James Gray says a filmmaker's best work comes from personal experience

- *James Gray's **Paper Tiger**, a crime thriller set in 1986 New York, has its MENA premiere at Doha Film Festival 2026*
- *Producer Rodrigo Teixeira says independent cinema will always find space outside the system*

Doha, Qatar; November 22, 2026: At a press briefing for the MENA premiere of ***Paper Tiger***, director James Gray said his films mirror his own life, and that audiences deserve the most honest version of it he can give. He was joined by renowned producer, Rodrigo Teixeira.

Set in New York in 1986, ***Paper Tiger*** is a high-octane crime thriller that follows Irwin, a naïve engineer played by Miles Teller and his brother Gary, a former cop played by Adam Driver, who are pulled into a confrontation with the Russian mafia. The film premiered in competition at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

In the session, Gray shared the film's inspiration from his own family. "It is quite autobiographical and an honest rendering of what I was going through inside," said Gray."

Gary, played by Adam Driver, is a powerful operator who knows how to navigate the city's dangerous underbelly, but in the end, decides to sacrifice himself for his family. "The two brothers do a terrible job of accounting for the ocean of malevolence and darkness beneath their feet. They underrate the threat. So, the title can be read as ironic and straight at the same time," said Gray.

" I believe that as a filmmaker, if I have a voice that matters at all, I should be as personal as possible and show all of my strengths and my weaknesses. That is how we can seed compassion and sympathy in this world."

"The systems try to get you to bury your voice in a larger statement, or in a genre where it is hidden. I have been lucky to make cinema that is directly personal. I don't take that responsibility lightly."

Gray said he once believed that cinema, like opera, would flourish for about a hundred years and then give way to another art form. Accessible technology has changed his view. "Anyone with a phone can make a film. The blockbuster has dominated the industry for about 40 years. But even when something dominates, you see new growth on the other side. I am optimistic that technology will introduce new voices."

Teixeira, founder of RT Features in Brazil, said independent cinema faces the same struggles in every country. "It is impossible to own the whole system, so there will always be space to create original films outside it." The difference in Brazil, he said, is that there is formalised government infrastructure that has supported the country's cinema for a long time.

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