

ELGOUNA 
FILM FESTIVAL
مهرجان الجونة السينمائي
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EL GOUNA STAR

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Together we can

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GFF... a New Edition Kicks Off

The 4th edition of El Gouna Film Festival kicked off yesterday in a charming atmosphere at the Festival Plaza in the newly established Gouna Conference and Culture Center (GCCC). It was preceded by the red carpet that witnessed the arrival of esteemed cinema and television stars.

The ceremony began with an inspirational song by Lebanese singer, composer and actor Rami Ayach, which praised the value of life, music and cinema. In a following speech, Ayach expressed his pride of joining the opening of a new edition of GFF, saying: "From the stage of El Gouna Film festival, I announce to the world the victory of life that exists deeply inside us. The life that conquers all the reasons that could make us lose one year from our life. Bravo El Gouna Film Festival, and bravo Sawiris family!"

Renowned Lebanese television presenter Hilda Khalife stated that star Rami Ayach was able to create a beautiful and stirring song in no time. She also expressed that she is proud to be in Egypt—especially at El Gouna Film Festival—where the tough challenge of Covid-19 is met with courage and an ultimate desire to live life to the fullest. She also added that the slogan of GFF, since its first edition, has been Cinema for Humanity, but what humanity has faced this year was beyond the expected. «Here and at this moment, cinema is for and with humanity. Cinema—across all ages—was and will always be the companion of humans.» Khalife also extended her thanks to GFF for the safety measures taken in all aspects of the edition.

On the other hand, the Governor of Red Sea Governorate, Major General Amr Hanafi, said that El Gouna has transformed into the capital of arts in Egypt; and that Art is the

most important tool to fight the culture of terrorism and violence. «Egypt will continue to play its role of enlightening the world as it usually has,» he added.

Engineer Samih Sawiris, founder of El Gouna, thanked the Egyptian government and all the Ministries whose efforts helped make the festival possible. «None of this would have been possible if it weren't for the support of the Ministry of Health,» Sawiris said. He also thanked the El Gouna Film Festival team, and used the event as an opportunity to remember the late Orascom CEO, Khaled Bichara, who passed away earlier this year. Sawiris invited Mrs. Marian Bichara, Khaled Bichara's wife, to the stage to announce a new independent filmmakers award to commemorate his name. «Bichara shared the same ambitions

with those filmmakers; the same passion and enthusiasm to meet and to beat the challenges,» Marian Bichara stated.

British film director Peter Webber was also invited to the stage to deliver the El Gouna Film Festival's Career Achievement Award. This year's recipient was renowned French film star Gérard Depardieu, who expressed his pride to receive such an award from an Egyptian film festival, since to him, Egypt is a great country of civilization where cinema has a great history, home to many renowned film directors such as Youssef Chahine.

Engineer Naguib Sawiris, GFF founder, introduced renowned Egyptian production designer Onsi Abu Seif, another recipient of El Gouna Film Festival's Career Achievement Award. Abu Seif, who said that he was



honored to receive such an award, said: "To have a backstage crew member such as a production designer on the stage of the honoraries is a crucial sign that gives further credibility to the festival." Abu Seif dedicated his award to the prominent late film director, Shadi Abdel Salam, his first teacher and mentor.

Additionally, Egyptian actor Khaled El Nabawy delivered the Omar Sharif award to prominent French actor of Moroccan descent, Said Taghmaoui, who said that Sharif was a hero with special qualities. "He was one of us, a source of inspiration to many aspiring Arab talents," he added.

The opening stage also welcomed mezzo-soprano Farrah El-Dibany who performed a moving rendition of L'Histoire de l'amour in Arabic and French. The piece paid homage to the stars who left us in 2020.



El Gouna Film Festival Director, Intishal Al Timimi, praised the efforts of the GFF team—the group of young Egyptian talents of varying backgrounds, who grew to become experts in their fields—affirming their vital role in the success of the 4th "In spite of all the obstacles, we made it with the valuable collaboration of all team members," he said, before introducing the jury members of GFF's three competitions.

The ceremony was concluded with a dance performance by the renowned Reda Troupe in collaboration with Fabrika band. The choreography included some of the most memorable performances designed by the legendary late dancer and choreographer, Mahmoud Reda, who passed away earlier this year. The performance was introduced by Reda's daughter, Egyptian film star Shereen Reda.



★ Today

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

Feature Documentary
Competition

Guest (s) are attending

Director

Lina Soualem

Sea Cinema 2

3:30 p.m



I Never Cry

Out of Competition

Guest (s) are attending

Actress:

Zofia Stafiej

Sea Cinema 3

8:45 p.m



The Man Who Sold His Skin

Narrative Competition

Guest (s) are attending

Composer:

Amine Bouhafa

TUB

3:00 p.m

Onsi Abou Seif Exhibition

Stemming from El Gouna Film Festival's commitment to celebrating everything related to the art of film—and to shedding light on all cinema artists, today marks the opening of an exhibition of the works of the famous production designer Onsi Abou Seif, the recipient of GFF's Career Achievement Award this year. Abou Seif's valuable contribution has enhanced the value of some of the most prominent Egyptian films across decades.

The exhibition includes treasure troves of set design sketches and layouts for films such as *The Mummy* by Shadi Abdel Salam; *Alexandria: Again* and *Forever* by Youssef Chahine; *Kit Kat* by Daoud Abdel Sayed; *Summer Thefts* by Yousry Nasrallah; and

Date Wine by Radwan El-Kashef. This is in addition to *Dreams of Hind* and *Camelia* by Mohamed Khan, and *Sweet Day*, *Bitter Day* by Khairy Beshara.

In addition to said designs and sketches, the exhibition also showcases video clips from Abou Seif's films, movie posters and awards he has received over the course of his career. Additionally, the exhibition will feature miniature models of some of the iconic pieces made by him. The exhibition is curated by acknowledged designer Karim Mekhtigian.

The Onsi Abou Seif retrospective exhibition will be presented throughout the course of the 4th edition of GFF, held from 24 to 30 October, 2020.



★ Schedule

BAD TALES Sea Cinema 1 2:45 PM	THEIR ALGERIA Sea Cinema 2 3:30 PM	THE FURNACE Festival Plaza 6:30 PM	I NEVER CRY Sea Cinema 3 8:45 PM	TRUE MOTHERS Tik Tok Arena 9:30 PM	Short film program 1 SHAKWA - 14 min INFLUENCER - 18 min MARE NOSTRUM - 16 min I AM AFRAID TO FORGET YOUR FACE - 15 min PEEL - 15 min PLAY SCHENGEN - 15 min
THE MAN WHO SOLD HIS SKIN Audimax (TU Berlin) 3:00 PM	DELETE HISTORY Sea Cinema 3 5:45 PM	DELETE HISTORY Audimax (TU Berlin) 6:30 PM	BAD TALES Grand Cinemas Hurghada 9:15 PM		
ANOTHER ROUND Grand Cinemas Hurghada 3:00 PM	SEPTET: THE STORY OF HONG KONG Grand Cinemas Hurghada 6:00	SEPTET: THE STORY OF HONG KONG Sea Cinema 1 6:30 PM	AND TOMORROW THE ENTIRE WORLD Audimax (TU Berlin) 9:30 PM		
SPRING BLOSSOM Sea Cinema 3 3:15 PM	IRRADIATED Sea Cinema 2 6:15 PM	ANOTHER ROUND Tik Tok Arena 6:30 PM	NEVER GONNA SNOW AGAIN Sea Cinema 1 9:30 PM		

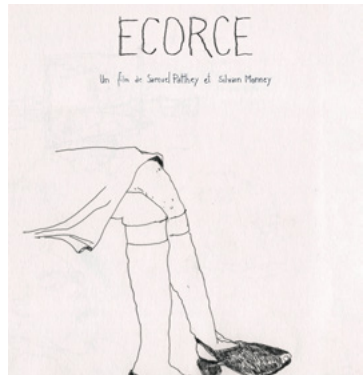
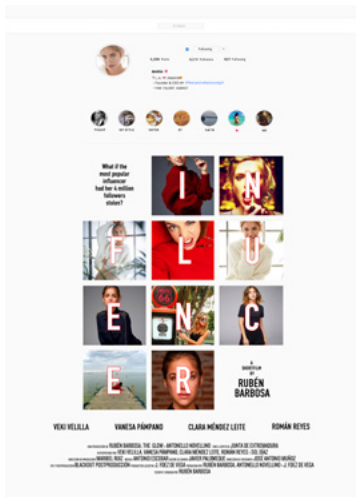
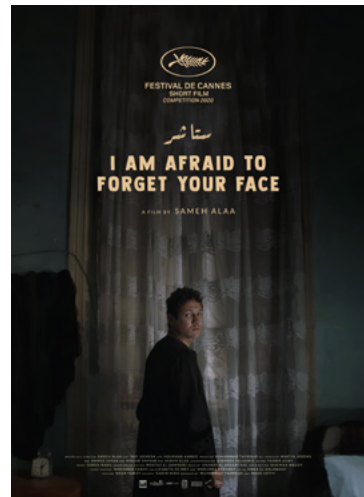
Short Films Program Kicks Off

The GFF shorts competition kicks off tomorrow with the screening of *I Am Afraid to Forget Your Face* by Egyptian film director Sameh Alaa. It was the first Egyptian film to be selected for the Official Short Film Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 50 years.

Other films in the shorts program include the world premiere of *Shakwa* by Lebanese director Farah Shaer; *Influencer* by Spanish director Rubén Barbosa; *Mare Nostrum* by Greek director Dimitris Anagnostou; Peel from Switzerland by directors Samuel Patthey and Silvain Monney; and from Norway, *Play Schengen* by director Gunhild Enger.

This year, 18 films are participating in GFF's Short Film Competition. The prizes are: El Gouna Golden Star, Certificate and US \$15,000; El Gouna Silver Star, Certificate and US \$7,500; El Gouna Bronze Star, Certificate and US \$4,000; as well as El Gouna Star for Best Arab Short Film Trophy, Certificate and US \$5,000.

Tomorrow's short film screenings will take place at Sea Cinema 1 at 6:00 p.m.



★ Bullet Points



Bushra Rozza
Co-Founder/COO
El Gouna Film Festival

- What was the most challenging part for me this year as we prepared for the 4th edition of GFF? It was the uncertainty and fear as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, and the wait for the official permits needed to make it happen. This vague journey oscillating between 'Yes' and 'No' was very unnerving.
- What is the key word that describes how we tackled this challenge? «Venice»-- the fact that Venice International Film Festival took place in its physical tradition was a huge encouragement for our team. Dear Intishal and myself insisted on making it happen--despite all the difficulties--and it was all carefully addressed and decided.
- What do I think now that the 4th edition is upon us? It is a miracle! I almost can't believe that we are even here, answering this question right now.
- What would I like to say to GFF audiences and guests? We are all responsible! You, me and everyone are not only responsible for our own well-being, but also our counterparts and fellow human beings... it's not a country's, city's, ministry's or a festival's responsibility; it's fundamentally YOU! And finally, stay safe and enjoy the experience.

★ Tomorrow

Red Carpet



The cast and crew of the award-winning film, *200 Meters*, walks the red carpet tomorrow at the Festival Plaza as part of the MENA premiere of the film at GFF's Feature Narrative Competition. The film, starring renowned Palestinian actor Ali Soliman, is the feature debut of the Palestinian film director Ameen Nayfeh. It was among CineGouna SpringBoard's winning projects in development at the inaugural edition of GFF, and it won the BNL People's Choice Award at the 17th Venice Days.



Their Algeria

Feature Documentary
Competition

Director: Lina Soualem

Sea Cinema 2

4:15 p.m.

Oasis

Feature Narrative
Competition

Director: Ivan Ikic

Producer: Marija Stojanovic

Sea Cinema 1

3:15 p.m.



The Man Who Sold His Skin

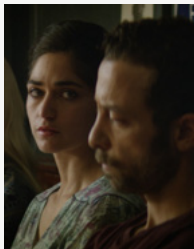
Feature Narrative
Competition

Composer: Amine

Bouhafa

TUB

9:45 p.m.



The Furnace

Feature Narrative
Competition

Actor: Ahmed Malek

Sea Cinema 1

12:15 p.m.



Kaouthar Ben Hania Director of The Man Who Sold His Skin:

The Desire to Explore Takes Me to the Unexpected

Nahed Nasr

How was the world premiere of The Man Who Sold His Skin at Venice International Film Festival?

It's the ultimate ambition of any filmmaker that their movies can be seen worldwide. When The Man Who Sold His Skin was in the final stages of post-production, the lockdown ensued, movie theaters were shut down, and the festivals were canceled. That is why it was such a relief when it was selected for the Venice International Film Festival. Finally, the movie was going to be seen and have a prestigious premiere. Actually, nowadays, it's almost an obligation for our movies to have a premiere in a big festival to be acknowledged. Otherwise, a film can have very limited local distribution and go unnoticed, and this situation is even worse with the pandemic.

How do you feel about having the MENA premiere at GFF?

We are very excited about that! It's a very courageous and heartening step to be able to organise the festival under such circumstances. Egypt is the country of cinema; I personally grew up with Egyptian movies. Screening my film in Egypt is such an honor and a responsibility, and I hope the audience will enjoy it.

How helpful was the GFF support in 2018 for the progress of your film?

It gave us a boost of confidence, especially that it was one of the first pushes in the early stages of the project development. We knew that this story should be told, but the financing process of such an ambitious

film is not an easy task. That's why every bit of support was needed and very much welcomed.

How did the idea for The Man Who Sold His Skin begin?

The idea was born in 2012 while I was in a retrospective exhibition for the Belgium artist Wim Delvoye at the Louvre in Paris. There I saw--in Napoleon III Apartments--Delvoye's Tim, (2006 - 08) in which the artist had tattooed the back of Tim Steiner, who was sitting on an armchair with his shirt off displaying Delvoye's design. This singular and transgressive image has not left me since that time. Later on, it was enriched in my mind with other elements of my experience. In 2014, and while I was in the editing phase of Beauty and the Dogs

film screenplay, I just started writing non-stop for five days! It was the story for The Man Who Sold His Skin. After the release of Beauty and the Dogs in 2017, I looked at that first draft and started to rework it until I had a solid version. It was a long process that began with an image and resulted in a rich story.

Tackling the Syrian refugees' tragic situation through art is an unusual cinematic treatment in Arab cinema. How did you develop this idea?

This film is a meeting between two worlds that captivate me; the world of contemporary art and the world of refugees. An established elitist world where freedom is the keyword, meets a world of survival impacted by current events where the



absence of choice is the daily concern for refugees. The contrast between these two worlds in the film shows a reflection on freedom. When the refugee Sam meets the artist Jeffrey, he tells him, «You were born on the right side of the world." Despite all the talk about equality and human rights, the increasingly complex historical and geopolitical contexts ensure that there are inevitably two kinds of people: the privileged and the damned. My film is a Faustian pact between those two worlds.

Regarding the cinematic language of your film, did you have the Western audience in mind as your main target?

As I said, I make films with the intention to be seen worldwide. The cinematic language is the most international and widely understood dialect in the world. Images are universal, although style is personal, and it is almost the story of the movie that dictates the film style. I wanted to give the story the characteristics of a contemporary tale, so I conceptualized the image with my D.O.P. in that way.

Although depicting a tragic story, your film is visually vibrant and beautiful. What was your rationale behind setting that specific mood?

Writing this film immersed me in the history of art, especially the representation of the human body in painting. I collected an arsenal of images, photos and paintings that could nourish the visual universe of the film. I also storyboarded the majority of the scenes based on the selected sets. At the end of the design phase, I met Christopher Aoun, the cinematographer, with whom I spent days and nights discussing every scene, every frame, every tone and every shade of color in the film. Nothing was left to chance. It was an enchanting process of brainstorming. Thanks to Christopher's creativity, involvement and desire for perfection, he was able to find technical solutions to magnify everything and go beyond my expectations.

How challenging was the casting process, especially with Monica Bellucci on board?

I personally adore Monica Bellucci, and I've always wanted to work with her. I sent her the script, and she loved the role. Soraya is a woman who expresses that haughty and snobbish side that is sometimes seen in people who are settled in their jobs and are self-confident; people who master the codes. Monica is not at all like Soraya in real life. She is an extraordinarily humble and sensitive person, but she knows the art world well and she immediately understood Soraya's character. I remember when she called me during the preparation to tell me: «We need to see each other, I have a clear idea of what Soraya looks like.» I went to the meeting with apprehension, because I am always afraid of actors who unilaterally decide how their characters should appear. I had my own clear idea of what Soraya would look like, and even took some hairstyle and costume photos with me that reflected what I had imagined for the character. Monica laid out her vision, and it exactly matched the images I had! We were on the same page from the very beginning.



What about the main character role, Sam Ali?

To properly portray Sam Ali, I needed a solid actor who had the art of moving from one register to another with ease; an actor with a broad emotional palette. The casting process was quite time consuming, but when I saw Yahya Mahayni's audition, I immediately recognized him as a diamond in the rough; an actor capable of carrying the film on his back!

Do you believe it is harder for a female filmmaker in the Middle East to make films?

It's a very tough job, but yet oh-so-exciting! A film is like a high-level marathon; it consumes years of your life and you can't just prepare for it the day before. It takes discipline and a lot of work. You have to research, read, learn and be deeply interested in the human soul, history, literature, philosophy and the current political context. You have to forge a vision of the world to then be able to say something interesting. This observation is valid for men as well as for women who want to do this job. But I'm not naive about the expectations one can have of a

director, a woman coming from the South like me. In fact, the first feedback I received on The Man Who Sold His Skin was just this sentence that kept coming back: «It's unexpected!» Talking about refugees in Europe or the contemporary art in a visual allegory full of colors was unusual for my Tunisian director profile. Being a screenwriter, a director also means having the ability to think outside the box of your own identity. During the process of writing and directing this film, I myself had to become a Syrian refugee, a contemporary artist, an internationally renowned gallery owner, a young girl trapped in a marriage... Only this otherness, this desire to explore, allowed me to go towards something unexpected.

I and Monica Bellucci were on the same page from the very beginning



“During the process of writing and directing this film, I myself had to become a Syrian refugee

