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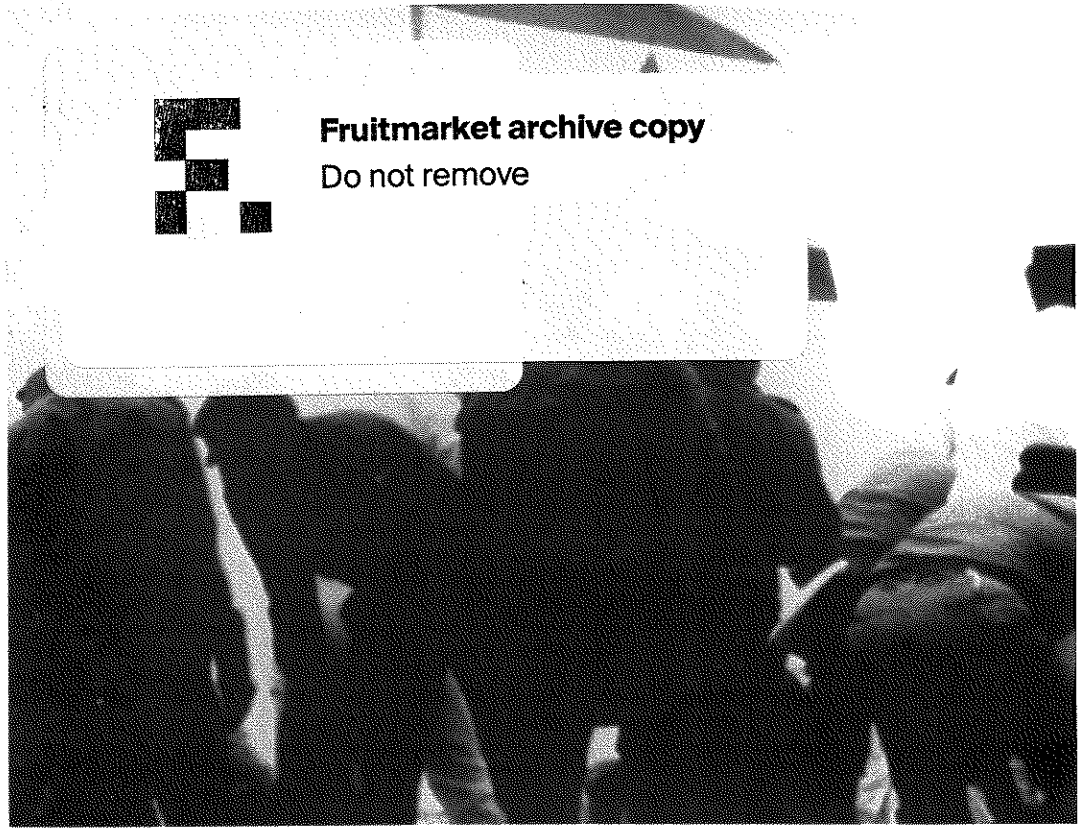

Descriptions of a Struggle

Israeli/Palestinian Film Series

7 June – 24 July 1999

Organised by Marc Lambert and Evelyne Kluger-Kadish

The Fruitmarket Gallery
Edinburgh

Descriptions of a Struggle

Israeli/Palestinian Film Series

Omar Al-Qattan
Nurith Aviv
Simone Bitton
Assy Dayan
Ayelet Dekel
Orna Ben Dor
Duki Dror
Azza El-Hassan
Amos Gitai
Amit Goren
Nizzar Hassan
Michel Khleifi
Rashid Mashrawi
Mai Masri
Avi Mograbi
Tsipi Reibenbach
Ido Sela
Elia Suleiman
Sobhi Zobaidi

"Culture is meant to be controversial. It should provoke thought, not defend it"

Michel Khleifi, 1986

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Elia Suleiman, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, 1996

Palestinian/Israeli Cinema(s)

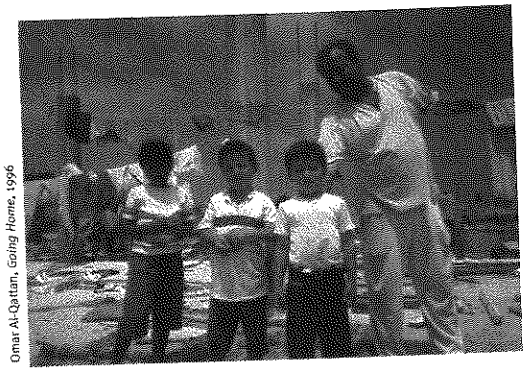
Paul Willemen

In spite of the common curatorial habit of presenting artforms under a national flag, cinema – and more recently video – are media which cast doubt on the all too easy yoking together of artforms and nation states, raising questions about the very concept of a 'national' culture rather than confirming its legitimacy. This is as true of the films made in the USA, Britain, India or in any other country. In the country today called Israel, the first major film work was done by a Ukrainian Jew, Yaacov Ben Dov, and his First Palestinian Film Company in 1919. Since then, in spite of the fact that part of 'Palestine' has come to be named Israel, it has remained difficult to make firm distinctions between Palestinian and Israeli cinema(s) as all film makers who 'inhabit' the territory together with all who have been displaced from it make films/videos about what it means to live in it. However different the perspectives adopted and however different the cultural traditions invoked by individual film makers may be, they all share, at least, the context provided by this common geo-historical framework.

In order to provide a way in to thinking about the complexities involved in being an artist in Palestine/Israel, the Fruitmarket Gallery presents a range of films and videos made by artists working in the territory, some defining themselves as Israeli, some as Palestinian, some just as film makers trying to deal with the problem of being only ambiguously aligned with either identity. The questions raised by the films and videos go to the very heart of what it means to be an artist working in a 'specific time and place' choosing to 'speak' within the terms of specific media. A special afternoon has been set aside where these and other questions can be discussed on the basis of the films/videos by members of the public together with some of the film makers involved.

Professor Paul Willemen teaches at Napier University, Edinburgh. He is the editor of *The Films of Amos Gitai*, published by the British Film Institute, and on sale in the gallery bookshop.

1. *Going Home*
Director: Omar Al-Qattan. Documentary 1996. Duration 50 min. Producer: André Singer and Michel Khleifi.


Omar Al-Qattan, *Going Home*, 1996

In late 1947, Palestine is a country in the throes of war between Palestine's Arabs and Jews. The British government is officially responsible for maintaining law and order but it quickly loses control and decides to abandon the country on May 15th 1948, leaving behind a war which was to lead to the tragic dispossession of over three quarter million Palestinian Arabs of their homes and the creation of the state of Israel. One man, Major Derek Cooper, witnessed those final days of the Mandate as an officer in the British army responsible for the protection of the Arab city of Jaffa (see also http://www.yafa.org). His experiences there marked him so deeply that he continued to work on behalf of Palestine's refugees for most of his life. The film tells the story of his return to Palestine/Israel in the summer of 1995.

Writer/Producer/Director **Omar Al-Qattan** graduated from Oxford in 1985 and from INSAS Film School in Brussels in 1988. In 1991 his film *Dreams and Silence* won the Joris Ivens Award (1st Prize), and an Honorary Mention at the Amsterdam Documentary Film Festival. In 1988, with Michel Khleifi and Jacqueline Louis, he founded Sourat Films sprl (Brussels) and in 1996 he created Sindibad Multimedia Ltd., a CD-ROM publishing company with a special focus on Arabic and Arab subjects. He is currently working on *Homesick*, a feature-length film based on the novel by Tony Hanania (Bloomsbury 1997).

Sindibad video and multimedia titles available from the gallery bookshop:
CD ROM: *An A-Z of the Middle East*, in association with Les Éditions de l'Atelier, Paris - The indispensable guide to today's Middle East. VHS Videos: By M. Khleifi - *Wedding in Galilee; Tale of the Three Jewels; Canticle of the Stones; Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land.* By O. Al-Qattan - *Dreams and Silence; Going Home*. For more information contact Sindibad Films LTD, 5 Princes Gate, London SW7 1QJ (tel. 0171 823 74 88, fax 0171 823 91 37). Or visit the Sindibad website on www.sindibad.co.uk

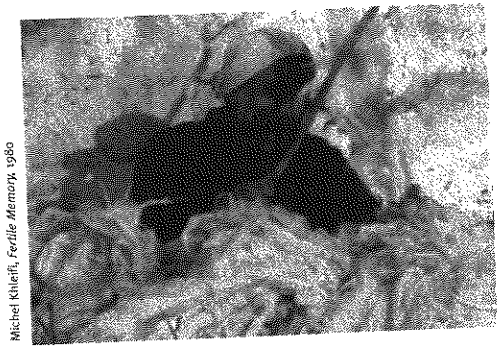
2. *Ma'aloul Celebrates its Destruction*
Director: Michel Khleifi. Documentary 1984. Duration 30 min. Producer: Michel Khleifi and Perrine Humblet.

Ma'aloul is a Palestinian village in Galilee. In 1948, it was destroyed by the Israeli armed forces and its inhabitants expelled either to Lebanon or to the neighbouring town of Nazareth. Ever since, the former inhabitants of Ma'aloul are only allowed to visit it once a year on the anniversary of Israel's independence and have developed a tradition of organising a picnic on this day on the very site of the destroyed village. "We filmed this special day and various components of reality which come together and create the film. Through them, a new dimension is given to the Israeli-Palestinian problem: time". (M. Khleifi). In *Ma'aloul*, Khleifi relives the experiences of former residents of a village demolished by the Israelis, complete with footage from [lyrically reconstructed] home movies and a teacher's history lesson on the creation of Israel and the Palestinian problem. As villagers plan to visit their old homes, some among them wonder if they should perpetuate the pain of remembering. The answer: "Rights don't disappear as long as someone claims them." Those who were born there cannot forget, but they concede the next generation will.

3. *Fertile Memory*
Director: Michel Khleifi. Docu-feature 1980. Duration 99 min. Producer: Michel Khleifi. Finalist for the Prix de la Camera d'Or Cannes 1981. Prix special du jury, Festival de Cinema dei Popoli 1981, Florence.

Written in 1978, Fertile Memory was the first film to be made by a Palestinian director inside Israel's pre-1967 borders. Neither a documentary nor a feature film, Fertile Memory recounts the lives of two very different Palestinian women: Farah Hatoum, a widow living with her children and grandchildren, and Sahar Khalifeh a West Bank novelist. Michel Khleifi observes both women closely in their everyday life and brings their contrasting personalities to the fore. Their differing opinions and differing lives play an important role in underlining their shared status as Palestinians under Israeli rule, and as women in a male-dominated society. Yet despite these contrasts, both mother and intellectual share the same struggle for freedom and dignity.

"The object of this film is to ensure that between the contrasting characters and differing destinies of the two central personalities, the condition of Palestinian women living under occupation is brought out both as a memory and as a living reality. The film is not didactic but it captures the spectator in a movement of emotion, a new film which breaks down barriers and is fertile....
I wanted to make a film on oppression in a manner which was not abstract. I wanted to ask myself how people who were victims of history became oppressors. I myself, a Palestinian, am a victim of Zionist oppression, but I'm also an oppressor in relation to women and children, who are at the bottom of our social hierarchy." (M. Khleifi)


Michel Khleifi, *Fertile Memory*, 1980

"Khleifi has made one of the most beautiful films on individual resistance to oppression. The film... merits an international audience" (Revue du Cinema 358).

"...the most effective cinema study to date on the complexities of the Palestinian experience" (Miriam Rosen, Merip Report, June 1984).

Michel Khleifi taught at the Institut National Supérieur des arts du spectacle (INSAS), Brussels from 1983-88, and was Head of the Film Department from 1987-88, where he designed the film course still used today for all directing and production students. He has produced or directed five full-length features and seven documentaries which have received numerous awards, among them *Wedding in Galilee* (1986); *Canticle of the Stones* (1990); *L'Ordre du Jour* (1992), and *Tale Of The Three Jewels* (1994/5).
These VHS titles are on sale in the gallery bookshop.

4. *A Title Deed From Moses*

Director Azza El-Hassan. Documentary, 1998. Duration 30 min. Producer: Azza El-Hassan / Jerusalem Legal Aid and Documentary Center.

A Title Deed from Moses deals with plans made for the expansion of the Israeli Ma'aleh Adumim colony, linking it to East Jerusalem. As a result of this expansion, five Palestinian villages will no longer be able to grow. The plan also entails the forcible removal of a Bedouin tribe from the area. Through the collected testimonies of Israelis and Palestinians the film explores the relationships that have developed between the two groups in the occupied territories over the past fifty years.

Azza El-Hassan (b. Amman, 1971) graduated in Film and Television Studies and Sociology at Glasgow University and in TV Documentary at Goldsmith College in London. Since 1994 she has made several further documentaries and has published widely on Arab film and on censorship. She is the Director of the Yamamma Production House in Ramallah.

5. *Stress: Tension/An Ordinary Day*

Directors: Rashid Mashrawi and Duki Dror. Documentary 1998. Duration 52 min. Producer: The Peres Center for Peace*, The Palestinian Center for Regional Studies, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Jazz Productions.

Stress is a innovative Palestinian-Israeli documentary in two parts, 26 minutes each. *Tension* was directed by R. Mashrawi, and *An Ordinary Day* by Duki Dror. The two parts are uniquely woven together by unifying elements such as music and parallel techniques of editing. The film was produced through the cooperation of Israeli and Palestinian crews who engaged in dialogue in their joint exploration of the stress present in the daily life of both societies. In *Tension* Mashrawi uses only images to depict the tensions arising from the social, economic and political crisis in the Palestinian zone after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The

Rashid Mashrawi/Duki Dror, *Stress: Tension/An Ordinary Day*, 1998

limitation of words are overcome in a powerful collection of faces, movements, and confrontations that challenge the viewer to understand the language of the Palestinian people through the silence of their eyes and the pace of their steps. In *An Ordinary Day*, we have a drama illustrating the fast tempo and deep complexities of Israeli life. A serial stabber in an ultra-religious Jewish neighbourhood in Jerusalem ambushes Arab workers as part of a sequence of vengeful killings perpetrated by both sides. A radio correspondent investigates the incidents, and a taxi driver's conversations with his passengers about the findings reflects a combination of apathy, hope, and fear.

Rashid Mashrawi (b. 1962) was born and raised in a Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. He began filming at 18. Since then he has made numerous documentaries and feature films portraying life in the refugee camps and of reactions to the peace treaty and process, among them *The Shelter* (1989), *Curfew* (1993 – Best Feature Film of the Arabic world, French Film Institute, 1994), *Haifa* (1995 – Official Selection, Cannes 1995; Best Artistic Work, Torino Festival, Italy, 1996) and *Rabab* (1997). In June 1996 he founded the Cinema Production Center in Ramallah, the first Palestinian center concerned with improving the cinema industry in Palestine with a Production and Mobile Cinema departments. **Rashid Mashrawi has contributed an essay on Palestinian Cinema for the *Tales of the Sands* Catalogue.**

Duki Dror (b. 1963 Israel) graduated in Film Studies from The University of California, LA in 1989. He has made six documentaries since 1993 and works in the Israeli film industry.

**More information about the Peres Center For Peace available at the front desk*

6. *My Very Private Map*

Director: Sobhi Zobaidi. Documentary 1998. Duration 21 min. Producer: Refugee camp Productions.

My Very Private Map was made to commemorate the Nakba (the disaster), the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel, an event with a heritage which weighed heavily on life in Palestinian refugee camps. It is an intimate, personal expression of love for Palestine where a 'map' is drawn using objects, poems, music and interviews with participants in the Palestinian uprising. Following in the tracks of the map, fragments are brought together by fragile, precious links: an old ceramic pot, a fading letter and so on. Slow-

motion black and white pictures are accompanied by spiritual songs by American Indians. In interviews the Intifada is defended and the speakers confront the narrator with their frank opinions. *My Very Private Map* is a lyrical ode to Palestine.

Sobhi Zobaidi (b. Jerusalem 1961) grew up in the Al-Jalazon camp, graduated in economics from Bir Zeit University and pursued Film and Cinema Studies at New York University in 1994. The author of other documentaries, mostly on environmental issues in Palestine, he is also known as an actor and songwriter.

7. *Children of Shatila*

Director: Mai Masri. Documentary 1989. 50 min. Producer: Jean-Khlail Chamoun.

Children of Shatila was made in close collaboration with two Palestinian children living in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, which came to world attention after the Sabra-Shatila massacre. Farah, age 11, and Issa, age 12, were both given video cameras with which they recorded their daily lives. Out of their stories evolves a portrait of the entire camp, where 15,000 Palestinians and Lebanese live in appalling conditions.

Mai Masri (b. Amman 1959) studied film at San Francisco State University. She is the author of several award-winning documentaries about Beirut and Palestinian issues. Her films have been shown by over 100 television stations including the BBC, Channel 4 and PBS. With her Lebanese husband Jean-Khlail Chamoun she has set up two production companies: MTC and Nour Productions in Beirut.

8. *Sumud (Ten Years After)*

Director: Ayelet Dekel. Documentary 1987/1997. Duration 26 min. Producer: Amythos TV and Film Productions.

Sumud explores the emergence of the Palestinian uprising. While filming Palestinian children in the Deheisha refugee camp on the West Bank in 1987, Dekel was struck by the intensity of their resentment of Israeli rule. When asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, most children answered "freedom fighter", "gangster" or "executioner". In 1997 Dekel returned to the camp to find out what had become of the children. Footage from both trips is included in *Sumud*, which translates as "preserve the land".

Ayelet Dekel (b. Israel 1960) studied Stage and Cinematic Arts in Tel Aviv and Communication and Television in New York. In 1989 she made her first documentary film, *That's not me*, shown at numerous festivals and on American TV. Currently she is working on a feature film and a television series.

9. *Makom, Avoda*

Director: Nurith Aviv. Documentary 1998. Duration 81 min. Producer Leora Kamenetzky/ Luma Communications. Winner of the Wolgin Award, Jerusalem Film Festival.

Nurith Aviv, *Makom, Avoda*, 1998

Moshav Shekef, a green and pleasant place in the Lachish region, is inhabited by Israelis - some are Arabs, some were born in Morocco, Argentina or Iraq. Today there are 40 families, half of whom vote for the left, and half who vote for the right. Opposite, on the other side of the Green Line, is the Palestinian village of Beth-Awah (population 7000). The agricultural labourers who worked in Moshav Shekef came from Beth-Awah until the start of the Intifada when Moshav Shekef member Eli Cohen was murdered. The murder still hasn't been solved. As a result, the Moshav Shekef members decided to cease employment of all Palestinian workers. Moshav Shekef became the first moshav to receive permission to employ workers from Thailand. Later the entire agricultural sector followed suit... *Makom, Avoda* deals with the problems of the foreign workers and at the same time, with the situation that created that problem. A triangle is formed between Thais, Palestinians and Israelis - who all live around the same place (Makom), and work (Avoda) - the link between them. The film exposes the tensions, fears and uncertainties which are concealed behind the apparently peaceful, green exterior of the moshav. The different characters in the film reveal within the triangle of relationships a variety of perspectives that undermine the familiar clichés. In addition to this complexity, it seems that everyone suffers from the same oppressive sense of being trapped.

Nurith Aviv has worked with Amos Gitai, Agnes Varda and a host of others as Director of Photography on over 60 feature and documentary films. As director she has made three other documentary films.

10. *Good or Bad, Black and White.*

Director: Amit Goren. Documentary 1995. Duration 82 min. Producer: Amit Goren, Eytan Harris. Winner of the Wolgin Award, Jerusalem Film Festival and Special Prize for Best Director by The New Foundation for Cinema & Television 1995.

A caravan camp in a deserted military base is the first home in Israel for immigrants arriving from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. Peter from the Ukraine and Chanan from Samarkand meet with Fitigeh from Gondar and Gavru from Addis Ababa. Their cross cultural encounter heightens the already strong feelings of uprooting, dislocation and alienation. The film follows Peter's efforts to realise his pre-immigration dreams of a 'Fantastika Israel' described in official brochures, and his attempts to bring his mother and sisters out of the Ukraine. In a neighboring caravan Fitigeh and her family dream of

'becoming white in Israel' shatters in the face of hostility towards their heritage, customs and skin colour. In the midst is Ilana, the camp's director who emigrated from Iraq during the 1950s, now trying to ease the misery she herself experienced as an immigrant. This is a story of a two year journey from Ethiopia and the Ukraine to a temporary residence on the fringe of Israeli society. Here the immigrants long for a permanent address they can call 'home'.

11. *Another Land*
Director: Amit Goren. Docu-drama, 1998. Duration 85 min. Producer: Amit Goren, Yeud Levanon. Winner of the Wolgin Award, Jerusalem Film Festival 1998.

"Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space... it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control."
(Mary Douglas, *The Idea of a Home: a Kind of Space*)

"Another Land *examines the meaning of 'Home' from a personal and a public perspective, against a background of political and social upheaval in Israel, between 1992-98. The morning after the elections in 1996, I spontaneously filmed the interior of my apartment. Looking out of the window, I saw a group of ultra-orthodox Jews who live nearby. They were in high spirits as they were calculating Knesset seats. Above them, on the facade of an apartment building, hung a large poster: 'Netenyahu. Making Peace with Security'. The camera returned to the interior of the apartment as shooting my rooms and possessions gave me a feeling of security. Everything was as it had been the night before, when I went to sleep thinking that the peace process would continue. In a drawing by my eight year old son there is a house-like structure, roughly outlined, floating in a void which looks like a tempest or a sand storm, a house which has detached from the ground and escaped control. This is how he showed his feelings of insecurity after his father and mother had separated. The film moves between these two extremes, defined through the home - security and peace of mind on the one hand, collapse on the other - on both private/personal and public/political levels."* (Amit Goren)

Amit Goren, *Another Land*, 1998

12. *Perets and the Wolf*
Director: Amit Goren. Documentary 1999. Duration 50 min. Producer: Amit Goren, Yeud Levanon.

Perets and the Wolf examines relationships between man and wolf through the story of Perets Giladi, a Nature Reserve Ranger and wolf expert, during his work on the Golan Heights in

Amit Goren
Perets and the Wolf
1999

Israel and then in Northern Mongolia, amongst a nomadic population. Agua, a 66 year old Mongolian Hunter and retired economist, recounts an ancient Mongolian proverb about the possibility of a meeting between man and wolf: "If a wolf never shows itself to a man, it is said that that man has less luck than a wolf. If a man is able to see a wolf it is said that he has the same luck as a wolf. But if a man hunts a wolf, it is said that he is someone with more luck than a wolf, and that is a lot." Agua, needless to say, has hunted many wolves. Perets, meanwhile, is involved in the preservation of Israel's unique wolf population. He puts his own luck to the test as he travels to the vast Mongolian steppe to confront wolf hunters and participates in a wolf trapping operation led by an American wildlife expert. Will the wolf show itself to Perets? Can man dwell with wolf or will he hunt it to extinction? The film is a journey from Israel to Mongolia and back, revealing two different cultures and their beliefs and attitudes towards the rhythm of nature and its wildlife.

Producer-Director **Amit Goren** graduated from New York University Film School. His films, which have won numerous awards world-wide, include *The Cage* (1989), *66 Was a Good year for Tourism* (1992), *6 Open 21 Closed* (1994) and *119 Bullets + Three* (1996).

13. *Three Sisters*
Director: Tsipi Reibenbach. Documentary 1998. Duration 68 min. Producer: Tsipi Reibenbach. Winner of Haifa Arts Foundation prize for works in progress 1997 and the Cinematography Award, Festival Doc-Aviv, Tel Aviv 1999.

"Life has passed and we have achieved nothing", says Ester, age 70, the youngest of the three sisters. Karola, the eldest at age 78 is silent. Fruma, my mother, is trying to write her memoirs. They a Holocaust survivors. Over 50 years have passed but they are still unable to tell their story. Following World War II, all three were in

love with one man, my father, but only one, Fruma, won him, though he loved the youngest, Ester most of all. This is a film about the relations between three sisters, sisters who talk on the telephone occasionally but never meet. The film follows their daily life - three women who, in their old age, devote most of their time to caring for their sick husbands. The camera follows them in the shower and during intimate medical examinations, exposes the wrinkles and veins which will not disappear and the taboo of the naked bodies of the elderly. They are forced to deal with the weakness, loneliness and anger of old age. In the background lurks the trauma of the past. The Nazis stole not only their youth but also their ability to grow old in serene fulfillment. Three Sisters *is a film about people whose time is running out. In the present looms the fear of death and the feeling of having missed out. Despite the fact that this is a film about old age, it is also a film of much humour and optimism."* (Tsipi Reibenbach)

Tsipi Reibenbach graduated in Mathematics and Physics from Tel Aviv University in 1969 and in Film, Television and Animation in 1980. In 1996 she won The Minister of Culture Prize for Filmmakers. Her films include *The Garden* (1976); *Widow Plus* (1981); and the much acclaimed award-winning *Choice and Destiny* (1993).

14. *Ostura*

Director: Nizar Hassan. Docu-feature 1998. Duration 90 min. Producer: Nizar Hassan. Winner of the Wolgin Award, Jerusalem Film Festival 1999.

Until summer 1948, Moussa el Khalil and Amneh el Qasem lived in their house in Safouri, a town in northern Palestine. Three generations lived in the same household: Moussa and Amneh, their two daughters and only son Abu Salim married to Um Salim, and their two grand children Hadra and Salim. Salim was Abu Salim's only son and appeared to confirm an old tradition by which only one son was born to the family each generation. In the 1948 war leading to the establishment of the State of Israel, Safouri was conquered and destroyed and an Israeli settlement named Zipori was built on its ruins. All the Khalil family had fled apart from the grandfather Moussa who refused to leave with them and remained. Some months after the end of the 1948 war, his wife succeeded in infiltrating back into what was now Israel bringing along their grand-son Salim. Salim's parents, however, did not manage to do so and had to remain in the Irbid refugee camp in Jordan. The sealed borders prevented them from joining their only son. Hence, Salim grew up with his grandparents in the new village of Zipori and was educated in Jewish schools. His parents had two more sons in their forced exile, but the Khalil family remained torn apart by the new political and military reality. Salim acquires Israeli nationality and becomes instrumental in trying to reunite his family, working toward the return of his parents, and his brothers who he has never met and who live in Jordan and Germany. At the same time he tries to preserve his role of the 'only son' in line with his family's tradition.

Tsipi Reibenbach, *Three Sisters*, 1998

Nizar Hassan, *Ostura*, 1998

Ostura, which means legend, fable or myth shows the problem of the Palestinian's forced exile though the personal story of a family scattered to various countries. The film exposes the world of people fighting one of the bitterest and most contentious problems: that of identity in the face of the loss of their homeland. The film exposes the layers of this complex story by creating a new cinematic reality - a sort of legend - in which political and psychological realities mingle in time and space, through the personal story of one family reflecting on the catastrophe of a people robbed of their homeland.

Nizar Hassan graduated in Anthropology from Haifa University in 1989. His highly acclaimed films include *Istiqlal* (1994 – winner of the Wolgin), *Kalamat* (1995) and *Jasmin* (1996 – winner of the Wolgin award).

15. *Introduction to the End of an Argument (speaking for oneself; speaking for others)*

Director: Elia Suleiman in collaboration with Jayce Salloum. Experimental Documentary 1992. Duration: 45 min. Producer: Elia Suleiman. Best Experimental Documentary at the Atlanta Film Festival 1992. Bronze Award at Montbillard International Video Festival 1993.

The film critiques representations of the Middle East, Arab culture and the Palestinian people produced by the West. The work is a compilation of Hollywood, European and Israeli films, documentary, news coverage and live footage shot in the West Bank and Gaza strip. The film approaches the subject by deviating from a critical analysis in order to avoid granting the racist stereotype any credibility. The tactic is to appropriate the images, bunch them, take them out of their context, and to make them clash to nullify their meaning. By pushing them to the surface, the film renders them shallower than they aim to be, and by employing a quick-pace montage it inflicts image digestive problems and conceptual nausea on the spectator. The result is to make the images

more ephemeral than their expected life expectancy, speeding their exit.

Elia Suleiman, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, 1996

16. *Chronicle of a Disappearance*
Director: Elia Suleiman. Feature 1996. Duration 84 min. Producer: Elia Suleiman. Luigi De Laurentis Prize, Venice 1996 (Best First Feature). Silver Prize, Nantes 1996 Festival of Three Continents.

After living in New York for many years, Suleiman returned to Israel for this film. He used his privileged position as half insider and half outsider to analyse how much the Arab population of Israel is losing its national identity. Through his quasi-aimless roaming we become acquainted with his extended circle of family and friends. The characters lead a marginal existence in an occasionally surreal reality. The director/protagonist moves between the role of a character and a spectator, mediator and narrator, as the film itself moves between genres. Lucidly structured, the film is both funny and ironic.

> *"Employing a compilation of possible truths, transgressed mediums and genres to explore the entwined boundaries between naming and storytelling, history and autobiography, the film depicts a situation of stasis, characterised by deprivation, disillusionment and lack of action. It explores the effect of ghettoisation and marginalisation on the Palestinian Psyche."* (Elia Suleiman).

Elia Suleiman (b. Nazareth 1960), lived in New York from 1982-93 where he made his first two films *Introduction to the End of an Argument* and *Homage by Assassination*. In 1994/5 he was a visiting lecturer at Beirziet University teaching Discourse Analysis and Communication. In 1995 he shot his first feature film *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. Other films include *The Arab Dream* commissioned by La Sept Arte 1998 as part of an end of the millennium programme. Currently he lives in Paris where he is preparing his next feature film *The Kill Fee*.

17. *The 92 Minutes of Mr. Baum*
Director Assi Dayan. Feature 1997. Duration 80 min. Producer: Yoram Kislev, Haim Meckiberg. Winner 1997 Israeli Academy Awards for best Screenplay and Best Leading Actor.

Mr. Baum is an importer of purple 'Made in China' sunglasses. Given just 92 minutes to live, he sets off on a frantic farewell tour. He imagines how his nearest and dearest react to the news of his death, and how they gather on a comic odyssey to his graveside.

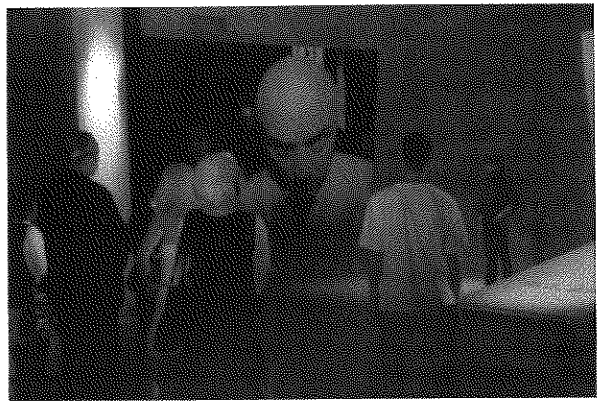
Mickey Baum is granted one final satisfaction: he beats death by 2 minutes. An offbeat look at the banalities of everyday life, spiced up by the odd fantasy in somewhat dubious taste, this is Dayan's third film in a trilogy illustrating his philosophical approach to the search for the meaning of life, "just a case of running errands and following procedures... death is the only plan in life..."

> *"Before writing the script, I asked several people what they would do if they were informed that they only had 92 minutes left. The answer was, in most cases, silence. Because 92 minutes is too short a time to commit suicide, take a tour around the world, make love or waste that time in traffic jams on the way to the emergency room. However, and this is the point of the movie, it makes no difference whether you've got 92 minutes or 92 years. If tombstones spoke the truth, then everyone would wish to have been buried at sea..."*

Writer, Director and Actor **Assi Dayan** (b. Israel 1945), studied Philosophy and has appeared in over twenty films. He has written and directed a further fourteen.

18. *Field Diary*
Director: Amos Gitai. Film Journal 1982. Duration 83 min. Producer: Richard Copans for Les Films D'Ici.

Made in the occupied territories during the invasion of Lebanon, *Field diary* uses the power of the camera against the power of the gun. During the tense opening sequence, Gitai films a dispute with the Israeli army that wants to prevent him from filming the Palestinian Mayor of Naplouse, who is under house arrest. Amid threats and intimidation, the camera keeps turning. Gitai uses and abuses the power of film. Each shot is a test, lasting until the contradictions explode under the impassive eye of the camera. The sound editing adds to the uneasy atmosphere, with a prayer for the dead or a speech by Begin - the voice of Zionism gone astray, emulating a landscape that cries out for its deported inhabitants.



Assi Dayan
The 92 Minutes of Mr Baum
1997

19. *A House in Jerusalem*
Director: Amos Gitai. Documentary 1998. Duration 90 min. Producer ITV - Television.

In 1978 Gitai made *Bait (The House),* in which he shed light on the difficulties of the young nation of Islam. 20 years later, he returns to that same house and evokes a new situation in Israel, through its owners past and present. The film describes a series of concentric circles around the house and its neighbourhood, underlying the unstable situation of the Israelis who came to occupy this part of Jerusalem at the expense of its former inhabitants. The only constant is the suffering of the expropriated Palestinian family. "To see something that is yours, but to be unable to go inside, words cannot describe it", says Mr. Dejani at the end of the film, in front of the house where he was born. *House* offers a microcosm of relations and conflicts between Jews and Arabs.

20. *Wadi 1981 - 1991*
Director: Amos Gitai. Documentary 1991. Duration 97 min. Producer AGAV Films/La Sept Arte. Winner Grand Prix, 32nd Festival Dei Popoli, Florence.

Wadi Rushmia is a valley in the eastern part of Haifa. Until the end of the British Mandate Wadi was a quarry. From 1948 until today, many different groups have come to make their homes here - Jewish immigrants from North Africa and from Eastern Europe, many from refugee camps, living side by side with Arabs evicted from their homes. In Wadi everyone makes their own living space using old car tires, barrels and other materials found among the city's refuse. The inhabitants have to help each other in order to survive. In this valley Jews and Arabs live together. The film focuses on three groups: an Arab family, a Jewish family and a mixed couple. Gitai had filmed here in 1981. Returning ten years later he wanted to trace those people he had filmed a decade earlier and to find out whether social relations had shifted over the years. The resulting film depicts harsh realities and shattered ideals.

Amos Gitai (b. Haifa 1950) studied architecture in Israel and America. He began making films in 1977, for Israeli television. After two of his films were censored and Field Diary met with much hostility, he emigrated to Paris. From there he continued to study themes of exile, emigration and geography, creating films which exceeded the bounds of traditional genres such as *Esther* (1985), *Berlin-Jerusalem* (1989) and *The Petrified Garden* (1993). His latest film *Kadosh* (1999) received widespread acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival. For more information please see *The Films of Amos Gitai,* ed. by Paul Willemen and published by the British Film Institute - available from the bookshop.

21. *Because Of That War*
Director: Orna Ben Dor. Documentary 1988. Duration 90 min. Producer: Israel Film Service. Winner of Israeli Film Critics Prize; Critics Prize Berlin Film Festival, Prize winner Leningrad Film Festival.

A subject which has become central in Israeli documentary cinema, the memory of the Holocaust reflected by the second generation of Israelis, is the subject of *Because Of That War*. It is a sensitive portrait of two of Israel's best known musicians, Yehuda Poliker and Ya'akov Gilad, who are responsible for some of the most moving songs on the subject of the Holocaust. This film, along with Tsipi Reibenbach's *Choice* and *Destiny* and *Three Sisters*, set the mark for the genre.

> *"The collaboration of two of Israel's top rock musicians takes an unexpected turn when they learn that they are both children of Holocaust survivors. Intrigued by this discovery, they embark on a journey through the separate realities of generations living together in worlds apart: their parents who suffer in silence, and their peers, who confront pain by denying it. But* Because Of That War *is more than the story of Yehuda Poliker and Ya'akov Gilad. It is a remarkable portrait of a generation emerging from a war it never experienced to a world it didn't create. A musical journey of the heart, from hate to hope."* (Orna Ben Dor)

Orna Ben Dor graduated in Philosophy from Hebrew University Jerusalem in 1976 and in Film Studies from Tel Aviv University in 1981. She is General Manager of the New Foundation for Cinema & Television, and teaches at the Camera Obscura Film Department in Tel Aviv, at the Jerusalem School for Film & Television, and at Tel Aviv University. Her other films include *Cloud Burst* (1989), *Sarah* (1991 – prize winner Denver Film Festival), *Good Holocaust* (1993) and *New Land* (1994).

22. *Palestine: Story of a Land*
Director: Simone Bitton. Documentary 1993. Duration 115 min. Producer: Point du Jour, France 3, INA.

Compiled from film and photographic archives, *Story of a Land* tells the controversial story of Palestine this century. Land is at the center of this conflict. Promised, reclaimed, conquered, transformed, lost, forbidden and bloodstained, the land is key. Over the course of this century, hundreds of villages and towns have been built; and hundreds have been razed and destroyed, or occupied, leaving hundreds of thousands dreaming of a return. And while the victims of racism and genocide have regained their human dignity, others see their most elementary human rights denied. At once historical, national and religious, home land and place of exile, the land of Palestine is now the scene of bitter conflicts between two peoples and their birthright. But the story is not even as easy to define as this, for it cannot be comprehended without an understanding of its (essentially European) historical sources, and its place as a result of the cold war and the division of the world by 'the new world order'. Nor can its interaction with the contemporary Arab world be underestimated.

The film begins with images from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1880 and ends with the Madrid negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis in 1991. Will the current peace process succeed? As a well known middle-eastern saying has it:

'before asking how things will turn out, better first to understand how it all started in the first place...'

Simone Bitton (b. Morocco 1955) graduated from the Paris Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques in 1981. She has made over 15 documentaries including *Between Two Wars* 1983, *Great Masters of Arabic Music* (1986), *Great Voices of Arabic Music* (1990), *Arafat: 24 Hours with Yasser Arafat* (1994), and *The Bombing: Suicide Bombing in Jerusalem* (1998).

23. *Testimonies: Israeli Soldiers on the Intifada*
Director: Ido Sela. Documentary 1985. Duration 56 min. Producer: Amit Breuer.

Israeli soldiers involved in suppressing the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) discuss the emotions they experienced and the memories they still harbour today. When confronted with film footage of themselves brutalising unarmed Palestinians, some speak matter-of-factly of "following orders". Others are deeply conflicted. Tracing the on-the-ground processes entailed by a policy of military action in a civilian population, this tape takes a painfully critical look at progressive and pervasive dehumanisation among soldiers and commanders. Commissioned by Channel 4 and Les Films D'Ici, *Testimonies* was long banned in Israel, has never been shown on television, but is still used by the military.

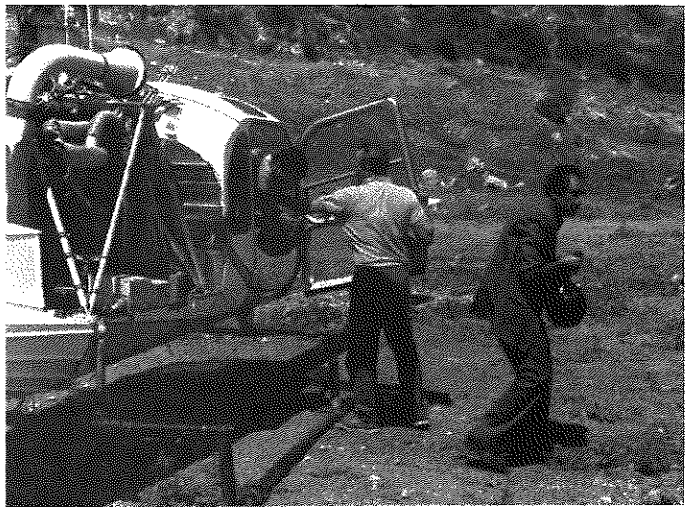
24. *Deportation*
Director: Avi Mograbi. Documentary 1989. Duration 12 min. Producer Avi Mograbi.

This short film deals with the exile of Palestinian detainees by the Israeli authorities. Wordlessly transported by helicopter to the border, they are forced to cross into exile.

25. *Happy Birthday Mr. Mograbi*
Director Avi Mograbi. Semi-documentary 1999. Duration 77 min. Producer: Avi Mograbi, Serge Lalou, Les Films D'Ici. Distinguished Filmmaker Award, Doc-Aviv Film Festival, Tel Aviv.

"In 1998 Israel celebrated its 50th anniversary and I decided to celebrate my own anniversary on the same date (it was due only 10 days later). The raw idea was to tell two parallel stories. The first about the making of a documentary following the jubilee celebrations, the second about the middle age crisis of the filmmaker - me. The two stories were meant to run a dialogue, or in fact argue, on the screen. But something was bothering me. When I realised what it was it seemed obvious: there was no way to mark these two anniversaries without marking a third, the Nakba, the 50th anniversary of the Palestinian catastrophe. I decided that in this line of the story a Palestinian producer hires the same filmmaker to shoot stuff for a Palestinian film commemorating the Nakba. The material he shoots takes the form of a disruption of the (final) film. Images of destroyed Palestinian villages invade the film like pirate broadcasts. The last third of the film has become an argument, with strife between its three elements. One story may take over for a moment, only to be disrupted by a kind of 'video static'. The film ends on the eve of Israel's Independence Day. People are celebrating in the streets. The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories mark the Nakba while fireworks light up the sky. Palestinian protesters are shot dead by Israeli soldiers. Mograbi sits at home alone and finishes the telling of the three parallel stories." (Avi Mograbi)

Happy Birthday Mr. Mograbi is **Avi Mograbi**'s sixth film. *How I learned to Overcome my Fear* and *Love Arik Sharon* showed at The Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1997.



Avi Mograbi
Deportation
1989

Programme organised by Marc Lambert and (in Israel) Eveline Kluger-Kadish. Eveline Kluger-Kadish has worked for the Jerusalem and Edinburgh Film Festivals, and currently works as a producer in the Israeli film industry.

With thanks to the following for their invaluable advice and co-operation: the film-makers, Paul Willemen at Napier University; Sarit Shapira; Jacques Persekian; Ken Inglis at Edinburgh Filmhouse; Elia Suleiman; Omar Al-Qattan and Nathalie Meagan at Sindibad Films, London; Rashid Mashrawi at The Cinema Production Distribution Centre, Ramallah; Rutger Wolfson at The Witte de With Gallery, Rotterdam; Simon Hill at Digital Facilities, Edinburgh; Claudia at Christa Saredi Films, Zurich; Amit Breuer at Amythos Films, Tel Aviv; Marnix van Wijk at Fortissimo Films, Amsterdam; Christel Higraff at Jane Balfour Films, London; and Sammy Tat at Jazz Productions, Tel Aviv.

The films *My Very Private Map, Ma'aloul Celebrates Its Destruction, Fertile Memory, A Title Deed from Moses, Tension, Children of Shatila* and *Sumud* were part of the programme in the exhibition *From/To*, organised by Fareed Armaly and Witte de With, Center for contemporary art in Rotterdam.

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Omar Al-Qattan

Nurith Aviv

Simone Bitton

Assy Dayan

Ayelet Dekel

Orna Ben Dor

Duki Dror

Azza El-Hassan

Amos Gitai

Amit Goren

Nizzar Hassan

Michel Khleifi

Rashid Mashrawi

Mai Masri

Avi Mograbi

Tsipi Reibenbach

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Front: Amos Gitai, *Field Diary*, 1982