

Film and TV director Robert Gillings responds to Riyadh comedy festival backlash

The Paper Empire director praises Saudi Arabia's progress in human rights and female empowerment.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 17, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Paper Empire](#), a crypto-themed TV series created and directed by American filmmaker Robert Gillings, has filmed several episodes in Saudi Arabia's historic AlUla region—marking one of the most significant American television projects to shoot in the Kingdom. The production signals confidence in Saudi Arabia's evolving film infrastructure and its visible social reforms.

Gillings statement follows recent negative press blowback and negative commentary by many comedian's surrounding entertainment events in Saudi Arabia. In light of that criticism, Gillings has spoken publicly to clarify his stance—emphasizing that his experience filming *Paper Empire* in the Kingdom was rooted in acknowledging and supporting the country's ongoing positive transformation.

"Saudi Arabia offered a striking visual and cultural backdrop for *Paper Empire*," said Robert Gillings. "We were inspired by the energy of a positive transformation we experienced there—especially the expanding opportunities for women in the arts and media. As a filmmaker, the country's progress in human rights and women's empowerment was the most important reason I traveled to Saudi Arabia."

Saudi Arabia has taken visible steps toward gender inclusion in recent years, including lifting restrictions on women driving, expanding workforce participation, and opening new creative pathways in film and television as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030.



For Gillings, those efforts—combined with logistical support from the Royal Commission for AlUla, Film AlUla, and Yellow Camel Productions—have positioned the ancient city of AlUla as a growing destination not just for TV shows like Paper Empire but also for other high-end international productions.

“My experience on the ground was eye-opening,” added Gillings. “We worked alongside talented Saudi film crew members—many of them women—such as Rasha Eyad Alemam, Co-Founder and CEO of Yellow Camel Studios, who are helping shape a new creative industry. It’s important to acknowledge progress where it’s happening. As an American filmmaker, I believe cultural collaboration is a bridge, not a barrier.”

Gillings’ remarks arrive amid renewed debate in Hollywood about working in Saudi Arabia following recent simplistic narratives and one-dimensional criticisms from comedians and commentators referencing the country’s human rights record.

“It’s easy to criticize, to speak from afar,” Gillings said. “Holding onto the past prevents one from recognizing change, progression, and growth. When you see firsthand a shift toward empowerment—especially for women—you should embrace and reward that progress, not isolate it.”

“While on location in Saudi Arabia, meeting the people and seeing for myself this powerful human rights and female empowerment movement in motion—that’s worth supporting,” he concluded.

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