

Israeli Series  
Autumn/Winter 2016-2017

An Introduction to Israeli Cinema

**Cinema of Israel**

*Article sourced from Wikiwand:* [*http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Cinema\_of\_Israel*](http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Cinema_of_Israel)

**History**

Movies were made in Mandatory Palestine from the beginning of the silent film era although the development of the local film industry accelerated after the establishment of the state. Early films were mainly documentary or news roundups, shown in Israeli cinemas before the movie started.

One of the pioneers of cinema in Israel was Baruch Agadati. Agadati purchased cinematographer Yaakov Ben Dov's film archives in 1934 when Ben Dov retired from filmmaking and together with his brother Yitzhak established the AGA Newsreel. He directed the early Zionist film entitled *This is the Land* (1935).

In 1948, Yosef Navon, a soundman, and Yitzhak Agadati, producer of the first Hebrew-language film with his brother, Baruch Agadati, found an investor, businessman Mordechai Navon, who invested his own money in film and lab equipment. Agadati used his connections among Haganah comrades to acquire land for a studio. In 1949 the Geva film labs were established on the site of an abandoned woodshed in Givatayim.

In 1954, the Knesset passed the Law for the Encouragement of Israeli Films (החוק לעידוד הסרט הישראלי). Leading filmmakers in the 1960s were Menahem Golan, Ephraim Kishon, and Uri Zohar.

The first Bourekas film was *Sallah Shabati*, produced by Ephraim Kishon in 1964. In 1965 Uri Zohar produced the film *Hole in the Moon*, influenced by French New Wave films.

In the first decade of the 21st century, several Israeli films won awards in film festivals around the world. Prominent films of this period include *Late Marriage* (Dover Koshashvili), *Broken Wings*, *Walk on Water* and *Yossi & Jagger* (Eytan Fox), *Nina's Tragedies*, *Campfire* and *Beaufort* (Joseph Cedar), *Or (My Treasure)* (Keren Yedaya), *Turn Left at the End of the World* (Avi Nesher), *The Band's Visit* (Eran Kolirin) *Waltz With Bashir* (Ari Folman), and *Ajami*. In 2011, *Strangers No More* won the Oscar for best Short Documentary. In 2013 two documentaries were nominated the Oscar for the Best Feature Documentary: The Gatekeepers (Dror Moreh) and Five Broken Cameras, a Palestinian-Israeli-French co-production (Emad Burnat, Guy Davidi).

Author Julie Gray notes "Israeli film is certainly not new in Israel, but it is fast gaining attention in the U.S., which is a double-edged sword. American distributors feel that the small American audience interested in Israeli film, are squarely focused on the turbulent and troubled conflict that besets us daily."

2014 was the best year for Israeli films at the Israeli box-office. Israeli-made films sold 1.6 million tickets in Israel in 2014, the best in Israel's film history.

**Israeli Film**

*Article sourced from My Jewish Learning:* [*http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israeli-film/*](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/israeli-film/)

****Israel is a young country, and cinema is a young art form. But the relationship between Israeli cinema and its establishment has often been an uneasy one. Nonetheless, the history of Israeli cinema mirrors the history of Israel itself.

One of the first-ever motion pictures was filmed in Ottoman Palestine by the French Lumiere brothers. It is known popularly as *Train Station in Jerusalem* (1896). Its exotic, panoramic views are as transfixing today as when they were first screened for a European audience.

*Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) itself remained the focal point of filmmakers through the period of the British Mandate. The first feature-length film in Hebrew was *Oded the Wanderer* (1933). It depicts a young*sabra* [Jew born in the land of Israel] who gets separated from his classmates on a school trip. In a typically didactic effort, the film emphasizes the importance of working the land and restoring a Jewish connection to it.

Most productions made during the years before and the first years of Israeli statehood, stressed these and other Zionist ideals. A common trope was the heroism of the Jewish pioneers, not just in settling the land, but also in fighting for their survival.

The most prominent Israeli manifestation of this type is probably *Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer* (1955). Filmed with a relatively expensive budget, it tells the stories of four fighters from diverse backgrounds in the War of Independence. They die, but their deaths are not in vain–their mission is accomplished and the eponymous hill is awarded to Israel.

Ephraim Kishon’s first movie, *Sallah Shabbati* (1964), is radically different from these standard productions featuring heroism, nobility, and sacrifice. It shattered all box-office records and is still shown frequently in *ulpanim* [Hebrew-language training] in Israel. *Sallah* hilariously subverts the self-important idealism that was so pervasive both in Israel and in Israeli films. It was nominated for an Academy Award, and stars Haim Topol as a Sephardic immigrant [that is, a migrant from Mediterranean lands], lazy and endearing, who manipulates the system for his own advantage.

The late ’60s saw the emergence of a new force in Israeli cinema, the so-called *Kayitz* (in Hebrew, an acronym for Young Israeli Cinema) group. The French *nouvelle vague*–New Wave–movement and its concept of the auteur had begun filtering through to Israel.

Developments in cinema were also running parallel to developments nationally, as the [1967] Six-Day War changed Israel’s view of itself. Israelis were bored with the Zionist fables, and were less worried about imminent destruction. However, there was no context in which to place the cinematic innovations as there was elsewhere. In literature, there was an uninterrupted tradition going back thousands of years, and writers were able to draw on a rich heritage to lend resonance and context to their work. In film, forging a modern native tradition with artistic integrity proved more difficult.

Uri Zohar’s *Three Days and a Child* (1967), based on a short story by A.B. Yehoshua, garnered Oded Kotler the Best Actor Award at the 1967 Cannes Film Festival. It is a psychological drama, which explores the ambivalence of a man during three days when he baby-sits the son of his ex-girlfriend. It strives, in ways the story does not, to normalize life in Israel and the existential dilemmas faced by its citizens. However, this very effort makes it less successful than the work by Yehoshua, who knows that nothing universal can arise without attention to the particular, and that Jerusalem is not Paris. Despite its lack of complete success, the film is of seminal significance in its effort to project a fully realized artistic vision onto the screen.

The ’70s saw the ascendancy of the so-called “bourekas films.” Many Israelis looked to these home-grown farces (and some melodramas) for an escape from the tension of their lives. In no way sophisticated, and as unpretentious and insubstantial as the pastries that gave them their name, these bourekas films fit the bill.

Finally, in 1978 the Fund for the Encouragement of Quality Israeli Cinema was established. Not coincidentally, the second wave of Kayitz filmmakers emerged in the late ’70s and early ’80s. One of the most important members of this generation is Uri Barabash, whose made-for-television drama, *My First Sony*, is being screened at the Israel Film Festival. His work deals with issues like mental illness, the rehabilitation of criminals, and the pressures of basic training. His most well-known film is *Beyond the Walls* (1986), which deals with Arab-Jewish relations in a prison and was nominated for an Academy Award.

In the 1990s, Israeli cinema came of age in many ways. The expanded population and economy, along with a less defensive, insular perspective of Israeli society, have contributed to an explosion in both the quantity and quality of films. Many Israelis stopped going to domestic films at the time of the bourekas movies, and continue reflexively to avoid local productions. Others see all films as ambassadors, and thus want them to represent Israel in the best light possible.

Unsettling is an understatement for the situation in Israel today. What course even the immediate future will take is uncertain. There are explosive, rival visions of the character and nature of the state. These conflicting views have the potential to provide fertile nourishment to a film industry that is increasingly gaining respect, both at home and abroad. As Israel continues to mature, we can only wait and see what form Israeli cinema will take as it matures too.