

Agav films presents

OFFICIAL SELECTION COMPETITION



AnA Arabia



A FILM BY AMOS GITAI

www.amosgitai.com

SYNOPSIS



Filmed in one sequence-shot of 85 minutes, ANA ARABIA is a moment in the life of a small community of outcasts, Jews and Arabs, who live together in a forgotten enclave at the "border" between Jaffa and Bat Yam, in Israel. One day, Yael, a young journalist, visits them. In these dilapidated shacks, in the orchard filled with lemon trees and surrounded by mass public houses, she discovers a range of characters far removed from the usual clichés offered by the region. Yael has the feeling of having discovered a human goldmine. She no longer thinks of her job. Faces and words of Youssef and Miriam, Sarah and Walid, of their neighbors, their friends tell her about life, its dreams and its hopes, its love affairs, desires and disillusion. Their relation to time is different than that of the city around them. In this tinkered and fragile place, there is a possibility of coexistence. A universal metaphor.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

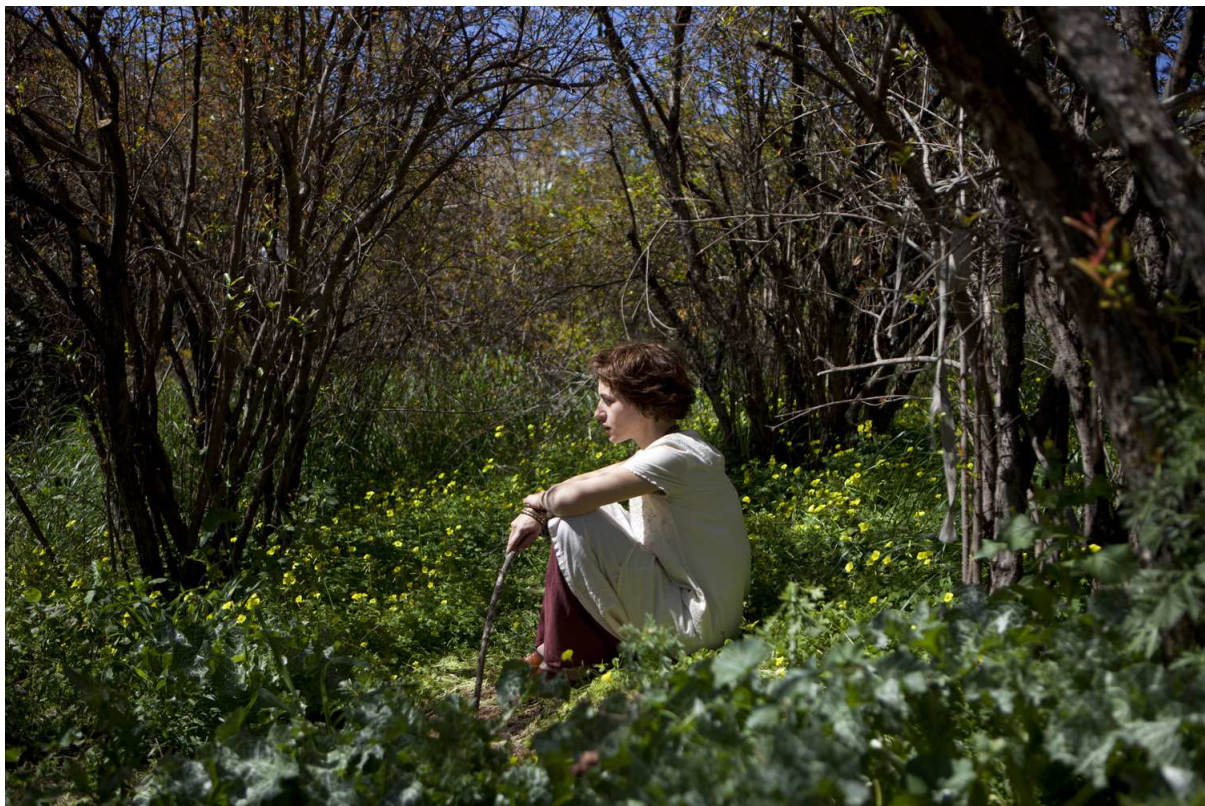
The story of Ana Arabia is based on several sources. One of them is a little news item, which appeared also in European press about a woman in Umm el Fahem, a village in the North of Israel. She went to see her doctor due to a loss of calcium. He told her that she might have been malnourished when she was a child. Her head was covered like all Muslim women, yet after much hesitation, she told him that she had actually been born in Auschwitz. Through this woman's story we discover a very rare tale of friendship and love - especially rare in this region of so much hatred and conflict - between this Jewish woman born in Auschwitz and her Muslim husband. It's said that they had 5 children and 25 grand children.

This initiated my research on how to tell this story, which breaks those borders of prejudice and hostility. I also referred to the series of documentaries I did over the past 20 years: the first one in 81 (WADI), then in 91 (WADI, TEN YEARS AFTER) and in 2001 (WADI GRAND CANYON 2001). Those films describe a group of Arabs and Jews in Wadi, in the north of Israel, their biographies and fragments of their biographies.



THE LAST ENCLAVE

The set is an important actor of ANA ARABIA. It is the last enclave of a kind of shantytown in Jaffa, next to Tel Aviv. The rest of Jaffa, especially the most precious coastal area, is little by little being eaten away by the real estate pressures of the Israeli upper middle class. They are pushing away the original Palestinian population so this is probably the last enclave which is enclosed by a road on one side and a series of mass residential housing for a mixture of Palestinians and immigrants from Russia, etc. There is a beauty in this piece of shantytown in the way that it integrates the popular talent of people shaping their environment. So you will see some old trees that nobody dares to cut at the entrance and then you will see some houses and some cables and some makeshift handiwork and a little piece of garden and an orchard. All of that is a kind of endangered zone because since the value of the real estate is going up, the pressures on this fragile community will go up and up. There is an improvised garage where one who lives there is fixing in open air some cars, which come by. So the whole environment is very adapted to the community. In a way, the film is also a statement about architecture, about environment, about a built space. It took quite a while to find this place and I have to say that line producer Gadi Levy was very talented in reaching an agreement with the families who live in this area so that they would accommodate us while we were shooting.



DAILY LIFE

I had to consider carefully the question of where to situate this story. I think that in cinema, the set is very important. It establishes the context. Maybe that's also because I was formed as an architect and I remain very interested in architecture. Also, I like the convenience and the simplicity of the relation of the crew having easy access to the set. I like it more and more through the years. In this case we are all like anyone else going to their daily workplace.

They wake up in the morning, they sleep wherever they are, they take a bus, they take a taxi, they take a bicycle, and they go and work and then in the evening they disperse again. So this way of filming is more and more appealing to me as a procedure. In the past I used to do films which involved displacements: you collect all your crew, you sleep in a hotel or in a kibbutz or in a guesthouse, but now I like more and more the other routine of the fabrication of a film and I think it has a part in the mood, in the tissue of this particular film. Ana Arabia, which means 'Me, the Arab' is about daily life.

So I think that the nature of the film itself and the way of fabrication of the film had to adapt somehow to the subject, to the theme, to the sense of the film itself.

CINEMA IS ALSO FORM

ANA ARABIA tells vignettes, little memories, little stories that everyone of us carries with him or with her. That was another challenge for me: how to film this because cinema is not only content, not only narrative, not only writing, not only stories: it is also form. What form would I use to recount this daily life, these everyday stories, and how can we relate these fragmented memories of people dispersed in space. Since for a long time I have liked using sequence shots (plan-sequence) to connect fragments, contradictions, for ANA ARABIA I set to myself a much more ambitious goal: to make the entire film - 81 minutes - in one shot without any cuts. The continuous shot and its rhythm envelop the fragments of these figures. It's also somewhat of a political statement, commenting that the destinies of Jews and Arabs on this land will not be cut, will not be separated. They are interwoven and they have to find ways, a pacific way, to coexist and to find modules in which each one will live their life, and they will nourish and stimulate each other and not just by continuous conflicts.

ONE SEQUENCE SHOT

In cinema the interesting thing is that once you decide on a formal concept it implies immediately not only the routine of the making of the film, but also the additional technical challenge: how can we shoot the entire film in one sequence shot? What we discovered with director of photography Giora Bejach, and to the Steadicam is that actually the existing cameras with all the bravour about digital technology do not allow so easily to make a very long shot of this length. The cameras can deal with 10-12 minutes but even the American camera Red, after 17 minutes, starts to make major fan noise like a tractor, which disturbs the sound. In the end, we shot the film with a camera called Alexa belonging to Arriflex. We were obliged to have an external hard disk, which was carried by a camera assistant who walked behind the Steadicam. So if you had been on the set, you would have seen a group of technicians and my assistants running around, one behind the other, in order not to enter the frame since the camera was on a continuous move.

THE LAST TAKE

Although the film is 81 minutes, we couldn't shoot it every day because the physical effort on the crew was too big. Also I like more and more the fact that we can shoot some time and then break and reassess what we did and then shoot some more. The take that I chose to be the film is the last one, the last of 10 takes and I have to admit that it is the only good one. The other takes, I saw them while I was shooting, and I did not even wish to see them again, each one having other defaults. This particular take has a kind of grace in the rhythm, in the fact that the seven actors, four men and three women, integrated the rhythm of pronouncing their words in a good way in relation to the movement of the camera. Also since I wanted the change of light to be a part of the continuity of this shot, we started to shoot at 4:00 pm until 5.30 when the sun starts to go down so you can see along the shot the modification of the natural light, the textures, the colors, the material from which this shantytown is done and the human faces which are the center of this story.



AMOS GITAI BIOGRAPHY



The work of Amos Gitai spans 41 years and includes over 80 films. While his output and longevity are striking, most impressive is the diversity of his body of work – video productions, theatre pieces, and books. However, his diversity is kept balanced by an overarching coherence. Over the years, Amos Gitai has ceaselessly examined and reexamined the fundamental elements that link his works; overlapping them, mirroring them, and finding different ways – physical and imaginary – to enquire into the territories and questions his work addresses. He was born in Israel to a Bauhaus architect, Munio Weinraub, and an intellectual, Efratia Gitai, a secular teacher of Biblical texts. As a young soldier sent to the theatre of war in Golan in 1973 and confronted with the growing strength of the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation, Amos Gitai experienced decisive moments personally. Other experiences included his training and first vocation as an architect, whose influence is ever-present in his films. Amos Gitai resides in Haifa and Paris. He is one of the most respected filmmaker on the international scene and through his work constantly explores new narrative and stylistic methods while keeping a close relationship to contemporary reality, even when his scripts take detours into the mythical past.

Jean-Michel Frodon

CAST

Yael	Yuval SCHARF
Yussuf	Yussuf ABU WARDA
Miriam	Sarah ADLER
Sarah	Assi LEVY
Hassan	Uri GAVRIEL
Norman	Norman ISSA
Walid	Shady SRUR

CREW

DIRECTOR	Amos GITAI
SCREENPLAY	Amos GITAI & Marie-José SANSELME
PHOTOGRAPHY	Giora BEJACH
STEADYCAM	Nir BAR
SET DESIGN	Miguel MERKIN
EDITING	Isabelle INGOLD
SOUND DESIGN	Alex CLAUD
COSTUMS	Laura SHEIN
CASTING	Ilan MOSCOVITCH
PRODUCER	Michael TAPUACH, Amos GITAI, Laurent TRUCHOT
LINE PRODUCER	Gady LEVY
PRODUCED BY	HAMON HAFKOT, AGAV HAFKOT, AGAV FILMS

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