

ELGOUNA
FILM FESTIVAL
1ST EDITION
مهرجان الجونة السينمائي

EL GOUNA STAR



“THE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION”

Under the slogan «Cinema for Humanity», the first edition of the El Gouna Film Festival started, yesterday with a glamorous ceremony attended by a large number of film stars and filmmakers in Egypt, the all over the world in an unprecedented scene at the Red Sea city of El Gouna.

The opening ceremony witnessed the honoring of the great star Adel Imam with Career Achievement Award presented by Eng. Naguib Sawiris after showing a documentary contains testimonies of some of his colleagues in the film Industry and which also covers more than 40 years of his success as the most famous film star in Egypt and the Arab world as well.

Imam said that he is overwhelmed with the honoring, and he usually decline any invitation to attend film festivals, however when his friend Sawiris asked him to come to El Gouna Film Festival, he accepted as he believes in the efforts of Sawiris for the sake of Cinema. He added “a nation without art is a nation without conscience”. He ended his brief speech by congratulating the Sawiris family for their refined taste of art, that they have made a wonderful film festival in such an astonishing spot with great weather.

The festival also gave the Career Achievement Award to a great Lebanese critic, Ibrahim Al-Aris who said, «I felt, as I walked through the streets of El Gouna, the presence of the spirit of Talaat Harb”, as he pointed out that El Gouna is one of the world’s most attractive spots for tourism and a great place to hold a Film Festival as well.

Naguib Sawiris, the founder of the El Gouna Festival, said that the idea of the festival was due to his passion for cinema.

Sawiris added that Amr Mansi, one of the founders and organizers of the festival, played an unusual role in the festival, as well as the director of operations and one of its founders, the film star Bushra.

For his part, Tamimi said in his opening speech that the festival wants to be a bridge between Egyptian and international culture to share ideas, interests and dreams.

After the end of the awards, the opening film «Sheikh Jackson» by Amr Salama was showed, in the presence of the film crew: Ahmed Al-Fishawi, Ahmed Malik, Amina Khalil and Dora and Yasmin President.



	Marina Theater	Audimax (TU Berlin)	Sea Cinema 1	Sea Cinema 2	Sea Cinema 3
11 AM				11:00 AM Dabka 117 min	
12 PM					
1 PM					
2 PM					
3 PM		3:00 PM No Bed of Roses 86 min	3:15 PM 78/52 91 min R :18+	3:30 PM Tadeo 2 Animation, For Children 86 min	3:00 PM A Gentle Creature 153 min R: 16+
4 PM					
5 PM					
6 PM			6:00 PM Plot 35 66 min		
7 PM	6:40 PM The Other Side of Hope 98 min	6:30 PM Zama 94 min R :18+		6:45 PM Shorts Program 1 84 min	6:30 PM An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth To Power 98 min
8 PM			8:15 PM The Wild Frontier 225 min		
9 PM					
10 PM	9:30 PM The Music of Silence 114 min	9:15 PM Scary Mother 107 min		9:00 PM Snowden 134 min	9:15 PM Grace Jones: Bloodlight and Bami 115 min
11 PM					
12 AM					

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■ OPENING & CLOSING FILMS

■ FEATURE NARRATIVE COMPETITION

■ FEATURE DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION

■ SHORT FILMS COMPETITION

■ OFFICIAL SELECTION OUT OF COMPETITION

■ SPECIAL PRESENTATION

“SHEIKH JACKSON”: A SOCIETY’S CONTRADICTIONS

OPENING FILM



The philosophy of cinema resides in its ability to raise major questions about the viewer’s deepest emotions in life, their relationships with themselves and others, how they experience their reality and whether their world might actually be a dream?

And the Egyptian film “Sheikh Jackson” by Amr Salama lives up to that philosophy. It is filled with the kind of universal question that preoccupies people regardless of place and time. Lasting just over an hour and a half, it transports the audience to the world of a bearded young mosque imam, Khaled Hani, who subscribes to the Salafi ideology, preaches at the mosque and broadcasts his ideas and sermons for his disciples. Khaled also has an old passion for pop music, however; and the death of his former idol Michael Jackson in 2009 marks a turning point not only in his life and his sense of self but also in the mind of the viewer.

The director uses Jackson’s death as the trigger for a moving meditation on identity and contradiction, not only within the hero who suffers from a faith crisis but also all across present-day society.

The idea put forward by Salama and his cowriter Omar Khaled, while seemingly simple, is a profound way into the confusion of the young man and his society. Using flashbacks remarkably seamlessly, the film covers Khaled’s childhood and adolescence before it comes back to his young adulthood; it shows how as a teenager he left his cruel father in Alexandria and went to live with his fundamentalist maternal uncle in Cairo.

With many various and contradictory impulses imparted, Ahmed El Fishawy’s performance is so genuine it feels as though he and Khaled Hani are one. You have the sense that Fishawy is dealing with significant aspects of his own life. Likewise Salama’s dialogue and Ahmed Bishari’s photography: they reflect the hesitation of a whole generation, and its questions.

The film is set in Alexandria, where the conservative young preacher Sheikh Khaled Hani leads a strictly regimented life with its own peculiar rituals: he sometimes sleeps under his bed, for example, to remind himself of the grave’s nearness; he insists that his wife should wear a full veil and cuts off the internet connection when he discovers his daughter watching a music video by Beyonce, warning the girl against dancing and skimpy clothes and the “devilish music” that encourages them. He is pleased when his wife tells him, in bed, “I love you because I know you love God more than you love me.”

With his tightly and attractively constructed script and a picture that makes as much use of the imagination as of reality, Salama leads us seamlessly back to the moment in Khaled’s childhood when he finds his female classmate listening to Michael Jackson and returns home to ask his mother and father about it. “That effeminate man,” his father (Maged El Kidwany) says, but his mother (Dorra) explains that Jackson is a musician and famous singer. This is when contradictory thoughts are born in Khaled’s mind even as he grows gradually attached to Jackson.

No sooner does the scene return to the moment of Jackson’s death than the flashback jumps forward to Khaled’s adolescence (played skilfully by Ahmed Malek, for whose career this role may prove to be a turning point). Khaled is now obsessed with Jackson. While his father tries to make him hate the pop idol, his classmates make fun of him for emulating his hair and clothes and movements. But his passion for the music also draws the girls to him and gives him confidence.

As the scene shifts back to the present it becomes clear how much Jackson’s death has disturbed the young preacher. The pop legend begins to appear to him while he is delivering a sermon at the mosque,

leading the prayers or attending a Salafi discussion with other sheikhs. He begins to stutter, which shocks his disciples and fellow sheikhs, and so he decides to see a psychiatrist.

Khaled’s psychiatrist turns out to be a woman (played by Basma), and they have a long discussion that starts with her asking why he does not want his name on her records. Khaled explains that he can no longer weep during prayer, that his mother’s death brought on painful memories of his father’s cruelty and a failed adolescent love at school; he has been having nightmares and hallucinating at the mosque...

Intelligently, with the help of Hani Adel’s music, the film shows how the hero’s ideas begin to swing nearly giving him a nervous breakdown. Khaled begins to track down his hidden fears and their origins in the past in the hope of shutting off his childhood. And so the film reveals its true colours. The central idea remains bright even when its lustre fades due to lack of sympathy with the hero or intense melodramatic moments. Feeling pardoned by God, Khaled is gradually liberated from the ghosts of the past.

This is especially powerful in the scene of his confrontation with his father 15 years after he left, with the intense emotional debate between them and the memories that come up. The film ends cleverly with a life-affirming message and the suggestion that we must accept our contradictions, since there really is an identity crisis in Egypt (which became clear after the revolution especially) – embodied by Khaled in another powerful scene showing how in appearance he looks like a Salafi even as he remains emotionally attached to Jackson’s dance moves. Salama will certainly cross barriers with this sensitive story, authentically conveyed, which moves the heart and shakes the rigid mind with its game of self identification.

Khaled Mahmoud

FOR THE SAKE OF CINEMA

INTISHAL AL-TIMIMI



Born in 1954, he wasn't propelled into the cinematic limelight until 2001 – as co-founder of the Arab Film Festival of Rotterdam, then as director of Arab programming at the Abu Dhabi Festival, among many other positions. At Gouna, Intishal Al-Timimi is starting an event from scratch; he is the first non-Egyptian to direct an Egyptian festival;

What is special about Gouna Film Festival GFF?

It is a film festival that goes in line with the spirit of Gouna, which is only 20 years old. The festival emphasizes youth and young filmmakers who will come back to their festival, which will grow with them and they with it.

What was challengeable preparing for a film festival in Gouna?

My first concern was the infrastructure. Proper movie theatres are fundamental, whether in terms of equipment or capacity. We have prepared five movie theatres which is a good start if we are screening twice a day. Now we have a town that is ready for a film festival. There should be a film

festival in every pretty town in the Arab world both for the sake of cinema and to promote places. A film festival shows that people are eager to interact with the world.

What makes a successful director for a film festival?

I would prefer not to assess my own performance until the last day of the festival itself. However, with the help of a very cooperative team we made a great job in the film programming. Most of the official competition films are making their world or Middle East premiere at Gouna, some having already premiered at various world festivals. Of the two Egyptian films in the long narrative competition, Sheikh Jackson and Photocopy, Sheikh Jackson will have made its world premiere in Toronto only five days before its screening at Gouna; it will also have been screened at Venice and Locarno.

Why there is an extra award for the best Arab film in all the official competition (documentary and short as well as narrative)?

An award for a film means a new production; a festival in the Arab world should support Arab filmmaking, which didn't find its voice again until initiatives like AFAC, the Sanad film fund and the Egyptian National Centre of Cinema fund emerged on the scene; many of those including the latter have been discontinued. The state should support the film industry through coproduction – the European (and Canadian) model – as is the case in Jordan and North Africa. In addition to the best Arab film award, GFF has several initiatives to support and enable young filmmakers through CineGouna Platform. It is a creative and business hub to enhance the most promising talents of Egyptian and Arab Cinema. Now is the time for young Arab filmmakers to make their mark.

How do you see the film industry in the Arab world?

That is true, since recent political transformations have generated remarkable interest in the region and previously unpopular forms like the documentary are being screened in commercial theatres again. We

can also see this shift in audience taste at the Cairo International Film Festival and the Arab Days film festivals, and we will see it at El Gouna Film Festival as well. What it means is a chance for new talent to go forward, if not through the organized efforts of the state then through festivals and the initiatives of individual producers like Assia Dagher (1906-1986) – the adventurers on whose shoulders film production in Egypt started. Gouna Film Festival builds on such film events as the Cairo, Carthage and Dubai film festivals. Each has its point of strength and in my opinion they should not only collaborate with but also complete each other. They are the way to the future of Arab cinema.

You studied photography, photographed numerous Arab artists and intellectuals and gave exhibitions in Arab cities and beyond, why did you sacrifice photography for the sake of cinema?

I am a photographer, I can see myself as a photographer the moment I finish my everyday duties and can take a big break; it is the only creative thing I can do in my life since I am no good at singing

Interviewed by Nahed Nasr



“THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPE”: A POLITICALLY AWARE LYRICISM



Finnish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki's profound vision of social and political drama takes romantic form even when the reality underlying it is far from rosy. This gives his work a memorable intensity. Kaurismäki's predominantly marginal characters engage in a dialogue with us, imparting the ideas and feelings associated with their struggle for survival and the careworn lives they lead on the edge of failure and breakdown. But they turn out to have enough nobility to play a positive part in the lives of others, instilling in them the kind of hope that facilitates reaching a safe human shore.

In "The Other Side of Hope" – which won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale and is being screened in Gouna – such suffering is embodied in the story of Khaled. A young Syrian refugee, Khaled Hussein and his sister Mariam are forced out of Aleppo, their hometown, after most of their family is killed. Having lost Mariam in the confusion of travelling through Europe, Khaled tries to slip into Helsinki in a coal truck – only to be deported back to Aleppo, which the Finnish authorities deem sufficiently safe. Khaled manages to escape his confinement, living illegally and facing various kinds of racism on the street. Khaled also makes friends and finds support, however. He meets Wikström, the shirt dealer who presents him with a hot meal, work, accommodation, forged papers to guarantee his remaining in Helsinki – and eventually even all he needs to find his sister and smuggle her into the country. This happens following a fight during which they exchange blows that turn out to be the blows of destiny, for Khaled too enables Wikström to find refuge. Wikström lives in his own, safe homeland but he too is a refugee; his personal problems, his

failures and suffering have estranged him this much; he too has been looking for asylum without knowing it, and he finds in Khaled – who becomes a surrogate son to Wikström's father – a psychological and spiritual refuge: a support and a homeland.

Kaurismäki deals with the vexed issue of illegal immigration with a keen humane sensibility and a high dose of satire at one and the same time. What little dialogue the characters engage in is direct and shocking but also inspiring within the painfully realistic picture of which it is part. At one point the Syrian refugee is heard saying to someone in Arabic, "I like Finland a lot, but if you could find me a way to flee this country I'd be very grateful." In this way the filmmaker manages to imbue even the most tragic topic with comedy and laughter.

The humane Aki Kaurismäki, who is returning to cinema after a six-year break during which he must have indulged his need for meditation, presents a work that is in equal parts reality and escape from reality. In humane frameworks designed to interact with all that is happening in the contemporary world – the conflict in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere driving refugees to Finland – he does not ride on the interest any one had so much as express his primarily cinematic concern in a unique aesthetic idiom. In this way he presents the biography of a refugee on screen, showing the real-life details of a genuine human being with the right to a dignified life on the other side of hope where necessary.

One question Kaurismäki's cinema always raises is, "Where did our humanity go?" With his new film, the filmmaker insists, the object is to change the world by altering the anti-immigrant climate in

Europe. It is something he insists he is doing even if his film is only seen by three people. To this end he collaborated with Sherwan Haji, 31, who arrived in Finland in 2011 after entering a relationship with a Finnish girl in Damascus. In his ability to make the viewer interact with the world he proffers – stifling frames, confused and hesitant faces and grey backdrops all through Khaled's flight from Aleppo and his struggle in Europe – the director demonstrates ethical as well as aesthetic credibility.

Finnish and refugees are brought together in the same comedic space, where the shirt dealer who has left his wife must start over in a new profession and another Finn, Huber, grows so tired of his life and given to gambling that he begins to jeopardise his future. Despite racism and cruelty from the authorities, what is more, Khaled does find help. By these means the sensitive director manages to emphasise solidarity, turning his characters into heroes without having to resort to rhetorical cinema. Rather with an intense realism, intelligent narrative style and fresh dialogue, with the sophistication of a cinephile and the political awareness of a lyricist, he presents Europe's issue of the hour, letting some light seep through the darkness and playing a powerful musical composition embodying the dream of a better world.

A film deeply effective in realising intellectual and visual pleasure, "The Other Side of Hope" ends on a note of hope with Wikström regaining his trust for his wife after he manages to build trust with an "other"; and likewise Khaled, who begins to build a new life, however modest.

Khaled Mahmoud







