance confirmation of about 200 international personalities; these are the international ambassadors of our festival."

Intishal Al Timimi, Festival Director, considers El Gouna Film Festival the first Arab initiative supporting the idea that life must go on. He commented, "The most important decision we made this year was to go ahead with the festival. There are a lot of complicated matters that make holding the 4th edition a very significant victory in and of itself."

According to Artistic Director, Amir Ramses, the success of GFF will be the first step on the way to adaptation, for it will inspire a sense of security to other film festivals in the region. "We cannot just stay at home waiting for it to end. This could turn into an ice age hibernation that would lead to extinction," he said.

Co-Founder and COO, Bushra Rozza, said

that GFF--with its important annual event, CineGouna Platform--continues to serve as a meeting point for filmmakers from around the world and their Arab counterparts.

Engineer Omar El Hamamsy, CEO of Orascom Development Holding, confirmed that the top priority this year is the health and safety of the festival employees, workers and guests throughout the duration of activities. In this regard, all the required safety measures are to be taken in the newly established Gouna Conference and Culture Center. "At Orascom, we support innovation in all fields, be it cinema or entrepreneurship," he added.

As for Co-founder and Executive Advisor, Amr Mansi, he stated that the festival has become an important destination for all Arab filmmakers, adding that: "GFF has become a pioneer in the regional film industry, and we still have the support of our sponsors despite all challenges."

GFF General Coordinator, Amal El Masry, preferred to tackle the positive side of the crisis, saying: "The existing challenges forced us to rethink all aspects of the festival. They actually accelerated the ongoing improvement process of GFF."

Honorary Stars on the Opening Stage



Globally renowned filmmakers will be welcomed on the opening ceremony stage as the recipients of the 2020 El Gouna Film Festival's Career Achievement Awards. This year's honorees include acclaimed Egyptian product designer, Onsi Abu Seif, who contributed to some of the most important Egyptian films of all time, directed by renowned film directors from different generations, starting from the late 1960s and until this day.

Prominent French actor of Moroccan descent, Saïd Taghmaoui, is also a recipient of this year's award. In addition to his memorable appearances on the silver screen, Taghmaoui's television portfolio

includes notable roles in world-famous series. Taghmaoui will receive the El Gouna Film Festival Omar Sharif Award.

Renowned French actor Gérard Depardieu will also be honored at the opening ceremony, granted the GFF 2020 Career Achievement Award. Depardieu is a prolific actor who has appeared in around 240 films, and known to be the actor most nominated for the French César Awards.

The fourth recipient of the GFF 2020 Career Achievement Award is established Egyptian actor Khaled El Sawy, whose name shone in the world of Arab cinema, thanks to his performances in many paramount cinematic works. El Sawy will receive his award at the closing ceremony, to be held on October 30.

Opening Film

In the presence of its cast and crew, the 4th edition of GFF opens with a screening of *The Man Who Sold His Skin*, directed by renowned Tunisian filmmaker, Kaouther Ben Hania. The screening represents the MENA premiere of the film, which was an Official Selection at the 77th Venice International Film Festival, where it had its world premiere. While the film won the Edipo Re Inclusion Award, actor Yahya Mahayni

received the Orizzonti Award for Best Actor.

The Man Who Sold His Skin was among the winning CineGouna SpringBoard projects in development at the 2nd edition of GFF.

The film will be screened at the Festival Plaza and the Audimax (TU Berlin) at 8:00 p.m. for accredited guests. The public screening of the film will take place on October 24, 25 and 27.



🌟 Tomorrow

Red Carpet

Egyptian film star Ahmed Malek will walk the red carpet on Saturday, October 24 for the MENA premiere of his film, *The Furnace*, by Australian director Roderick MacKay. The film is Malek's first participation in an international production, where he plays the role of Hanif, a young Afghan cameleer who is led away from his friendship with the local Aboriginal people by a shifty gold prospector.

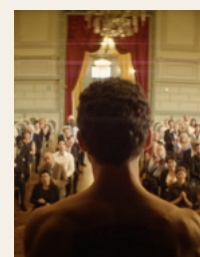
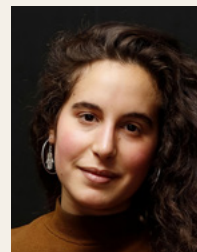
The Furnace, part of GFF's Feature Narrative Competition, premiered in the Orizzonti section of the 77th Venice International Film Festival. The screening of the film will take place at 6:30 p.m. at the Plaza.



🌟 Meet the filmmaker

Their Algeria

Doc. Competition
Guest (s) are attending
Director
Lina Soualem
Sea Cinema 2
3:30 p.m



The Man Who Sold His Skin

Narrative Competition
Guest (s) are attending
Composer:
Amine Bouhafa
TUB
3:00 p.m

I Never Cry
Out of Competition
Guest (s) are attending
Actress:
Zofia Stafiej
Sea Cinema 3
8:45 p.m



Stay Safe

To ensure the safety and security of our guests, as well as the proper implementation of social distancing, El Gouna Film Festival in its 4th edition has put some important procedures in place. For example, the number of the opening and closing ceremony invitees has been reduced.

The center yard--where the opening ceremony takes place--is completely open. In addition, the open air theater is complete with four entrances in order to avoid queues. On the other hand, social distancing measures were taken into consideration while designing **Gouna Conference and Culture Center** for this year's edition, which will be held in a space of 10,740 square meters, and a distancing space of 1 meter

is being maintained between seats. In contrast, previous editions were held in an area measuring 6,200 square meters. The red carpet area that has been increased to 30 meters.

Additionally, body temperatures will be measured at all entrances. Individuals with temperatures exceeding 37.8°C/100°F will not be allowed entry and immediately transferred to the mobile clinic or to El Gouna Hospital if they develop other symptoms. There will also be a 90-minute gap between events, during which the halls and spaces will be thoroughly disinfected and sterilized. Masks will have to be used in all external/internal areas when distancing is not possible or is difficult.





Onsi Abou Seif: The new generation is my window to the future

Nahed Nasr

Onsi Abu Seif started his career as a distinguished production designer just one year after his graduation from the Higher Institute of Cinema in the late 1960s. Since then, Abu Seif continued to be an iconic artist of Arab cinema. As one of the recipients of El Gouna Film Festival's Career Achievement Awards, he speaks to El Gouna Star about his career, his vision, and his connection to different generations of talented filmmakers of Egyptian cinema.

Your name is linked to some of the most important films in the Egyptian cinema... would you like to tell us more about that?

If I am of any significance, it is because of the important films in which I have worked with very distinguished film directors. I graduated from the Higher Institute of Cinema in 1967, only one year after my graduation, I was invited by the renowned late film director Tawfiq Saleh (1926 - 2013) to work on his film, *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* (1970) as a production designer, and not as an assistant. It was a big deal for me. The film put me in a certain status with certain standards in my career, something I would not compromise until today.

How was it that Tawfiq Saleh believed so much in you, in spite of you being a fresh graduate?

He liked the presentation of my graduation project, it was a series of small sketches for a bloody scene from *Othello*. I drew a detailed storyboard of the scene where betrayal and slaughter turned the bedroom into a grave, and this was represented in a gloomy mood and a rather gothic style in my sketches. He liked how expressive and reflective my design choices were, and said, "You have a very interesting cinematic vision." That was how he chose me for his film.

But before that, you worked on Shadi Abdel Salam's masterpiece *The Mummy* (1969). How did your connection with Abdel Salam begin?

Such a great memory! Shadi was my professor at the Higher Institute of Cinema. I owe him everything I have as a production designer. He is the reason behind my journey and my existence on the artistic map. He selected me to join his group of students at his office during my second year in the institute, only to meet the great production designer Salah Marei, one of Shadi's early students. That was how I became a production designer assistant

on *The Mummy*. Actually, I was the fourth assistant, but I cherish it as the most precious experience I have ever had.

What makes you choose to work on a certain film?

It starts with the screenplay and the level of involvement of the location as part of the drama. Production design in cinema is part of the narrative, rather than an aesthetic factor, and designers should understand the characters, their backstory, and their context. This was one of the issues between me and the legend Youssef Chahine. I worked with him in *Adieu Bonaparte* (1985), and *Alexandria: Again and Forever* (1989). When I started working with him, everyone told me that reading the screenplay is not allowed with Chahine. It took us some time to reach a common ground, but at the end of the day, he was a creative film director who believed that cinema is a collective work, where every input is precious. For example, in *Adieu Bonaparte*, he welcomed my input in one of the important scenes where the screenplay had previously had some historical mistakes in terms of the Islamic architecture. He simply agreed to change it, and that is the mutual respect and understanding that should exist between the director and his film crew. Ninety percent of the film directors I worked with were of that type. I also don't like to repeat myself, or to be put in a certain frame as a production designer. I never accept the same project twice. For example, after *Kit Kat* (1991) by Daoud Abdel Sayed where I designed an authentic Egyptian alley from scratch, I received a lot of screenplays that are based on building an alley, but refused all of them. To me, every film should be a new experience; an unrepeatable journey of experimentation.

You worked on 8 out of 9 narrative films by Daoud Abdel Sayed, how did you find it a different experience in each film?

That was the most interesting and brilliant part of working with Abdel Sayed. He never puts himself in a box and he never repeats himself. Working with him, each time feels different, like we are leading a new and exciting journey. You can't say that *Kit Kat* (1991) has anything to do with *Messages From the Sea* (2010), *Extraordinary Abilities* (2015) or *Land of Fear* (2000), and so on. Another serving aspect was that we came to a very strong point of mutual understanding. I love all the films I worked on with Daoud, but the most memorable film for me is *Land of Fear*, because none of its locations were built as sets, but rather real places that I developed to fit with the drama. It was a unique experience, and I am proud to have been a part of it.

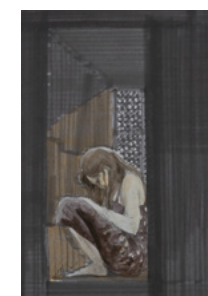
You worked with many of the Egyptian New Realism film directors, not only Daoud Abdel Sayed, but also Mohamed Khan and Khairy Beshara, how were those experiences?

There is a difference between the Italian realism, which also casted its influence on some Egyptian film directors such as Salah Abu Seif (1915 - 1996), and the New Realism which was initiated by 1970s directors such as Khan, Beshara and others, including Daoud. In the New Realism, we don't depend on rough reality, but rather on what I can call a selected reality. We build a set that looks like reality in our minds and memories, and we omit those aspects that could spoil our image about reality. That is why, although the real *Kit Kat* district is still there with its real alleys, we chose to build a full set of these alleys in *Kit Kat* the film. It took over six months and many visits by me and Daoud to observe and to feel the reality, before transferring it the way we want to show it in the film through a designed decor. The same goes to *Sweet Day, Bitter Day* (1988) by Khairy Beshara. And while working on *Dreams of Hind and Camilia* (1988) by Khan, I had to search for the typical location that could look like how the reality was presented in the screenplay.

What I mean is that, New Realism in cinema needs a deep understanding of what it is meant by reality, in reference to the screenplay and how to recreate it in a way that serves the vision of the film director.

You worked with different generations of film directors, from Henry Barakat (1914 - 1997) to Sherif Arafa and Marwan Hamed. How would you describe the difference between the generations?

Like I said, the screenplay is my greatest motivation to work on any film project, not the name of the film director, nor the generation. But also I have to admit that I find it very seductive to work with the younger generation. The new generation of filmmakers have their own fresh visions and philosophies, which—for an old man like me—open a new window to watch the world as it is now, through their eyes. To them, I may be a history book, but to me, they are the future. You need to connect with the new generation if you want to continue working and improving your skills. And yes, there is a difference. For example, a director



from the older generation will locate his characters at the living room for a certain kind of conversation, while a director from the current generation would have the same conversation on top of a mountain because he can relate to the natural energy of such a location and its connection with his character mood. It is a completely different interpretation. I have to say that there are many skilled production designers in today's generation who are doing great work. Even I sometimes can't do it.

What do you think should be the qualities and skills of a good production designer?

The most important thing is to study and to digest the history of world architecture. This is fundamental. In addition, I would advise expanding one's interest in art and music; that is how one boosts one's imagination.

What do you consider the most important films in your career?

I am satisfied with all the films I worked on, and I am also responsible for what I did in all of them. But I am particularly proud of working as a fourth design assistant on Shadi Abdel Salam's *The Mummy*. I am also proud of my work with the legend Youssef Chahine, and sharing, with my generation, the era of the 1970s and the important movement of a new Egyptian cinema. And I am also proud of working with a new generation of ambitious and talented filmmakers.

What is your dream project; a film you are yet to do?

I've always had the dream of working on a film where I can correct all my mistakes, and there are many! I also wish I could have the opportunity to work on a historical movie or a stage performance movie, but those should be granted a proper budget, because

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To a backstage crew member such as a production designer on the stage of the honoraries is an important sign that gives further credibility to the festival



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