

ELGOUNA  
FILM FESTIVAL  
1ST EDITION  
مهرجان الجونة السينمائي

EL GOUNA STAR



**ZIAD DOUEIRI TO RECEIVE VARIETY'S  
ARAB TALENT OF THE YEAR AWARD  
AT EL GOUNA FILM FESTIVAL**



	Marina Theater	Audimax (TU Berlin)	Sea Cinema 1	Sea Cinema 2	Sea Cinema 3
11 AM				<b>11:00 AM</b> <b>The Putin Interviews: Episodes 1 and 2</b> <b>116 min</b>	
12 PM					
1 PM					
2 PM					
3 PM		<b>3:00 PM</b> <b>After the War</b> <b>100 min</b>	<b>3:00 PM</b> <b>17</b> <b>73 min   Attended by Muna Fityani</b>	<b>3:30 PM</b> <b>Plot 35</b> <b>66 min</b>	<b>3:45 PM</b> <b>Shorts Program 1</b> <b>84 min</b>
4 PM					
5 PM					
6 PM		<b>5:30 PM</b> <b>Breathe</b> <b>117 min</b>	<b>5:15 PM</b> <b>Brimstone &amp; Glory</b> <b>67 min</b>	<b>6:00 PM</b> <b>Closeness</b> <b>118 min</b> R: 18+	<b>6:15 PM</b> <b>Manifesto</b> <b>95 min</b>
7 PM	<b>6:40 PM</b> <b>Mark Felt</b> <b>100 min</b>				
8 PM			<b>7:30 PM</b> <b>Soufra</b> <b>68 min   Attended by Thomas Morgan</b>		
9 PM		<b>8:30 PM</b> <b>Arrhythmia</b> <b>116 min</b> R: 18+			<b>8:30 PM</b> <b>The Brawler</b> <b>145 min</b>
10 PM	<b>9:30 PM</b> <b>Photocopy</b> <b>90 min   Attended by Tamer Ashry &amp; Film Crew</b>			<b>9:00 PM</b> <b>Felicity</b> <b>123 min</b> R:18+	
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

# “SOUFRA”: THE SALT OF HOPE

WORLD PREMIERE



The brutal history of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990-) has been a major topic for filmmakers all round the world. However, Thomas Morgan's documentary Soufra took a different approach to the issue. Although the place remains the same, the story is different.

The Palestinian refugee camp of Bourj El Barajneh was one of the most devastated during what became known as the “War of the Camps”, a stretch of the Lebanese Civil War that took place between 1984 and 1990. The Lebanese Christian Phalanges lay siege to Bourj El Barajneh during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut. But the most inhuman siege took place in 1984-1987-, when the Aama Movement was trying to control Beirut.

“Soufra”, which is competing for El Gouna Star Award in the Feature Documentary Competition, starts with a woman's narration describing the life situation of Palestinians living in Bourj El Barajneh in the Lebanese capital. The information she provides is essential to the audience understanding the details of the film's main story.

The social and the political situation of the camp has forced its residents to take low-income jobs; many women are factory cleaners. In 2016, what is more, there was a surge of refugees trying to leave Lebanon on illegal boats to Europe, and many in the process.

Such devastation forms the background of daily life at the camp. This filmmaker tries to bring hope out of this grim reality, however, with a film about poor Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese women from the Bourj El Barajneh who have a passion for cooking. These women decide to use their culinary talent to earn extra money that can make their life much easier, by launching a catering company.

The camera follows the emotional reactions of Mariam Shaar as she tries to change her fate and the

that of her neighbours against all odds. Shaar is the team leader of the group of women, who deals with the administrative obstacles and is looking for a suitable vehicle to use as a food truck on the streets of Beirut.

The director delves into the details of day-to-day work, preparing food for the costumers. As their kitchen becomes a hive of activity, they come closer to their first goal, that of buying the catering truck, in order to make food for the public and take their project to another level.

The film shows many women and intermingles their different personalities. Sometimes the filmmaker

tries to generate suspense by approaching the area of failure when they apply for a license to operate the catering truck. He uses extreme close shots to capture their anxiety and desperation. On the other hand, he tends to use long shots for the moments of the joy that result from making an achievement.

Academy Award winner Susan Sarandon is the executive producer of “Soufra”. Besides being a famous actress, Sarandon is a political and human rights activist. In 1999, she was made a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

Hani Mustafa



## سفرة SOUFRA

DIRECTOR **Thomas Morgan**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:  
Susan Sarandon

IN ATTENDANCE WITH THE FILM:  
Director Thomas Morgan,

Co-Writer and Editor Mohamed El Manasterly,  
Emmy Award Winner and Academy Award Nominee,  
Producer Kathleen Glynn, Academy Award Winner,  
Mariam Shaar, Subject of the film

WORLD  
PREMIERE  
SOUFRA

MONDAY  
**25TH**  
SEA CINEMA 1  
7:30 PM

WEDNESDAY  
**27TH**  
SEA CINEMA 3  
7:00 PM

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# THE REAL WONDER WOMAN

## THOMAS MORGAN:



Filmmaker Thomas Morgan told El Gouna Star about his experience making "Soufra"

**For filmmakers, there is usually something that triggers off a new project. What was it in this case?**

I tend to concentrate on people who find a way, in dire circumstances, to transform lives. They are heroes that we never hear of. I like stories of hope and people who will give everything they have to bring hope to others. Mariam is a great example of that person on so many levels. When I hear about a strong female, generational refugee, entrepreneur trying to start a food truck – I mean how many more obstacles could there be? I flew to Beirut just a few weeks later. In the year of the Wonder Woman film, I think I met a real Wonder Woman.

**There is a very tragic history to the Bourj El Barajneh Camp. Do you think the mid-1980s "War of the Camps" episode of the Lebanese Civil affected your approach during shooting? How much did your research help?**

I didn't want to take a political approach to the film because I didn't want to lose the amazing story. If you walk into the camp today, there are refugees from many different places and with a huge influx from Syria. They all have tragic stories. My approach was to look through the lens and see people who have been, in a way, discarded. I wanted to make the film a story that is relatable to so many other situations – whether that be the Rohingya refugees, the Syrian refugees or the women in poverty raising kids and living with contaminated water in Flint, Michigan. Mariam has never taken money from a political or religious organisation because she said when you do so you start to exclude people. I tried to stay true to that with the film.

**How did the economic and the social problems of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon affected the story of your film?**

Again, I didn't concentrate on one group – it was the story of all of the women. But when we first started shooting it became clear to me how difficult

so many things were for Mariam. It was frustrating to watch but after a while you realise this is what life is like for them every day. What was amazing was to see the calmness and grace with which they negotiated their way through all of the obstacles. I think that what Mariam has done with the kitchen and now with the food truck has not only changed the way those in the camp see themselves, but it has also touched so many outside the camp that I am sure it will have a positive impact on the way they're treated in the future.

**Did you face any obstacles while shooting whether from the main characters or the Lebanese authorities?**

No, not really. I remember the day I got there and asked the women to sign a release so we could film them. They all stood looking back at me until Mariam walked up and signed and then they all lined up behind her. I know it sounds kind of trivial but at the time I felt a great weight in the room – this was them saying to the world – see us. I felt like it was

very brave of them – especially given that I was an outsider. I am humbled that they trusted me with their story.

**The main theme of the film is hope. From your point of view do you think that the Palestinians can have a positive future whether in their homeland or as refugees?**

I don't know what will happen with the homeland of the Palestinians or the Syrians. I think it seems strange to be two and three generations removed from your country, never setting foot in the country they say you are a citizen of, and not having the basic rights of the society. What is happening, and what I hope can continue to happen, is that the refugees are pulled into society by the citizens of the country. When you are catering parties in other

people's homes, selling to them at the market, or seeing them at different events – you develop relationships. Those relationships become stronger than the government. When the citizens start demanding fair treatment for their friends that live inside the camp – because they know them and care about them, that is far more powerful.

**How did you portray the contrast between the poverty of the refugee camps and the luxury of Beirut?**

I really didn't. I never wanted to contrast the women to the other end of the spectrum – I just wanted the contrast to be to the basic standard that a Lebanese citizen would expect. That hill alone was steep enough without pushing to the other end of the very wealthy in Lebanon.

**Did you think the suffering of the Palestinian refugees has economic roots or is the political situation the main obstacle?**

Again, I didn't aim to make this a film that spoke to the politics involved. I think that allowing Palestinians or other refugees to become citizens would upset the balance of the different confessions in power and so it won't happen. But these camps are nearly 70 years old – that is a long time to not address a better solution. I hope that someday soon there'll be someone with enough political courage to say enough is enough. What is happening now is unjust...

Interviewed by Hani Mustafa



Morgan with the film executive producer the Academy Award Winner Suzan Sarandon

# “FRAME WITHOUT BOUNDARIES”: PHOTOCOPY DIRECTOR TAMER ASHRY:

*After years working in the less glamorous side of the industry, Egyptian director Tamer Ashry delivers a solid debut that reflects the experience of a seasoned artist rather than a first timer. Although busy with the premiere of his film in El Gouna Film Festival, Ashry found the time to sit with us for a chat about his project.*

## **Can you tell us a little bit about your practice?**

I worked in documentary filmmaking since 2006, and then went on in 2009 to work as an assistant director with several directors including Marwan Hamed, Ahmed Alaa, and Ahmed Galal, as well as a couple of foreign directors. It was mostly advertising work, but I did some films too. I eventually started directing my own ads two years ago.

## **You’ve been in this business for 10 years now, don’t you think it’s taken you a bit longer than usual to direct your first feature?**

I don’t really give much thought to timing. Back when I graduated, directing a feature was all I thought about. But then I saw friends of mine and other people my age working on their features and I thought that even if I was ready, which I wasn’t even sure I was, perhaps I should start at the bottom. Throughout my ten years as an assistant director I learned how to work with actors, and I learned a lot about the entire process. Filmmaking isn’t just books and big ideas, you know. You need to know how to run a set, for instance. A director’s work is half creative, half managerial. And in the end I believe the film came in time. Haitham Dabbour (the film’s writer) sent me the screenplay because he wanted my feedback as a friend, but I knew right away that I wanted to do it.

## **As I watched Photocopy, I could sense that your background in advertising is a huge influence on the look of the film. Do you agree?**

Stylistically speaking, I learned that you should not impose yourself as a director on the story. The story decides for itself how it should be filmed. When I first read the script, I saw it the way I shot it. The character is static; the camera doesn’t move within specific boundaries. I wanted to visually reflect Mahmoud’s (Mahmoud Hemeida) pace and character.

## **But don’t you think that the visual representation of the city in the film is too clean cut when compared to the reality of Cairo?**

It’s because Mahmoud takes refuge in a certain feel: old music; the old house; his old shop. It’s that old sense of beauty that I tried to convey. Can you see the contradiction between Ossama’s and Mahmoud’s shop, for example? Frankly, I think we miss that charm. Everything is deteriorating now, and beautiful old buildings are being torn out to the ground. Only Mahmoud is left standing. Naively, yes, but still standing.

## **The story doesn’t really have a traditional dramatic structure. What exactly drew you to it?**

I came to read the treatment first. Back then I was looking for something to experiment with, and I loved the scale of the film. It’s not a great story with twists and turns, its value lies in the details rather than the big structure. It’s very simple: a man wants to marry his upstairs neighbor, that’s all there is to it. I loved how it resembled so many ordinary lives around us; people who want to achieve their small dreams but end up getting screwed by the



## “I don’t believe in ‘independent cinema’—a director makes a film, people buy tickets and go see it. It’s as simple as that”

overwhelming presence of the city. But it’s also a study of solitude. I remember reading this Facebook post with a picture of an elderly man standing on Qasr El Nile bridge. The writer of the post was walking someday when that man stopped him and asked him to take a picture of him. The narrator later asked him for his email so he could send him the photo, but the old man said he didn’t want it. He only wanted a picture of him to be on somebody’s phone, so that when he died he wouldn’t be entirely forgotten. I was fascinated by this story, and if you look closely into the film, you will see it there somehow.

## **Do you feel like you somehow belong to a larger cinematic movement, perhaps a wave or a new film generation?**

You mean “independent cinema”? I don’t think so. I’m not trying to pose as an independent or alternative filmmaker, and I denounce those classifications to begin with. I’m more of a classical kind of guy: A director makes a film, people buy tickets and go see it. It’s as simple as that.

## **But the theme in Photocopy resembles others recurrent in recent Egyptian productions by filmmakers of a certain age group that we can loosely call “a generation,” starting with Tamer El Said’s Monday to Aiten Amin’s Villa 69. Do you view this as a coincidence?**

I wouldn’t lie to you, the first time I read the script I could feel that familiarity, perhaps in the atmosphere itself. It could be because I grew up in the same city where those artists grew up. It’s this relation with the capital, which I also clearly saw in El Said’s latest film, In the Last Days of the City. And maybe it’s our shared background in documentary filmmaking. But I do think that my treatment is very different from others, because my aesthetic preferences have been heavily influenced by working in advertising. For example, I really care about how refined the image is in relation to every other aspect, from acting to production design.

## **Hemeida is a veteran actor and a celebrated film star, while Photocopy is your first film as a director. How did working with him go?**

I sent him the script, and he called me two days after saying he wanted to meet. It was more of an investigation, really. He needed to feel assured that I knew exactly what I wanted to do with the film. I was fearful at first, but he was very helpful. He’s the kind of actor who can orchestrate performances around him, fine-tune them in a way. It was hard at times, but I enjoyed working with him and I deeply respect him as an artist. And at the end when he saw the cut he said “Bravo,” and that absolutely did it for me.

Muhammad El-Hajj



# The Refugee's Path, The Price of War in Short Films



Newton's Third Law

A war that leaves behind only snapshots. A group of simple people trying to make the best of a cruel life in the midst of destruction. Another struggling with illness and bad luck on the streets of Europe... These are the images you might extract from a reasonable number of films in the El Gouna Film Festival short films competition.

All of "Nightshade" by Shady El Hamus (a Dutch production) is filmed at night on a road in the Netherlands. A group of Syrian refugees in a small truck are holding their breath so as not to give themselves away. The most important shot is when Tarek, 11, who helps his father to transport illegal immigrants gives a child in the packed truck a piece of chocolate – a sympathetic moment soon dispelled by the death of a refugee on the asphalt.

The same atmosphere prevails in "Léo" by Julian Alexander (a British production): a van, refugees in the trunk, violent coughing and a fight over the final destination. The couple being transported want to go to the UK but the driver Léo was paid to take them no further than Calais in France. And yet the two sides of this conflict manage to achieve a moment of solidarity. This sparkle of optimism can be seen in both films. In the midst of this commerce in tragedy, humanity returns for a moment.

Joseph Simmons' "Impression", another British film, is somewhat different in that it focuses on dishonesty in dealing with foreigners and "the other" general. Reza is a simple car wash attendant whose appearance and name do not qualify him to go any further, but he manages to create an alter ego for himself through bribery and illusion: one woman lends him a suit, another, professional company secretary, answers his phone calls as if he is an important businessman; a man lends him an expensive car. In this way he tricks investors – one of whom treats him as a featureless immigrant at the car wash – into believing they can make money off him. The film thus deals with the issue of relative standpoints and draws attention to the fact that the truth is as much as anything a matter of material interests.

In Charlotte Carroll's "Red Crayon", a third British production, brings us back to the roots of the



Impression

problem: the blood and destruction that throws people with names and lives and family trees onto the roads of immigration, turning them into mere numbers of dead people, people illegally crossing borders or living in camps. This film is about childhood within that bloody equation. It's about a group of children at a refugee camp who when asked to draw use red more than any other colour.

Violence has wide-ranging consequences. The Syrian-Jordanian film "Newton's Third Law" by Nour Alsoliman opens with a child hiding while his parents are being hanged by members of a local army. How is a human being supposed to live with that memory? The film blames the present on the

past and seals the future in a grave of despair. A force is always two forces. If A acts against B, B responds with an equal but opposite action. There is no way out until all interaction stops.

And such endless tragedy is also to be found in the Iraqi film "Baghdad Photographer" by Mejd Hameed – a brilliantly expressive three minutes summarising the history of a family in pictures, from the mother and father at their wedding to the same woman with her bereaved daughter in law and her grandson – who may well end up on the path of war and immigration.

Naget Belhatem



# Ziad Doueiri to receive Variety's Arab Talent of the Year award at El Gouna Film Festival



In a special ceremony this evening, and as part of El Gouna Film Festival, Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri (*The Insult*, Feature Narrative Competition) will be given Variety's Arab Talent of the Year award. The ceremony will be followed by a screening of the film in the Marina Theatre at 6:40 pm, after which Festival Director Intishal Al Timimi will moderate a Q&A session with members of the film's cast and crew.

*The Insult* was met with favourable reviews upon its premiere in the 74th Venice Film Festival, its Palestinian lead actor Kamel El Basha winning the festival's Best Actor award. *The Insult* is also

Lebanon's official Oscar submission for Best Foreign Language Film this year.

The film follows the aftermath of an argument between Toni (Adel Karam), a young Christian Lebanese man and Yasser (Kamel El Basha), a Muslim Palestinian refugee, when dirty water falls on Yasser's head on a construction site from Toni's balcony. Yasser ends up insulting Toni, who decides to sue, turning the dispute into a public case followed by the masses in a drama that is both political and humane, subtly addressing the tragedy of the Lebanese Civil War.

*The Insult* also stars Rita Hayek, Camille Salameh and Christine Choueiri.

Doueiri is considered one of the most prominent contemporary Arab directors, with several internationally awarded films under his belt, including *West Beirut* (1998), which won the François Chalais Award at the Cannes Film Festival and the FIPRESCI Prize at the Toronto International Film Festival. His 2004 film *Lila Says* won several accolades, including Best Screenplay at the Gijón International Film Festival. His controversial third feature, *The Attack* (2012), was banned in Lebanon for being filmed in Tel Aviv.

Mohamed Fahmi

