

# The Museum of Modern Art

## REDISCOVERING GEORGIAN CINEMA

July 8-22

These 3 revelatory Georgian films, made across 3 decades of tumultuous history, exemplify one of the most storied traditions in world cinema.

***Ramdenime interwiu pirad sakitchebze*** (*Some Interviews on Personal Questions*). 1978. Georgia. Directed by Lana Gogoberidze. Screenplay by Gogoberidze, Erlom Akhvlediani, Zara Akhvlediani. With Sofiko Chiaureli, Gia Badridze, Ketevan Orakhelashvili. In Georgian; English subtitles. 94 min. A landmark of Georgian cinema and second-wave feminism, *Some Interviews* is an unsung Soviet counterpart to Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), in which Lana Gogoberidze mixes techniques of *vérité* documentary with wry, self-reflexive storytelling and breaks taboos of women's sexuality, conflicted desire, and independence. In the film, a well-respected journalist questions contemporary Soviet women about their careers and families, growing increasingly vexed about her own life's decisions and childhood memories of her mother's exile to the Gulag.

***Didi mtswane weli*** (*Great Green Valley*). 1967. Georgia. Directed by Merab Kokochashvili. Screenplay by Merab Elioizishvili. With Dodo Abashidze, Lia Kapanadze, Mzia Maglakelidze. In Georgian; English subtitles. 86 min. This great green valley has shades of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Beyond what appears to be another Soviet paean to nature and man's labor—a neorealist drama of a peasant who clings fiercely to his hardscrabble ways in the face of inevitable modernity—lies an almost pulp noir of marital strife and vengefulness.

***Sghwarze*** (*On the Border*). 1993. Georgia. Directed by Dito Tsintsadze. In Georgian; English subtitles. 78 min. The unacknowledged conflict of *On the Border* is the civil war in early 1990s Georgia, but the film's sharp-eyed portrayal of political and inter-ethnic violence and one man's divided loyalties could equally take place in Georgia today, a nation living in the shadow of a former Soviet Empire bent on reclaiming its lost golden past. Following the release of his related 2019 film *Shindisi*, about the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, Tsintsadze observed, "This creeping invasion is going on every week...every day. The border is moving meter by meter. No one knows what to do because any act of resistance could trigger another full Russian occupation."

## REDISCOVERING NORTH AFRICAN CINEMA

July 15-29

These films from North Africa—one by a pair of internationally celebrated Algerian writers, 2 by the father of Sudanese cinema, and 8 by a Sudanese film collective—examine legacies of colonialism, wars of independence, and political and religious violence.

***La zerda et les chants de l'oubli.*** 1982. Algeria. Directed by Assia Djébar. Screenplay by Malek Alloula. In Arabic; English subtitles. 59 min.. *La Zerda* is a brilliant work of historical revisionism in which the Algerian writers Assia Djébar and Malek Alloula dissect French colonial newsreel propaganda from 1912-1942 to reveal the simmering hatreds and signs of revolt among the subjugated Magreb population. Before her death in 2015, Djébar was often mentioned as a contender for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her novels, poems, essays, and less-known films are the eloquent expression of a richly conflicted self, torn as she was between her native Algeria and her ambivalently adopted France; between “the maternal tongue of Arabic” and what she called “the language of the enemy” (French); and between the promise of postcolonial liberation and the violent constraints, especially for women, of Islamic fundamentalism.

***Les misérables.*** 2006. Sudan. Directed by Gadalla Gubara. In Arabic; English subtitles. 105 min. The father of Sudanese cinema, Gadalla Gubara had become blind by the time he made this fascinating homespun adaptation of *Les Misérables*, relying on his daughter Sara, a wonderful filmmaker in her own right, to help him finish it. The rousing populism of Victor Hugo’s 1862 novel—in which goodness and justice triumph over corruption and abuse and the meek inherit the earth—must have seemed appealing if rather far fetched in a country that by 2006 lay in ruins, its decades-long civil war leaving millions of people dead, maimed, enslaved, and uprooted.

### ***The Sudanese Film Group***

From the late 1970s until Omar al-Bashir’s military coup of 1989, as myriad religious and political factions waged a seemingly endless civil war in Sudan, a group of filmmakers working first within the Ministry of Culture and then more independently of the state banded together to make a series of compelling short subjects, some of them documentary evocations of life during—and despite—wartime (a school for children with disabilities, a crossroads in the Sahara) and others more allegorical in nature (a camel in a sesame mill, two blind men and a donkey crossing the desert). Program includes:

***Afrika, Džungli, Baraban I Revoljucija*** (*Africa, The Jungle, Drums and Revolution*). 1979. USSR. Directed by Suliman Elnour. In Arabic; English subtitles. 12 min.

***Wa Lakin Alardh Tador*** (*It Still Rotates*). 1978. USSR. Written and directed by Suliman Elnour. In Arabic; English subtitles. 18 min.

***Al Dhareeh*** (*The Tomb*). 1977. Egypt. Written and directed by Eltayeb Mahdi. With Tharwat Aloub, Abu Bakr John, Abdel Da’em Omer. In Arabic; English subtitles. 16 min.

***Al Mahatta*** (*The Station*). 1989. Sudan. Written and directed by Eltayeb Mahdi. In Arabic; English subtitles. 15 min.

***Arba'a Marat Lil Atfal (Four Times For Children)***. 1979. Sudan. Directed by Eltayeb Mahdi. In Arabic; English subtitles 20 min.

***Al Habil (The Rope)***. 1985. Sudan. Written and directed by Ibrahim Shaddad. With Khatab H. Ahmed, A. Gadir Daoud, Mariam M. Eltayeb. In Arabic; English subtitles. 31 min.

***Jamal (A Camel)***. 1981. Sudan. Written and directed by Ibrahim Shaddad. In Arabic; English subtitles. 13 min.

***Jagdpartie (Hunting Party)***. 1964. East Germany. Directed by Ibrahim Shaddad. Screenplay by Shaddad, Claus Neumann. With Petra Hinze, Günter Meier, Günter Meier. In German; English subtitles. 40 min.

### **BRECHTIAN CINEMA**

July 22-August 5

Love and lust among the nomadic tribes of the Sudanese desert, the decline and fall of an empire in India, a massacre in Mozambique: these culturally disparate films have their roots in popular political theater, employing Brechtian alienation effects to stir audiences to action.

***Mueda: Memoria e massacre (Mueda, Memory and Massacre)***. 1979. Mozambique. Directed by Ruy Guerra. Screenplay by Calisto Dos Lagos. With Romao Canapoquele, Filipe Gunoguacala, Mauricio Machimbuco. In Makonde, Portuguese; English subtitles. 75 min. After spending 30 years in Brazil, where he became a key figure of the Cinema Novo movement, Ruy Guerra returned in 1978 to his native Mozambique to film an electrifying piece of absurdist political theater: the amateur theatrical reenactment by survivors of the 1960 Mueda massacre, performed yearly since 1975 in the very town square in which it took place. It was there, on the morning of June 16, 1960, that Portuguese troops fired on a peaceful demonstration of unarmed Makonde nationalists, a bloodbath that left hundreds dead and sparked the Mozambican War of Independence (1965-74) that would end 470 years of Portuguese colonial rule in the East African region.

***Ghashiram Kotwal***. 1977. India. Directed by Mani Kaul, Krishnan Hariharan, Yukt Film Collective. Screenplay by Vijay Tendulkar. With Mohan Agashe, Om Puri. In Marathi; English subtitles. 107 min. The collapse of India's Maratha Empire in 1818, which paved the way for British occupation and rule, is a riveting tale of lust and bloodlust, treachery and murderous despotism. In 1976, the great Mani Kaul, a leading figure of Indian parallel cinema, together with Krishnan Hariharan and other graduates of the national film school in Pune, formed the Yuki Film Collective and took this momentous chapter of Indian history as the subject of their collaborative film effort, dramatically reworking a popular Marathi play into a wildly experimental interrogation of history writing and political awakening.

**Tajouj.** 1977. Sudan. Directed by Gadalla Gubara. An enchanting and humorous blend of music, fable, and melodrama, *Tajouje* has become a classic of African cinema, the first Sudanese feature film and also the debut film of Gadalla Gubara (his later adaptation of *Les misérables* streams from July 15-29). The story of a forbidden love triangle among the nomadic Beja people of the Eastern Desert in 19th-century Sudan, *Tajouje* stars Salah Ibn Albadya, a nationally beloved performer best known for his mystical Sufi and romantic ballads. In Arabic; English subtitles. 92 min.

### **SKETCHES OF AN INDIAN CITY AT REST AND UNREST**

July 29-August 12

In these provocative film essays, Ruchir Joshi and Deepa Dhanraj reflect on the Indian cities of Ahmedabad, Kolkata, and Hyderabad, which for centuries have proudly stood as centers of cosmopolitanism but in more recent decades have witnessed vicious and deadly outbreaks of sectarian violence.

**Egaro Mile (Eleven Miles).** 1991. India. Directed by Ruchir Joshi. “The Bauls are an ancient group of wandering minstrels from Bengal, who believe in simplicity in life and love,” observed the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. An ecstatic blend of Sufi and Sahaja religious mysticism and romantic balladry, Baul has been an elemental force of Bengali culture for centuries, its name possibly derived from the Sanskrit *batul* meaning “mad,” or “afflicted by the wind disease.” Ruchir Joshi’s enlightening film preserves an ancient oral tradition through contemporary Baul performances as well as his own ruminative poetic sensibility.

**Memories of Milk City.** 1991. India. Directed by Ruchir Joshi. Ahmedabad in the heart of Gujarat in northwest India is a city of uncanny contradictions, where quick-dealing entrepreneurs rub elbows with street philosophers, and where children hawk ice cream from carts while cows roam freely in the shopping malls. Ahmedabad has also been the site of some of the worst violence between Hindus and Muslims in India’s history. Ruchir Joshi’s experimental film sketchbook draws upon the freeform “harmonica” writing of Madhu Rye, a noted Gujarati author, to peel back these layers of complexity. 14 min.

**Tales from Planet Kolkata.** 1993. India. Directed by Ruchir Joshi. Screenplay by Tony Cokes, Joshi. With Cokes, Joshi, Paritosh Sau. In Bengali, Hindi; English subtitles. 38 min. A great work of political subterfuge and subversive humor, *Tales from Planet Kolkata* confronts Western cultural stereotypes of India by contrasting Hollywood images (Kolkata portrayed in *City of Joy* as a miserable hellhole) and the bloviations of French theoreticians with the no-bullshit teachings of Ruchir Joshi’s late mentor Deepak Majumdar, who admonished him “not to look ‘down’ with the camera at a poor or destitute person,” and “not to regard traditional performance and crafts [such as the Patua scroll paintings seen in the film] as ‘primitive.’”

**Kya hua is shahar ko? (What Has Happened to this City?).** 1986. India. Directed by Deepa Dhanraj. Screenplay by Keshav Rao Jadav. Moments of tension are leavened by moments of tranquility in Deepa Dhanraj’s essential documentary portrait of the Old

Town of Hyderabad during the politically motivated riots of 1984, where the poorest of the poor lived under siege and where religious fanatics fomented hatred through staged processions and rallies. “In so many ways, what we were filming in the 1980s was prophetic,” Dhanraj later observed. “Hindu fundamentalists destroyed the Babri Mosque in 1992, and in 2002, 2,000 Muslims were killed in a pogrom in Gujarat.” In Hindi; English subtitles. 95 min

## **SCENES FROM THE FEMINIST STRUGGLE IN COLOMBIA AND INDIA**

August 5-19

Avoiding the condescending sentimentality of much Marxist cinema, these filmmakers work closely with their subjects—women textile workers and domestic laborers of India, the native peoples of Colombia—to offer a more honest and complex portrait of feminist activism and indigenous resistance today.

***Chircales*** (*The Brickmakers*). 1971. Colombia. Directed by Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva. In Spanish; English subtitles. 42 min. Depicting the shocking poverty, domestic abuse, and exploitation of indigenous women and children in southern Colombian highlands of Cauca, Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva’s first documentary bears the traits of Marxist cinema that they would later abandon.

***Nuestra voz de tierra, memoria y futuro*** (*Our Voice of Earth, Memory and Future*). 1981. Colombia. Written and directed by Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva. With Fernando Vélez, Eulogio Gurrute, Julian Avirama. In Spanish; English subtitles. 107 min. “This digital restoration honours an important work of Latin American political cinema, one that doesn’t posit indigenous culture in romantic contrast to modernity, but rather recognizes in it an aesthetic of resistance” (Tobias Hering). Nearly 90 and still at work, the Colombian anthropological filmmaker Marta Rodriguez, together with her late husband Jorge Silva, a photographer and cameraman, collaborated on a series of documentaries observing the centuries-old oppression, back-breaking labor, and fiercely preserved language and culture of the farmers and indigenous peoples of the Cauca region in Colombia’s Andean Cordilleras.

### **The Yugantar Film Collective**

India’s first feminist film collective, the Yugantar was founded in 1980 by Abha Bhaiya, Navroze Contractor, Meera Rao, and Deepa Dhanraj to collaborate with grassroots women’s rights groups on a series of provocative exposés. Dhanraj’s related film *What Has Happened to this City?* streams from July 29 through August 12.

***Idhi Katha Matramena*** (*Is This Just a Story?*). 1983. India. Directed by Yugantar. With Lalita K., Poornachandra Rao, Rama Melkote. In Telugu; English subtitles. 25 min. The Yugantar Film Collective collaborated with Sri Shakhti Sanghatana, a feminist research and activist collective based in Hyderabad, on this portrait of exploited women domestic workers.

***Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali*** (*Tobacco Embers*). 1983. India. Directed by Yugantar. In Marathi; English subtitles. 25 min. The Yugantar Film Collective joins with women factory workers in the Indian state of Karnataka as they attempt a strike action.

## **RECENT FILMS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST**

August 12-26

The filmmakers in this program scrutinize the evidentiary record—diary entries, eyewitness and survivor accounts, topographic irregularities—to find proof of Nazi war crimes that continue to be denied some 50 years later.

***Habehira Vehagoral*** (*Choice and Destiny*). 1993. Israel. Written and directed by Tsipi Reibenbach. In Yiddish; English subtitles. 118 min. Seeking to understand how her parents endured the Nazi concentration camps, filmmaker Tsipi Reibenbach documents their ritualized, even obsessive, domestic lives as elderly survivors in an Israeli residential complex.

***Me'kivun ha'yaar*** (*Voices from the Forest*). 2003. Israel. Directed by Limor Pinhasov, Yaron Kaftori. In Russian, Polish, Lithuanian; English subtitles. 91 min. “Between 1941 and 1944 more than 100,000 people, the majority of them Jews, were murdered in Ponar, a village near Vilnius. Kazimierz Sakowicz, an inhabitant of Ponar, documented the shootings as well as everyday life in the village in diary entries written on pieces of paper, calendar pages, and in exercise books. Based on these diary extracts, the film contrasts the memories of the village inhabitants with those of the survivors” (Arsenal).

***Totschweigen*** (*A Wall of Silence*). 1994. Austria/Germany/The Netherlands. Written and directed by Margareta Heinrich, Eduard Erne. With Karin Anselm, Kornelia Boje, Peter Kollek. In German, Hebrew, Hungarian; English subtitles. 88 min. A witness is murdered and a survivor dies during the filmmakers’ search for a mass grave near the Austrian town of Reichnitz, where the Nazis executed a group of Hungarian-Jewish forced laborers in March of 1945, just days before the arrival of the Soviet Red Army.

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