

**KINO**  
INTERNATIONAL

PRESENTS



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
- VENICE 2003 -



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**PRESSBOOK**

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# **KINO**

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## **A L I L A**

### Cast

Yael Abecassis – Gabi  
Uri Klauzner – Ezra  
Hanna Laslo – Mali  
Ronit Elkabetz – Ronit  
Amos Lavie – Hezi  
Lupo Berkowitch – Aviram  
Liron Levo – Ilan  
Yosef carmon – Schwartz  
Amit Mestechkin – Eyal  
Lyn Shiao Zamir – Linda

### Crew

Director – Amos Gitai  
Screenwriters – Amos Gitai and Marie-José Sanselme  
Based on a novel (RETURNING LOST LOVES) by Yehoshua Knaz  
Producers – Amos Gitai, Laurent Truchot and Michael Tapuach  
Co-producers – Michel Propper and Alain Mamou-Mani  
Line Producer – Shuki Friedman  
Casting – Ilan Moscovitch  
Director of Photography – Renato Berta  
Sound Engineers – Daniel Ollivier and Alex Claude  
Editor – Kobi Netanel and Monica Coleman  
Dolby Mixer – Gérard Lamps  
Production Designer – Miguel Markin  
Costume Designer – Laura Sheim Dinulescu

### Technical Specs:

Genre: Comedy / Drama  
Duration: 123 min  
Format: 35mm  
Format: 1:85  
Color  
Sound: Dolby SRD  
Language: Hebrew/ English subtitles

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## ALILA

### Synopsis

Amos Gitai's ALILA intertwines the stories of over a dozen distinct characters who inhabit an apartment complex located in a rundown neighborhood of Tel Aviv.

Holocaust survivor Schwartz (Yosef Carmon) has enjoyed a peaceful existence living in his small apartment with Linda (Lyn Shiao Zamir), a young Filipino who comes regularly to give him medication and company. But recently, Schwartz's treasured silence has been replaced by a cacophony of bangs, loud sounds and aggressive voices.

One of the many obtrusive men audible to Schwartz is Hezi (Amos Lavie). He recently rented one of the nearby apartments in the building for a secret rendezvous with a beautiful and self-deprecating woman named Gabi (Yael Abelcassis). Their intense, unequal and often-violent love affair turns Gabi's life into a public and dissonant garble of psychological pain and physical pleasure. Also disrupting Schwartz's rest is a group of illegal Chinese construction workers who expand one of the apartments into the courtyard, without the landlord's permission.

Divorcee Mali (Hanna Laslo) has her own problems as well. Their neighbors' construction workers have been contracted by her ex-husband Ezra (Uri Klauzner), who is himself unwilling to give up his regular rapport with Mali and let her continue her life with a new young boyfriend. And to make matters worse, their son Eyal (Amit Mestechkin) is missing after having deserted his military service.

# **KINO** INTERNATIONAL **ALILA**

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT** **- BY AMOS GITAI -**

### **THE FABRIC OF TEL AVIV**

ALILA is adapted from a novel by Yehoshua Kenaz (English title: Returning Lost Loves). I wanted to work again in Nehushtan studio, a location I have liked working with since KADOSH. It's a place on the outskirts between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. It has a parking lot crammed with cars, a building that dates from the time of the German Knights Templar and a large hangar which was once an elevator factory ... The decision to shoot there led to a whole series of changes regarding the original text. In the film, everything is regrouped into a sort of patio around a parking lot and everything takes place at ground level. Everything in the novel that took place in Tel Aviv's northern neighborhoods was moved south to a very working class, very colorful neighborhood, which is, for me the very fabric of Tel Aviv.

### **AN ALMOST INCESTUOUS PROMISCUITY**

I wanted to emphasize the feeling of an almost "incestuous" promiscuity. In Israel, dispersed but homogeneous communities found themselves transposed intact to this side of the Mediterranean. These communities rub shoulders, side by side, each trying to make their own little space. At the same time, reality, news, neighbors and gossip incessantly invade people's private lives. There's a constant penetration of intimate space in each "cell" of private life. The challenge was how to describe this space, this "cell" made so small and that it also be understood by the audience. It was an interesting challenge. Screenwriter Marie-José Sanselme and I first eliminated some characters. Then there was the fusion of some characters into one. For example, the character of Mali alone borrows from three different people in the novel. Then, there came the cinematographic script with director of photography Renato Berta regarding how to link exterior and interior into a shot. Each scene is composed of one shot and the film has 40 in total. A couple of weeks before the shoot, the three of us worked on a new shot list to fuse several scenes into one. Then, with Renato, I explored how to use the existing doors and openings of the Nehushtan building in terms of the practicalities and limitations of the camera. Sometimes, the camera barely passed within millimeters of the door frames. This construction of sequences allowed me to formulate the true meaning of the project, through the contrast played between the direction, necessarily linked and fluid, and the descriptive disorder of the story. For ALILA, this decision came about two weeks before the start of the shoot.

# KINO

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## ALILA

### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

– Continued –

#### A WONDERFUL BALAGAN

Israel has a bizarre cultural mixture of European and Oriental origin. It has a very physical presence. This is also one of the subjects of ALILA. This claustrophobic feeling which is sometimes disturbing, but also emotional. Everyone knows one another. Maybe it's also this physical side which helps Israelis hold on, which stops them from becoming completely authoritarian and cold. This disorder, this chaos creates an incredible humanity ... I love this "balagan," is a Hebrew word which means "disorder, shambles" and which is often used in a positive sense. Say, for example, "There was a wonderful balagan." In Tel Aviv, the heat and the balagan create a sort of mental protection. Tel Aviv is a very sensual city because of the reigning heat and the humidity and also because of the architectural failure it often demonstrates. Even a very beautiful avenue will almost certainly have a horrible building which messes up everything. I love this imperfection, this human side. ALILA could only have taken place in this city.

#### NON-CONVENTIONAL PREPARATION

For KADOSH, I asked the actors to say their prayers every night. If someone practices the gestures of a ritual every day for a certain amount of time, it becomes second nature to them...

For ALILA, I asked the actors to camp out on the set. Yaël Abecassis (who plays Gabi) arrived in the morning and sometimes stayed the whole day. She took naps in the afternoon and wore her own clothes. Liron Livo (who plays Ilan) spent several nights going out to clubs, Uri Klauzner (who plays Ezra) went to hire foreign workers at the bus station ... Each actor studied the way in which their situations arose. They played the game and adapted themselves to this non-conventional preparation which I find very effective. Some actors never succeed at that. I like to work with actors with whom I can build a trusting relationship over several projects. In a certain way, the role of Yaël Abecassis in ALILA is the opposite of the one she played in KADOSH. Yaël grew up in a small city, Ashkelon, and has since become a big star. The role of Gabi was a challenge for her, a gamble with regards to her fame. She accepted to have confidence in herself.

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## ALILA

### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

- CONTINUED -

#### PRESERVING HUMANITY

Because of his disappointment before the official discourse of politicians, the working class character of Ezra touches me a lot. At the end of the film, in a certain way, he sanctions his power. In Israeli terms, that's really what it's all about: through his own personal experience, he concludes that preserving humanity is what's most important and not reacting only according to the State. Ezra discovers his own humanity after having met Gabi. That changes his self-esteem and consequently the esteem he has for his son. An individual has the right to choose. He doesn't have to simply execute his role. In the case of Ezra, choice is not intrinsically political. He makes the choice to let someone else choose.

#### TEL AVIV'S HUMAN LANDSCAPE

ALILA is a film on the human landscape of Tel Aviv. A landscape composed today of foreign faces, other destinies, like those of illegal immigrant workers. Since occupied territories are sealed off, there are 300,000 to 400,000 workers from Asia, Romania, Ghana, Nigeria today. They don't have Israeli nationality and very few even have work permits. I am very interested in the life of these non-Jewish, non-Arab communities in this region.

#### THE END OF WHAT CAN BE OBTAINED BY FORCE

Israel will only be able to remain strong if it's still open to doubt. This society must remain open if it wants to subsist. That's its power. If this country becomes a religious autocracy or a strictly military or nationalistic country, it will disappear. Resolving these contradictions shouldn't be attempted. Both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, have come to the end of what they can obtain by force. Perhaps we're at the beginning of a new perspective. It's important for cinema to speak plainly, refusing to demonize, refusing the vocabulary of hate. Over-simplified and exotic imagery should be over and done with. Failed relationships happen just as easily in Tel Aviv as in Tokyo, Gaza or anywhere else ...

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## ALILA

### AMOS GITAI -FILMOGRAPHY-

- 1980 HOUSE (BAIT) (documentary)  
1981 WADI (documentary)  
1982 YOMAN SADE (FIELD DIARY) (documentary)  
1983 ANANAS (documentary)  
1984 BANGKOK - BAHREIN (documentary)  
1985 ESTHER  
1987 BRAND NEW DAY (music documentary)  
1989 BERLIN-JERUSALEM  
1990 BIRTH OF A GOLEM (docudrama)  
1991 WADI , 10 YEARS LATER (documentary)  
    GOLEM, THE SPIRIT OF THE EXILE  
1992 METAMORPHOSIS OF A MELODY (documentary/theater)  
1993 THE PETRIFIED GARDEN  
    KIPPUR WAR MEMORIES (documentary)  
    IN THE VALLEY OF THE WUPPER (documentary)  
    THE WAR OF THE SONS OF LIGHT AGAINST THE SONS OF DARKNESS  
    (documentary/theater)  
1994 GIVE PEACE A CHANCE (documentary)  
    IN THE NAME OF THE DUCE (documentary)  
1995 DEVARIM  
1996 THE ARENA OF MURDER (documentary)  
1998 YOM YOM DAY AFTER DAY  
    ZION, AUTO-EMANCIPATION (documentary)  
    A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM (documentary)  
1999 KADOSH  
2000 KIPPUR  
2001 EDEN  
    WADI GRAND CANYON (documentary)  
2002 KEDMA  
2003 ALILA

# **KINO**

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## ALILA

### THREE TESTIMONIALS (CAST)

#### **YAËL ABECASSIS (Gabi)**

##### ISRAELI MACHISMO

This story between a man and a woman could have happened anywhere in the world, but it also approaches the question of machismo, which I find very Israeli. Since men serve in the military here, they have to be very strong, very viril ... And they show it in their attitude toward women: I can have you and you, too, and you over there, etc. That one, she's my wife. That kid, he's my kid, etc. So feminist ideas take on another interpretation. Women become aggressive. They play out their femininity to the maximum. On the street, they show off their butts, their midriff ... All that inspired me for the character of Gabi.

##### GABI IN CONTROL

Gabi wants revenge against men. To say "Me, too, I can have anyone! No one can have me. I'm like a guy. I am a guy." This type of reasoning often underlies the relationship between men and women. Gabi feels like being strange, original, getting laid, screaming out that she's the one in control. She doesn't want to get married. She wants to express herself. So, in the secret apartment, she screams in pleasure to dominate Hezi ... And she succeeds.

#### **RONIT ELKABETZ (Ronit / the neighbor)**

##### ANGRY AT THE WORLD

My character thinks that everyone is against her. That's very Israeli. In this country, everyone is against everyone. So she represents, for me, this anger against a society which constantly asks you to be tough and to fight to survive. That's her mental universe. She's like an irritation to others, and at the same time, she is absolutely convinced that no matter what she does, no matter what happens, she'll get burned. She's a police woman, expected to be able to clear things up, but as soon as she goes home and takes off the uniform, she returns to this idea that there's no place for her. Of course, she's the one who puts herself in that situation. If she reacted differently, she would find her place. That touched me profoundly, actually overwhelmed me.

# KINO

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## ALILA

### THREE TESTIMONIALS (CAST)

-Continued-

#### **RONIT ELKABETZ (Ronit / the neighbor)**

##### ARABS AND JEWS

When I work on a role, I first prepare it physically. I want to know how the character walks, stands, sits, etc. and then only after that do I reflect on her way of expressing herself. It's very intuitive. For me, her slightly crooked way of walking allows for the expression of her anger. Of course, it's the anger of the Sephardis against the Ashkenazis. But what touched me the most was her discourse against the Arabs. The Arabs and the Jews, what the war is all about that ... That tore me apart. A declaration like that was enough for me to find the key to my whole character.

##### MID-EASTERN DANCE

Soon after my second meeting with Amos, I knew that, despite her anger, my character dances, like a Mid-Eastern dance, shaking her butt, etc. I tried to express her pain and dance at the same time. It's all very intuitive and difficult to explain. As soon as he saw the character who was there, Amos accepted me completely. That's the best moment one can experience with a director. It's a gift. A moment of love, acceptance. Then and there, you can deliver yourself completely and everything is released. Because you've seen the love in his eyes and that he has accepted you with the character that you proposed to him. Then, the rehearsals were very fluid and not numerous.

##### LIVING THROUGH ONE-SHOT SEQUENCES

On the shoot, I loved the idea of these one-shot sequences. It's like choreography, like telling a whole story by also hearing the silences, the unspoken. That's very rare. We're so used to hearing "Action! Cut!" With a one-shot sequence, you can live things out. Each scene has a beginning and an end. That also permits the invitation of other artistic forms like dance, theater, literature ... I found that wonderful but risky, too. But I had complete confidence in Amos. I knew he wouldn't abandon me.

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## ALILA

### THREE TESTIMONIALS (CAST)

-Continued-

#### **HANNA LASLO (Mali)**

##### MALI IS ME

It's very rare to play a character against your own energy. Mali in the film didn't exist as she did in the novel. Amos fused several female characters into one and I put myself into Mali. I understand her very well. Mali is me.

##### MOTHERS OF SOLDIERS

When you have a child with someone, it's for life. Even if you divorce, you have to construct a relationship with your ex-husband. In Israel, most women are mothers of soldiers. One of my sons will soon be going off to the army. To be a woman in this country is like everywhere else, it's about fighting for a career, taking care of the home, remaining beautiful, being perfect in every way. But here, when you send your kids off to school on the bus, it's different. You can't be blasé. Women are generals, heroes, more so than men. Everywhere in the world, the balance of relationships between men and women is distorted. Men feel threatened. They're often more vulnerable than women. Maybe because women are at the heart of things.

END.

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