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# MOTHERLAND, I SEE YOU

THE 20TH CENTURY OF  
GREEK CINEMA

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WITH THE SUPPORT



**THE FILMS FEATURED IN THE INITIATIVE APPEAR  
IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER:**

ASTERO **DIMITRIS GAZIADIS** 1929  
FORGOTTEN FACES **YORGOS TZAVELLAS** 1946  
A MATTER OF DIGNITY **MICHAEL CACOYANNIS** 1958  
MADALENA **DINOS DIMOPOULOS** 1960  
ACROPOLIS **ROVIROS MANTHOULIS** 1960  
MACEDONIAN WEDDING **TAKIS KANELLOPOULOS** 1960  
100 HOURS IN MAY **DIMOS THEOS & FOTOS LAMBRINOS** 1964  
THE ROUNDUP **ADONIS KYROU** 1965  
KISS THE GIRLS **GIANNIS DALIANIDIS** 1965  
THE SEVENTH DAY OF CREATION **VASILIS GEORGIADIS** 1966  
THE SHEPHERDS OF DISORDER **NICO PAPATAKIS** 1967  
KIERION **DIMOS THEOS** 1968  
THIREAN MATINS **KOSTAS SFIKAS & STAVROS TORNES** 1968  
THE YOUNG RUNAWAY **STAVROS TSIOLIS** 1969  
Z **COSTA-GAVRAS** 1969  
EVDOKIA **ALEXIS DAMIANOS** 1971  
PLOT **THEODOROS MARAGOS** 1971  
ANNA'S ENGAGEMENT **PANTELIS VOULGARIS** 1971  
LETTERS FROM AMERICA **LAKIS PAPASTATHIS** 1972  
JOHN THE VIOLENT **TONIA MARKETAKI** 1973  
MEGARA **SAKIS MANIATIS & YORGOS TSEMBEROPOULOS** 1974  
THE REHEARSAL **JULES DASSIN** 1974  
THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS **THEO ANGELOPOULOS** 1975  
LAST STOP, KREUZBERG **YORGOS KARYPIDIS** 1975  
THE OTHER LETTER **LABROS LIAROPOULOS** 1976  
LISA AND THE OTHER **TAKIS SPETSIOTIS** 1976  
IDÉES FIXES / DIES IRAE (VARIATIONS ON THE SAME SUBJECT)  
**ANTOINETTA ANGELIDI** 1977  
THE STRUGGLE OF THE BLIND **MARY HADJIMICHALI - PAPALIOU** 1977  
THE IDLERS OF THE FERTILE VALLEY **NIKOS PANAYOTOPOULOS** 1978  
BETTY **DIMITRIS STAVRAKAS** 1979  
TOURKOVOUNIA **LEFTERIS XANTHOPOULOS** 1982  
FOURNOI, A FEMALE SOCIETY **ALIDA DIMITRIOU & NIKOS KANAKIS** 1983  
LOAFING AND CAMOUFLAGE **NIKOS PERAKIS** 1984  
MANIA **GEORGE PANOUSSOPOULOS** 1985  
THE TREE WE HURT **DIMOS AVDELIODIS** 1986  
MORNING PATROL **NIKOS NIKOLAIDIS** 1987  
...DESERTER **GIORGOS KORRAS & CHRISTOS VOUPOURAS** 1988  
ROM **MENELAOS KARAMAGHIOLIS** 1989  
ATHENE **EVA STEFANI** 1995  
FROM THE EDGE OF THE CITY **CONSTANTINE GIANNARIS** 1998

# Motherland, I See You\*

## RE-EXAMINING 20TH CENTURY GREEK CINEMA

Afroditi Nikolaidou and Dimitris Papanikolaou

**G**REEK CINEMA HAS UNDOUBTEDLY CHANGED over the last decade. The success of the New/Weird Wave and the dense sociopolitical history of the country since 2010 have created a new context for understanding contemporary Greek cinema, its relation to Greek culture, and its position in international production, distribution and screening networks. Furthermore, over the last decade, the way in which we deal with the past has also changed, as has our willingness to watch again the films of the Greek cinematic archive in a new context.

The Hellenic Film Academy project *Motherland, I See You*, is an attempt to return to the Greek cinematic past on this basis. It aims at showcasing the complexity, diversity, and depth of twentieth century Greek cinema. The title itself, “Motherland, I See You”, makes it obvious that the reason for such an attempt to salvage and study Greek films is to renew the way we look at them: to (re) watch them, to become spectators again redefining our relationship with the past of Greek cinema as an aesthetic, sensorial, and social experience. How easy is such an undertaking?

Those of us who are involved in the making, studying, and teaching of Greek cinema recognise here a key issue: the limited access to the material (and to be more precise, to digitally restored and subtitled films). Renewed and alternative



**MOTHERLAND, I SEE YOU** is an initiative of the Hellenic Film Academy dedicated to salvaging, digitizing, screening, and studying 20th century Greek films, under the auspices of the “Greece 2021” Committee. The project is sponsored by the National Centre of Audiovisual Media & Communication (main sponsor), the Greek Film Centre, the Athens Epidaurus Festival, and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival, and with the support of the Greek Film Archive and Finos Film.

readings of a contemporary history of Greek cinema are, in this way, often undermined from the outset, precisely because our relationship with the material is fragmentary and circumstantial – even in the case of rather well-known and studied films. Even the most emblematic works, those which could be considered to belong to a canon, such as Cacoyannis' and Angelopoulos' films are difficult to find, let alone to teach and screen to communities of spectators who would interact with them in a new environment.

At the same time, in the last decade, we have come to appreciate the new impetus offered by every new public screening and discussion of many a twentieth century Greek film. We noticed how eagerly the spectators wanted to participate in this dynamic reframing of older films in a contemporary context. Suddenly, the whole idea of a “national cinema” (and indeed of the cinema of a small nation in crisis) was transformed from a static cultural reference into an energetic field of debate, critique, and redefinition.

Inspired by this dynamic, the project *Motherland, I See You* collected and fully digitised (when this had not been done before) a selection of films, and has now started to present and make accessible digitally restored files. Our project thus provides the material for an ongoing and moving festival: for each outing, a group of films are retrieved from a repository, combined in different ways and thus re-framed, offered as they are to the energy of new gazes, subjectivities and narratives.

## **Moving festival, archive trouble, and history in motion**

The first goal (which has already started to materialise) is the creation of a platform, a “moving festival”. Selections and different combinations of films will travel to theatres in 21 towns in Greece and all over the world. Moreover, an “educational platform” will be created, aiming at the use of this material by educational establishments in Greece and abroad, and by researchers of Greek and world cinema.

The list of films but also the logic of this project is not restrictive. It is one of the many selections that could be made, and we wish that similar initiatives would continue, be disseminated, and multiplied. Synergies and collaborations constitute the nucleus of initiatives that transform what once was a theoretical work or work of writing into action; the screening of films aims not at showing the wealth of our cinematic archive, but at creating a bodily renegotiation with its material, an *archive trouble*.

We believe that this moment in time is appropriate. On the one hand, because of the bicentennial celebration of the declaration of Greek Independence (1821-2021), which has already provided a wider impulse to redefine our relationship with national identity and culture in Greece. On the other hand, since, for more than a decade now, we have seen the development of a new critical and cinephile culture in the country. The “new/weird wave of Greek cinema” made public and critics alike re-evaluate the Greek cinematic past, watch in a different way many well-known films, and seek other, lost films. Systematising this trend, this project suggests the need for more than just a history of Greek cinema and an ethno-graphy; it gestures towards a contemporary and evolving *genealogy* of Greek cinema. Genealogy as a method does not seek to find origins, but to understand the appearance of forms at specific historical moments; it can study inconsistencies, ‘wrong’ or unfollowed paths, unsuccessful or unfinished trajectories and sideways. One of the main aims of the curatorial team, therefore, was to avoid the traditional taxonomization of the history of Greek cinema, and to showcase new connections, familiar genres in new contexts, forgotten narratives, and lost achievements of a long-standing tradition.

With few exceptions, many contemporary spectators have been unable to find, watch, debate, and evaluate a whole array of key Greek films. The state of the material was not always up to standard: colours have faded, scratches have been inserted, soundtracks are failing, and often invasive screening behaviours of the past have ended up leaving their trace on the actual films (e.g. cutting out scenes so that they can fit into the standards of a television broadcast). Undoubtedly, these practices are part of the history of each film, its surviving copies, and film’s dependence on the technological and distribution politics of its time. However, curatorial work on the material in order to preserve its aesthetic characteristics constitutes not only a recognition of cinema as an art; the act of digitalisation brings us back to confront its history, it becomes the point of entry into an entire era. The digitization process is itself a dialogue with the technology of cinema and its techniques, with the way it sees society and its history, the representations it chooses to promote, but also those it chooses to silence. It is a dialogue with the material, not only an intervention into the medium and its material conditions, but also the practice of an embodied media historicization.

Histories of Greek cinema are, to a large extent, guided by a specific and linear narrative. We talk about the Early, Old, New, and Contemporary Greek cinema, in a story that seems deterministic (this is also reflected in the adjectives used, from “early” to “contemporary”) and often stops at the end of the twentieth century. How can we broaden this narrative? What would it mean to

return to the Greek cinema of the '50s and '60s without looking at it as “old” and “commercial”, opening the discussion to questions of media politics, global trends and generic mimicry (eg. in musical, romantic comedy, films of social critique)? How are we to assess today the affective overinvestment that Greek society still displays for certain stars from the “golden age of Greek cinema”? How could a feminist or queer perspective alter our views on “New Greek Cinema”? How is our view of early Greek cinema changing under the pressure of new historical research on the early transnational networks of production and distribution?

In this way, as we are watching, screening, debating films again, it is worth rethinking not only of the transnational but also of the national characteristics of Greek cinema. It is worth looking at how, from the first silent movies and throughout its history, Greek cinema adapted national literary/cultural genres and texts (*Astero*, dir. D. Gaziadis), and proposed ways to revisit national history and face national traumas (*The Roundup*, dir. A. Kyrou, *The Travelling Players*, dir. Th. Angelopoulos); how it produced particularly popular representations of the national narrative (*Papaflessas*, dir. E. Andreou, *Mado Mavrogenous*, dir. K. Karagiannis), often subverted these representations (*When the Greeks*, dir. L. Papastathis, *Megalexandros*, dir. Th. Angelopoulos), researched the national and cultural archive (*100 hours in May*, dir. D. Theos and F. Lambrinos, and *Z* dir. Costa-Gavras, *Mourning Rock*, dir. F. Koutsaftis), and produced films that became themselves part of the national culture, “lieux de mémoire” to which we return and through which we express ourselves, such as *Stella*, dir. M. Cacyannis, *The Ogre*, dir. N. Koundouros, and *Evdokia*, dir. A. Damianos.

It is also worth reapproaching the cinematic topographies of Hellenism – by this term we mean not only the representation of the landscape, but also a certain “cognitive mapping”, i.e. how, through cinema, the national subject is offered an imaginary position on the world map. Crucial in this topography is the cinematographic representation of Athens (from *Astero* and *The Adventures of Villar*, dir. J. Hepp to *A Neighbourhood Named “The Dream”*, dir. A. Alexandrakis, and *From the Edge of the City*, dir. C. Giannaris), and the way it contrasts with the filming of semi-urban or rural areas (*Madalena*, dir. D. Dimopoulos, *The Fear*, dir. M. Manoussakis). Cinema negotiates the geographical fixations of the nation, mediates the imaginary extensions of national space, and follows the latter’s historical shaping.

Important questions about the dialogue between cinema and society re-emerge in this context. Greek cinema has, in memorable ways, both reflected and performatively mediated such issues as: migration (*Until the Ship Sails*, dir. A. Damianos, *Last Stop, Kreuzberg*, dir. Y. Karypidis), urbanization (*The Heavy Melon*, dir. P. Tasios) the transformation of the countryside (...*deserter*, dir. G. Korras and

Chr. Voupouras), social mobility and class (*Face to Face*, dir. R. Manthoulis), gender and sexuality (*From the Edge of the City*, dir. C. Giannaris, *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae* (*Variations on the Same Subject*), dir. A. Angelidi, *Betty*, dir. Stavrakas), countercultures (*Sweet Bunch*, dir. N. Nikolaidis), communities of resistance (*Megara*, dir. S. Maniatis and Y. Tsemberopoulos, *Struggle of the Blind*, dir. M. Hadjimichali-Papaliou), changes in moral codes (*Anna's Engagement*, dir. P. Voulgaris, *John The Violent*, dir. T. Marketaki), the Greek family and its transformations (*The Fear, The Shepherds of Disorder*, dir. N. Papatakis), tradition, “modernisation” and tourism (*Kiss the Girls*, dir. G. Dalianidis, *Thirean Matins*, dir. K. Sfikas and St. Tornés), otherness and identity (*ROM*, dir. M. Karamaghiolis, *Athene*, dir. E. Stefani).

So far, we have mentioned some of the themes and contexts we discussed while preparing *Motherland, I See You*. They are not the only ones. On the contrary, they are just indicative of the issues emerging as we re-think a long series of films and the comparisons and contrasts that emerge as we watch them together.

## From the moving festival to the open book

The book we put together to accompany *Motherland, I See You*, aims at showing the multiplicity of viewpoints and pathways that we would like to see emerging from this initiative. The book does not focus on individual films or specific directors and movements. Instead, we adopted right from the beginning a multi-perspectival and polyphonic approach, which would start by deconstructing our own fixation with periodization and timestamps. Our aim was neither to seek origins nor to suggest a new Canon.

Instead, the book consists of short essays each of which tells a story. They always start with a date – but they see it not as a milestone but as an occasion for critical storytelling. Thus, the date 30 December 1928, when the journal *Κινηματογραφικός Αστήρ* [*Cinema Star*] published an article entitled “The first of the Greek films”, serves as a starting point to write an article about the first Greek women film stars. The date 18 April 1966, when the film *Blood on the Land* (dir. V. Georgiadis) makes it on the list of nominees for the international feature film Oscar award, is used as a springboard for an essay on genres in Greek cinema. 25 April 1977, the date that saw Betty Vakalidou read on the stage of a central Athenian Theatre, the historical manifesto of trans sex-workers fighting against a phobic legislation on STDs, now becomes the starting point for a short queer history of Greek cinema. And an essay on Greek cinema

during the Greek dictatorship takes its cue from the (only seemingly unrelated) decision by film critic Pavlos Zannas to translate Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* while imprisoned for his anti-dictatorship actions.

These are only a few of the 35 contributions that this book contains. We encouraged oblique approaches, unexpected connections and original contributions. Our perspective as editors of this volume is sometimes macroscopic, showcasing cinematic dominants, while sometimes focuses on small events, on a formal device, on a context (e.g. cinema publications), on a person, on a moment.

The essays in the book tell stories within the greater history of Greek cinema; a critical storytelling which poses questions and returns to well-known debates with a new energy: what does national cinema mean in today's context? Is this concept still functional? What are the new perspectives we gain, the more we see cinema as an industry with a vertical and horizontal development and in constant interaction with other industries such as television and book publishing?

What happened with the debates following the screenings organised by *Motherland, I See You*, also happened with the book accompanying this initiative. Themes, suggestions and topics began to multiply as we received the texts, making us realise that this book can only be proposed as a work in progress, a history which understands and shows that it can only exist in the plural. *Motherland, I See You* as both a moving festival and an open and evolving book, cannot but show the degree to which its very title constitutes an oxymoron: three words in the singular, pluralised once you delve into their intersecting archives. You start with the very concept of "motherland": how plural does it become once confronted with that "I see you...". How multiple and diverse images, conceptualisations, narrations, wishes, projections, perspectives arise with the very act of watching, and watching again. *Motherlands... Now We See You*.

**MOTHERLAND, I SEE YOU – THE 20th CENTURY OF GREEK CINEMA /** curated by (HFA): Elina Psykou, Syllas Tzoumerkas / co-curators, publication & educational materials curators: Afroditi Nikolaidou, Dimitris Papanikolaou / project manager (HFA): Phaedra Vókali / digitization & restoration supervisor: Yannis Veslemes / image lab: AN MAR FILM LAB, STEFILM, AUTHORWAVE / sound lab: KVARYBOSOUND MFC / production coordinator: Ioanna Rampaouni / assistant production coordinator: Vaios Galanis / legal consultant: Marina Markellou / graphic designer: Nikos Pastras, TALC / publicist: Natasha Pandi / social media manager: Dimitris Tsakaleas / program notes: Thodoris Dimitropoulos / festival co-ordinator: Stavros Markoulakis / publication coordinator: Aspasia-Maria Alexiou / publication translators: Aspasia-Maria Alexiou, Despina Pavlaki, Kostas Skordyles / subtitling & film translations: AUTHORWAVE / additional film translations: NEANIKO PLANO, STORYTELLER

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## Authors list in alphabetical order

Konstantinos Aivaliotis  
Aspasia-Maria Alexiou  
Ioanna Athanassatou  
Ursula-Helen Cassavetes  
Maria Chalkou  
Christos Dermentzopoulos  
Franklin L. Hess  
Phevos Kallitsis  
Vrasidas Karalis  
Athena Kartalou  
Kostis Kornetis  
Eleni Kouki  
Olga Kourelou  
Manolis Kranakis  
Konstantinos Kyriakos  
Vasiliki Lazaridou  
Geli Mademli  
Ioulia Mermigka  
Afroditi Nikolaidou  
Panayis Panagiotopoulos  
Lydia Papadimitriou  
Alexandros Papageorgiou  
Dimitris Papanikolaou  
Maria Paradisi  
Kostas Peroulis  
Philip E. Phillis  
Dimitris Plantzos  
Anna Poupou  
Elina Psykou  
George Sampatakakis  
Eirini Sifaki  
Vassiliki Tsitsopoulou  
Syllas Tzoumerkas  
Electra Venaki  
Phaedra Vokali  
Rea Walldén

Those wishing to learn more about the screenings and the educational and publishing initiatives of Motherland, I See you, please write to the Hellenic Film Academy at [info@hellenicfilmacademy.gr](mailto:info@hellenicfilmacademy.gr).

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