

The development of lebanese cinema

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



“ Most non-Lebanese people passing by our pavilion at this year’s Cannes film festival seem to think that Lebanese cinema is only a decade or so old. Of course, they can be forgiven for thinking that, since the last decade has brought with it a renaissance of sorts, with a few bi name productions that got international recognition. But it’s important to know that the Lebanese film industry started all the way back in the late 20s. ” By 35 mm from Beirut

The first silent Lebanese film “ Moughamarat Elias Mabrouk” (The Adventures of Elias Mabrouk) was filmed in 1929 by the 24-year-old Italian director Jordano Pidutti. It was such a big success, that a sequel was produced by Rachid Ali Chaabane, “ Moughamarat Abu Abed” (The Adventures of Abu Abed). Unfortunately, Pidutti had to stop filmmaking due to lack of financing. In 1933, Lummar Film produced the first talking Lebanese movie, subtitled in French, since Lebanon was under French mandate, and directed by Julio de Luca and Karam Boustany, “ Bayn Hayakel Baalbek” (In the Ruins of Baalbek). In the second world war, filmmaking was interrupted, and was mainly replaced by news and contemporary events. It wasn’t until the 1950s that Lebanese cinema gained some importance. Georges Kahi directed “ Azab El Damir” (Remorse) and “ Qalbaine wa Jassad” (Two Hearts and One Body). Georges Nasser presented the first Lebanese movie at the Cannes Festival in 1957, “ Ila Ayn” as well as a second, but in french-language, “ Le Petit Etranger” (The Little Stranger).

During the sixties, Lebanese cinema was overshadowed by The Egyptian cinema. However, during President Abdel Nasser’s regime, the Egyptian film industry was nationalized and controlled by the government, which helped Lebanon become a film set for the Egyptian cinema. Beirut became the new

capital of film distribution. This era is considered as the Golden Age of Lebanese Cinema. However, despite the increase of local productions and co-productions, with Egyptian, Syrian and western companies, Lebanese cinema was still poor, overshadowed by its neighbors and still searching to develop its identity. Only the movies of the Rahbani brothers, which were adapted for television by the Egyptian Youssef Chahine for “ Biya’ Al Khawatem” (The Ring Seller in 1965) and Henri Barakat for “ Safar Barlek” (1967) and “ Bint El Hares” (The Watchman’s Daughter in 1968), featuring the renowned Lebanese singer Fairuz, and centered around nostalgic themes of life in Mount Lebanon villages, helped restore the reputation of Lebanese cinema.

In the seventies, cinema attendance in Lebanon was the highest among Arabic-speaking countries. And it was even producing sexually indulgent films such as “ Cats of Hamra Street” and “ The Guitar of Love”. With the eruption of the civil war in 1975, a new wave of Lebanese filmmakers emerged talking about the war, political conflicts and displacement. One of the most important directors of this time was Maroun Baghdadi, who with the help of the American filmmaker, Francis Ford Coppola, made “ Little Wars” (1982) which was screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival and in the New York Film Festival. When the war was over, Lebanese audiences were no longer interested in warfare themes. Only “ West Beirut” (1998) directed by Ziad Doueiry was considered a local and an international hit. It was the first Lebanese Film, and the first Arabic language film to have been released in America. And when young Lebanese millennials, are asked about Lebanese cinema, “ West Beirut” is always

mentioned as a “cornerstone or the beginning of the Lebanese cinema’s identity”. It wasn’t until the new millennium, with the growth of the political and economic stability, that local films gained domestic appeal and commercial success even rivaling Hollywood films, with films like *Bosta*, *Caramel*, *Stray Bullet*, *Where Do We Go Now?* and *Capernaum* which won the “prix du jury” in 2018. There was also “*The Insult*” by Ziad Doueiry, which was nominated for the Academy Award for “Best Foreign Language Film”, the first for Lebanon. Today, cinema is one of the most common cultural activities in Lebanon. It has the highest number of cinema screens by individual in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, with 15 multi-cinema facilities, 94 screens and 16,499 seats, in Beirut alone. Euromed Audiovisual III programme of the European Union and the European Audiovisual Observatory report. There are 14 film festivals all year long with different programs and themes, from animation, to horror, to short films, student films, feature films etc. The film industry has seen a significant growth, reaching record levels of 675% over a 10-year period: In 2015, 31 films were produced, with an approximate investment value of 32.4 million USD, compared to a yearly average of 11 films and an investment size of 8.8 million USD produced in the previous 4-year period. There were always interruptions in the Lebanese film timeline, and despite the obstacles, the industry managed to start over and over again. Lebanese cinema is becoming hip and more attractive, with a new wave of young talented directors and all sorts of films that are being made from commercial, to action, social, drama even documentaries, covering the wider diverse tastes of their audience.

In 2011, thirteen feature and short Lebanese films were premiered at DIFF (Doha International Film Festival). But despite the small triumphs and the success in establishing an identity for the Lebanese film industry, “ When the 12th edition of the Lebanese Film Festival opened to movie enthusiasts at the Beirut Souks on May 30, it reflected the potential of the nation’s film industry but was also a testament to the need for funding – the festival was only made possible this year with the help of crowdfunding. ”