Beat: Arts

DEAUVILLE'S 52nd AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATES 250 YEARS OF AMERICA

THROUGH CINEMA LED BY ROSHDY ZEM

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USPA NEWS - ROSCHDY ZEM PRESIDENT OF JURY LEADS DEAUVILLE'S JOURNEY THROUGH AMERICAN MYTH, MEMORY AND MOVIES
From 4 to 13 September 2026, the 52nd Deauville American Film Festival returns to Normandy with the familiar glamour of stars, premieres and red carpets but also with a more ambitious invitation: to look at the United States through the cinema that has shaped, questioned and exported its myths across the world.

This year, the Festival marks the 250th anniversary of American independence with Once Upon a Time (in) America, a retrospective that uses films to trace the country's founding dreams, inequalities, wars, economic crises, social struggles and contradictions. The festival presents more than 80 films across the Centre International de Deauville, the Casino cinema and Cinema Morny, while the official competition includes 13 features.
For French audiences, American cinema has never been merely an imported product. From the western to the paranoid political thriller, the courtroom drama, the musical, the road movie and the independent film, it has been a way of watching America imagine itself and sometimes dismantle its own legend.

ROSCHDY ZEM, A JURY PRESIDENT WITH RANGE
The 2026 edition is presided over by Roschdy Zem, one of the most versatile and compelling figures in contemporary French cinema. Actor, filmmaker and screenwriter, Zem brings to Deauville a career that has moved naturally between auteur cinema, thrillers, popular films and character-driven drama.

His presence is particularly resonant at a festival that celebrates cinematic crossings between France and the United States. Born in France to Moroccan parents, Zem has built a body of work marked by sensitivity, charisma and an ability to make interior conflicts visible without theatrical excess. He first gained attention in the films of André Téchiné before expanding across genres, both as an actor and as a director.

Most recently, his portrayal of singer Yves Montand opposite Marina Fois as Simone Signoret demonstrated the precision of an actor capable of carrying physical resemblance, emotional restraint and a southern accent without losing the complexity of the man behind the public image. Zem's performance is notable not because it imitates Montand, but because it captures the tension between fame, loyalty, ambition and vulnerability.

He also represents a generous idea of cinema: an established actor who has helped open doors for younger talent, including Leiia Bekhti. As Jury President, Zem gives the festival both stature and a sense of continuity between the generations.

A JURY OF ACTORS, FILMMAKERS AND STORYTELLERS
Roschdy Zem leads the Official Competition Jury, a nine-member group bringing together actors, filmmakers, writers and artists from different generations and cinematic traditions.

The jury includes actor and playwright Simon Abkarian; actress and writer Camille Chamoux; Belgian actress Cécile de France; director and producer Euzhan Palcy; actor Raphael Personnaz; filmmaker and screenwriter Lola Quivoron; writer Mohamed Mbougar Sarr; and actress and filmmaker Laura Smet. Their task is to assess a competition of 13 films, including six first features the kind of selection that makes Deauville more than a parade of celebrity appearances.

The Festival's Revelation Jury is chaired by singer and actress Lio, joined by Noée Abita, Marion Barbeau, Manon Clavel and Sayyid

El Alami. Its role is central to Deauville's identity: recognising emerging talent before the industry has fully decided who deserves to be watched.

AMERICA THROUGH ITS FILMS

The anniversary programme offers an intelligent shortcut through 250 years of American history, not through textbooks but through images that have stayed in the collective imagination. The official presentation describes cinema as a fitting setting in which to tell the story of a country whose history has been deeply intertwined with France since the beginnings of the American Revolution.

Charlie Chaplin's The Gold Rush (1925) returns viewers to the mythology of migration, poverty, hunger and the pursuit of prosperity. Beneath its comic genius lies a portrait of people who travelled west in search of fortune and often found harshness instead. It is an early American story in miniature: hope, exhaustion, improvisation and survival.

John Ford's The Grapes of Wrath (1940) provides another essential chapter. Adapted from John Steinbeck's novel, it follows families displaced by the Great Depression and environmental catastrophe. Its relevance has not faded. The film asks what happens when an economic system becomes so vast that individuals are reduced to numbers, labour and disposable bodies.

Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove (1964) and Full Metal Jacket (1987) bring the Cold War, nuclear anxiety and the Vietnam War into the festival's historical landscape. Kubrick understood that war can be both absurd and terrifying, bureaucratic and intimate. His films remain painful reminders that military power often produces its own distorted language, rituals and silences.

The wider selection moves from Chaplin's silent-era satire to later films such as Martin Scorsese's Killers of the Flower Moon, linking the American dream to conquest, racial violence, finance, oil and the long struggle to tell history from more than one point of view.

STARS, TRIBUTES AND THE ART OF REMEMBRANCE

Deauville is also a place for honouring the performers who have given American cinema some of its most durable faces. Ethan Hawke and Brendan Fraser are receiving Deauville Talent Awards; Faye Dunaway is being recognised with a Deauville Icon Award; and Sophie Thatcher receives a Deauville Rising Star Award. Susan Sarandon is also among the festival's major honourees and guests.

These names bring very different versions of American cinema to the Normandy coast. Dunaway evokes the fierce, modern glamour of New Hollywood. Hawke represents artistic endurance across independent cinema, theatre, writing and directing. Fraser's recent return to the centre of awards recognition has given him the kind of comeback story Hollywood has always loved perhaps because it reminds the industry that audiences can still recognise sincerity when they see it.

Celebrity remains part of Deauville's pleasure. But its real value lies in the opportunity to revisit performances and careers outside the noise of commercial release schedules. An award on the Normandy coast can create the space to look again and looking again is often the beginning of serious film criticism.

A FESTIVAL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

One of Deauville's enduring strengths is that the festival is not reserved for industry professionals, invited guests or people who know how to wear black sunglasses in the rain. The public can buy tickets and passes, attend screenings and take part in the City of Deauville Audience Award.

The Festival Pass costs €170, or €102 at the reduced rate for students under 26 and jobseekers, and provides access to more than 80 films at the C.I.D., Casino cinema and Cinema Morny, excluding designated star sessions. The Fan Offer, priced at €320 and already sold out, includes access to the full festival programme, including star sessions, subject to seating conditions. Individual star-session tickets cost €17, with a €11 reduced price, while some premium events are priced at €40.

The Audience Award gives viewers a direct role in the Festival's outcome. It is a simple but meaningful democratic gesture: cinema

criticism does not belong exclusively to juries, distributors, sales agents or magazine covers. It also belongs to the person who buys a ticket, watches attentively and decides that a film deserves to travel further.

A DAY OF FILMS, YOUNG AUDIENCES AND INDUSTRY

On Sunday 6 September, the Festival illustrated its many identities in a single day. Seventeen screenings were scheduled across the C.I.D., the Casino cinema, Morny 2 and Morny 3, covering the competition, premieres, American documentary stories and classic films.

The programme included meetings with filmmakers behind Mouse, directed by Kelly O'Sullivan and Alex Thompson, and Méli-Mélo, directed by Leah Nelson. The evening continued at the C.I.D. with Andy Garcia's Diamond and the presentation of Brendan Fraser's Deauville Talent Award.

The Festival also made room for younger viewers with a special screening, open from age six, of L'Île des Souvenirs by Joel Crawford and Januel P. Mercado. Giving children access to the Festival's large-screen experience is more than a family-friendly gesture. It is a reminder that cinema culture has to be transmitted, not simply streamed.

The same day launched the Deauville Industry Days, a new professional programme devoted to dialogue between French and American film industries. Pitch sessions, professional meetings and discussions on food styling and production practices aimed to build practical bridges across the Atlantic. The Festival therefore functions as a public event, an artistic showcase and a working meeting place for those who finance, produce, write, direct and distribute films.

A NORMANDY STAGE FOR AMERICAN STORIES

The Deauville American Film Festival has always played a delicate and productive game: it celebrates American cinema from France, at the edge of the English Channel, in a town whose architecture, beach cabins and changing weather belong to a very different mythology.

That distance is one of its advantages. Deauville can admire Hollywood without becoming Hollywood. It can welcome stars while continuing to protect a space for young directors, documentaries, first films, historical classics and audiences who simply want to spend a day moving between screenings.

Under Roschdy Zem's presidency, the 52nd edition has the potential to remind viewers that cinema is not only an industry of fame. It is a memory machine. It records nations at their most seductive and their most troubled; it preserves faces, accents, gestures and conflicts long after political speeches have faded.

As America approaches its 250th anniversary, Deauville offers neither a simple celebration nor a simple indictment. It offers films which is better. Films can flatter a country, expose it, mock it, mourn it and still keep believing that its stories matter.

By Rahma Rachdi, cultural correspondent, for over two decades reporting from Normandy, with Jedi Foster

Disclaimer

This independent cultural article was written by Rahma Rachdi, a journalist and film correspondent, based on official Festival de Deauville programme information, ticketing details, public announcements and editorial analysis. The Festival's public-access model, including passes and the City of Deauville Audience Award, is described according to published programme and ticketing information and remains subject to availability and venue conditions. Our Agency supports disability inclusion, accessibility and the equal representation of disabled journalists, artists and audiences in cultural life.

SOURCES

Official Festival du Cinéma Américain de Deauville programme, selection, events and press resources.

Official Festival presentation of Once Upon a Time (in) America, dedicated to 250 years of American history through cinema.

Official Festival practical guide, including the jury, tributes, schedules and venues.

Festival information on the 52nd edition, the competition and public ticketing arrangements.

Festival programme overview, including the 13-film competition and the anniversary retrospective.

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