



Other Name(s): Cinema Alhambra, Yafo Cinema, Yafo Theatre
Location: Jerusalem Boulevard, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Israel
Date: May 1937
Architect: Elias Al-Mor

Description / Important Facts

The Alhambra Cinema was first opened in May of 1937. It is an Art-Deco-style building originally on Jamal Basha Street which today has become Jerusalem Boulevard in the Jaffa district, designed by architect Elias Al-Mor. The cinema was one of the first in Palestine making it become a cornerstone of Jaffa's entertainment landscape for decades. After the state of Israel was established the Alhambra Cinema was renamed the Yafo Cinema and was able to continue operating as a cinema until 1963. The building was then converted to a live theater, which required there to be an extension put in from the back side of the building to account for a stage

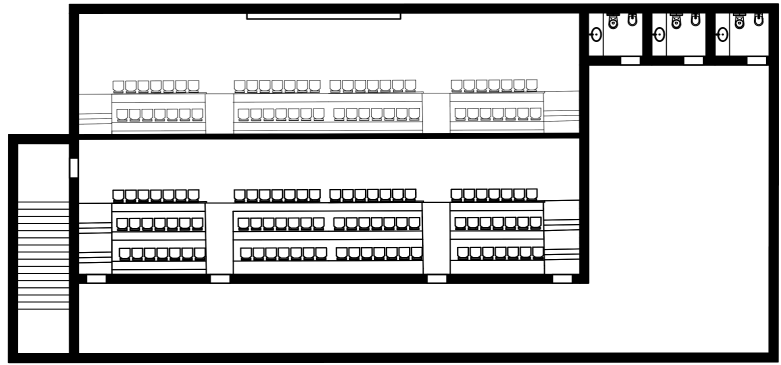
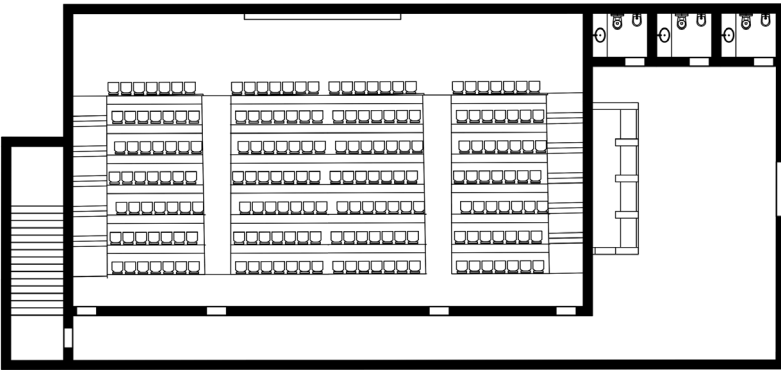
Palestinian cinema was effectively non-existent for nearly two decades due to the "Nakba" a term that translates in English to "The Catastrophe." The first Nakba began in 1948 and resulted in the displacement of Palestinians and the dispossession of land and properties. This in turn resulted in significant effects to the social and cultural identity of many Palestinians and the destruction and abandonment of cinemas and the culture surrounding film acts as one marker of this loss. Palestinian film making effectively vanished as Israeli authorities either took possession of or closed down theaters.

In the late 1980s all Palestinian cinemas were forced to close by Israeli forces, then some were able to reopen in the 1990s after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. The Alhambra cinema, then turned the Yafo Theatre was left abandoned during this time and only reopened as a bank in 2007. Shortly after this, in 2010, the site once considered an Arab cultural institution was bought by the Church of Scientology and underwent a two year renovation and restoration. Then in August of 2012 it was officially opened and became the Ideal Center of Scientology in the Middle East.

When it functioned as a movie theater the design with its characteristic marquee and classic facade were intended to be a nod to the golden age of film. The cinema's interior was meant to follow a similar theme as its exterior, with plush seating and state-of-the-art sound and projection technology. The Alhambra's programming was diverse, featuring a mix of blockbuster hits, independent films, and cultural showcases that reflected the eclectic tastes of Jaffa's population. Beyond its role as a hub for moviegoers, the Alhambra Cinema also served as a venue for film festivals and special events, further cementing its status as a cultural institution within the city.

(by Bleona Velic, May 3, 2024)

- 1. Front elevation of Alhambra Cinema taken in 1937 with Palestinian flag on the turret, image source Matson Photo Service
- 2. Arial view of Alhambra Cinema outlined in red line, image source Google Earth
- 3. "Nasheed El Ama" showing in Alhambra Cinema in 1937, image souchr FAY
- 4. First floor plan of the Alhambra Cinema
- 5. Second floor plan of the Alhambra Cinema
- 6. Elevation of the Alhambra Cinema



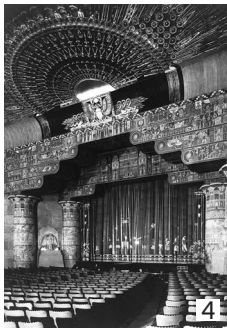
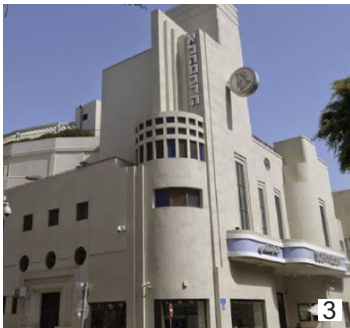
Design Context(s)

Beginning in 1935 all movies shown in Palestine needed to be approved by the British Mandate, which put strict conditions on what could be shown, where, and when. In 1948 there were around forty cinemas across Palestine, showing mainly Egyptian and American movies. This time period, which coincides with the opening of the Alhambra Cinema also marks what is now locally referred to as the era of silence in Palestine. This terminology is meant to be a play on words referencing silent film and the forced closures and restrictions put on Palestinian artistic expression through film that resulted in the art movement being pushed underground and out of local spaces. .

The cinema was named after the Alhambra Palace in Spain. The Alhambra Palace is a famous monument of Islamic architecture and is an important maker of the Spanish Renaissance. The choice to name the Alhambra after the palace which is an iconic symbol of Islamic arts and culture elicits a sense of cultural richness and greatness to be attributed to the cinema as well. Globally, the popularization of naming cinemas the "Alhambra" reflects a level of cultural exoticism. The intention of a film is to transport viewers to another world thus the architecture of movie theaters attempt to facilitate this experience and naming is a factor in this experience. This then leads to many movie theaters using the name of the Alhambra Palace to evoke a sense of exoticism as well as opulence. The Art-Deco was intended to attract a large global audience, making a statement of unity and cosmopolitan collaboration through cinema. The geometric forms and highly stylized interior and exterior detailing speak to globalized styles at the time that saw Art-Deco as a more artistic modern appearance. The British occupation of Palestine that began in 1918 and lasted until 1948 was a primary reason for this style being imprinted on to the local architectural culture. Globally beginning in the 1920s Art-Deco styles became the unofficial architectural language of movie theaters. For example, architect Sid Grauman designed the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood (Los Angeles), California in 1922 in an Art-Deco style. Grauman's intention behind the design was to reference Egyptian pyramids and tombs through its decorative elements and in turn elicit a lavish and luxurious experience for patrons of the theater.

An image of the Egyptian Theatre can be seen by in image four bears a resemblance to the Alhambra in terms of layout and in the embodied experience of the space both, through the use of light and elevated ceilings evoke the feelings of grandeur intended by the use of the Art-Deco style. The similarities between these spaces despite their differences in location and the cultural backgrounds of the architects that designed them represents the presence of globalization resulting from the movement of modern architecture developing. The Alhambra is reflective of an era of Palestinian architecture that can be referred to as "Palestine Modern" where during and in the time before the "Nakba" the Palestinian people were architecturally influenced by a global modernist era and attempted to use these globally established styles and construction techniques as an attempt to claim space for Palestinian architecture this is particularly evidenced in the architecture of key coastal cities like Jaffa as well as in the West Bank. The Alhambra Cinema in this way is then functioning as an example of a locally built tropical modern style of architecture in that it was designed by local architects but influenced heavily by global trends.

1. Former Alhambra Cinema now Church of Scientology front elevation taken in 2011, image source Dr. Avishai Teicher
2. Former Alhambra Cinema now Church of Scientology side perspective taken in 2015, image source Zahi Shaked
3. Former Alhambra Cinema now Church of Scientology side perspective taken in 2012, image source Adrian Yekkes
4. Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood (Los Angeles), California in 1922, image source Art in Context
5. Alhambra Cinema interior 1937, image source Kinospotter



Other Name(s): Cinema Alhambra, Yafo Cinema, Yafo Theatre
Location: Jerusalem Boulevard, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Israel
Date: May 1937
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Statement of Significance

The Alhambra Cinema was an extremely important and relevant cultural center when it functioned as a theater. The films screened and performances hosted at the Alhambra Cinema drew audiences from both local Arab and Jewish communities, who attended shows with their families. By its opening in May of 1937 it was not the first cinema opened in Palestine but it was widely considered to be the the largest and most luxurious opened in the Middle East. While Palestinian cinema is younger than Arab cinema as a whole, Palestine was once home to many cinemas as film was a growing and flourishing industry. One of the first Palestinian films considered to be made was a documentary on King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia's visit in 1935 to Palestine made by Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan, which was based in Jaffa. Sirhan followed the King and around Palestine, "from Lod to Jaffa and from Jaffa to Tel Aviv".

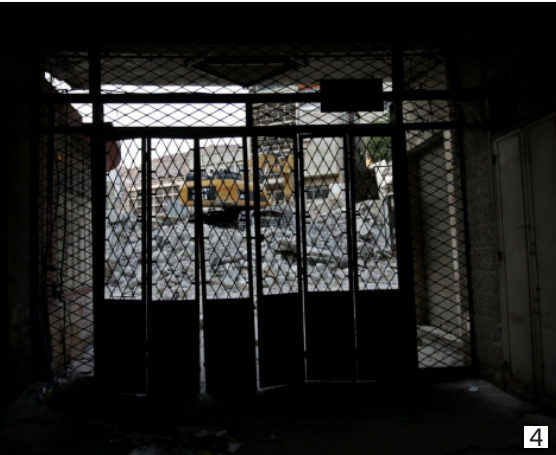
Films like these were some of the first played at the Alhambra Cinema and presented at festivals like the Nabi Rubin Festival. Sirhan went on to produce films that focused on telling Palestinian and Arab stories leading to the establishment of the Arab Film Company with Ahmad Hilmi al-Kilan in 1945, leading infrastructure for the film industry really began to take off after this time. The production studio they made, Studio Palestine, was in Jaffa and many of the films made by their company were lost in 1948 during a bombardment of Jaffa that forced many Palestinians to leave the region. The bombardment of Jaffa in 1947, included the bombing of the Alhambra Cinema in December of 1947, Sirhan had to flee as well and would never return to Jaffa, dying in the Shatila refugee camp near the capital of Lebanon, Beirut.

When the cinema was no longer allowed to be opened under Israeli mandate the original owners had paid unbelievable amounts of taxes to the Israeli authorities to maintain control over the building. They were unable to afford any renovation over the years leaving it to be largely abandoned with locals breaking in occasionally to engage in illegal activities. The owners' desires to retain possession of the cinema eventually came to an end when rumors grew that the cinema would be bought and converted to a commercial shopping center. This did not come to fruition but the building did not ever return to being a cinema either, it instead was sold to the Church of Scientology and remains as such today. The Alhambra Cinema tells a story of the rich history of Palestinian cinema and its particular significance in Jaffa. The once iconic cultural hub hosted performances by well known Arab artists like Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, and Leila Mourad now is closed off to the public and can only be accessed by members of the Church of Scientology.

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(by Bleona Velic, May 3, 2024)



Other Name(s): Cinema al-Assi
Location: Nablus
Date(s): 1952
Architect: Niazi Kan'an

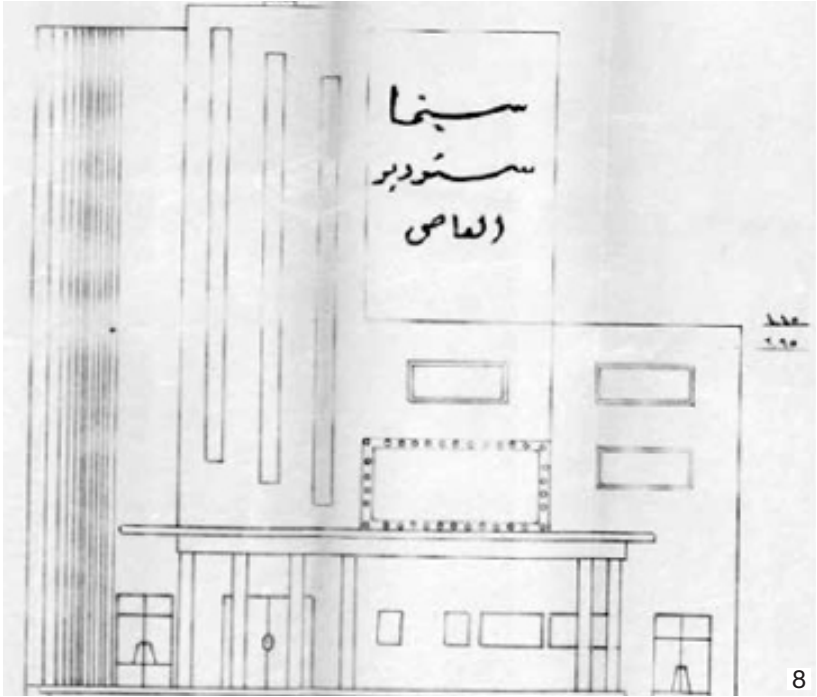
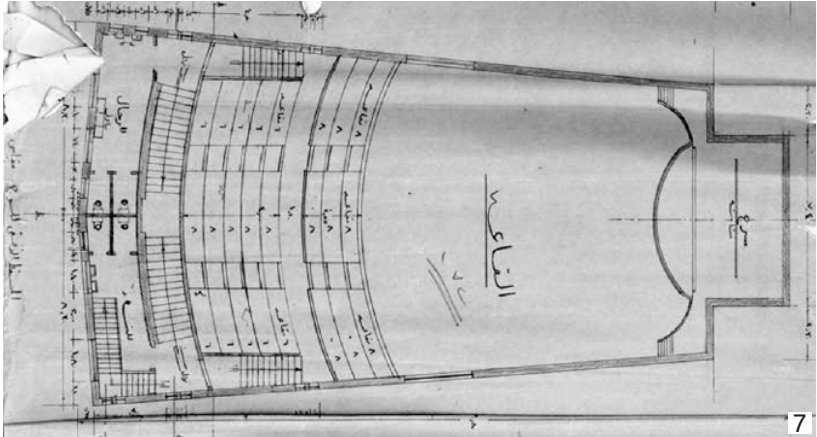
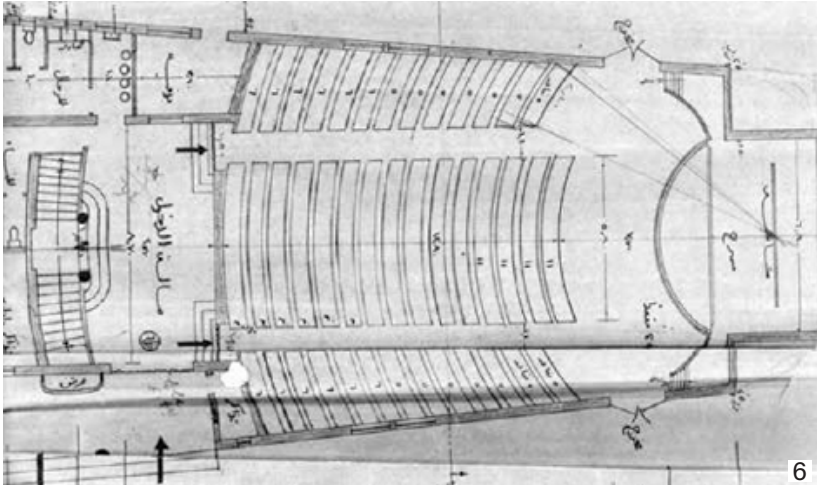
Description / Important Facts

The al-Assi Cinema was built in the heart of Nablus, making it deeply intertwined with the city's cultural fabric. The al-Assi Cinema was first opened in 1952 and became a center for film enthusiasts throughout the West Bank. The cinema, which the rear side of can be seen on the right side of first image, was made with a seating capacity of 600, and throughout its lifetime it hosted screenings of popular Indian, Arabic, and Japanese films in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Nablus has been a focal point of the Palestinian struggle for decades due to its geographic positioning that had it caught between Israeli and Palestinian territory. The modernist style angular and minimalist building style was accompanied by an addition in 1958 that functioned as a wedding hall, which can be seen on the left hand side of the first picture. Furthermore, as well as being home to significant cultural institutions like the al-Assi Cinema it also encompasses highly contested religious sites like Joseph's Tomb. During the British Mandate Period Nablus was instrumental in spearheading the strike against British rule.

Today the region still remains an area of persistent conflict and struggle. Israeli raids into Nablus continue to become more frequent and sustained. From 1952 until the beginning of the first intifada in 1987, the al-Assi Cinema Studio operated as a cultural beacon, connecting the people of Nablus with the art of the rest of the world and situating the Palestinian people within a larger global context. The al-Assi Cinema was then able to reopen again in 1994, as both a movie theater and a wedding hall. This lasted until the second intifada when it was forced to shut down due to Israeli incursions in 2002. The building was then abandoned leading to its condition worsening overtime and was at risk of demolition for a long period of time, despite community members holding out hope of its reopening and attempting to preserve it in the meantime. The cinema that was once a silent witness to the atrocities of Palestinians who endured the Nakba and continued their lives amidst adversity, now no longer stands, meaning it can also no longer be located through satellite imaging.

(by Bleona Velic, May 3, 2024)

1. Front street view of al-Assi Cinema taken in 1952, image source Zahraa Zawawi & Mohammad Abu Hammad
2. Front street view of al-Assi Cinema taken in 2009 being used for parking, image source Ahmad Al-Bazz
3. Al-Assi Cinema grounds being used to build a shopping mall taken in 2017, image source Ahmad Al-Bazz
4. Interior of Al-Assi Cinema after raids taken in 2017, image source Ahmad Al-Bazz
5. Al-Assi Cinema interior in 2017, image source Ahmad Al-Bazz
6. Al-Assi Cinema ground floor, image source Zawawi & Hammad
7. Al-Assi Cinema first floor, image source Zawawi & Hammad
8. Al-Assi Cinema elevation drawing, image source Zawawi & Hammad



Design Context(s)

The year 1952 marked significant changes to the facade of the municipality of Nablus. The city witnessed the construction of the Dawar, a main traffic route in the city center, and the al-Assi Cinema. These two monuments, in particular, were manifestations of a new era of urban development and architecture for the city. According to local legend, Napoleon bestowed the name "Jabal Al-Nar" upon Nablus during his campaign in the Orient, which translates to "Mountain of Fire." The city's narrow alleyways and ancient stone walls have witnessed countless struggles and confrontations over the years. As a "postwar" building the al-Assi was very referential to ideas of a "international style" through the architect's use of simple geometries and minimalist forms and materials.

The interior space of the cinema was simple, intentionally reflecting the taste of the time period in terms of color and design. This was mirrored in the exterior design which was intended to exemplify modern techniques and methods of construction. With the main facade for example, it was designed with simple lines and openings and employed the use of modern materials like concrete. The walls were stone-clad, and stone decorating elements were installed around the windows of the cylindrical main staircase. The plan views of the cinema reflect its functional form in addition to the use of new technologies of that period, such as the skeleton of the cinema's roof made of a simple steel structure covered with asbestos sheets. The addition of the wedding hall was attached to the cinema's eastern facade; it was made of concrete walls with rough plaster exterior coating. Niazi Kan'an designed the cinema with two floors, reflecting a functionalist modern design. The auditorium of the cinema contained a balcony, which was an elevated level above the ground floor seats. The balcony seats were larger and more expensive. In addition, the balcony contained seating section called the "penwar" which was located in the rear part of the hall and dedicated for families only. This section was separated from the rest of the hall by a handrail and parapet to sustain a greater level of privacy. The rest of the auditorium was an open hall facing the stage where the films would be screened.

The use of concrete in the cinemas construction is reflective of the Israeli occupation, while the traditional vernacular style would have used a material like limestone; the concrete construction reflects the forced shift to more cost-effective and accessible building techniques. Before the occupation limestone was reflective of the Palestinian building aesthetic for its ability to blend into the natural landscape and the natural abundance of limestone in the region, over time the material became considerably more difficult and expensive to extract from the West Bank. Additionally a material like concrete does not come without environmental considerations as the use of concrete presents the potential for runoff that can damage ecosystems and concrete and cement need to be imported which creates a dynamic of requiring a highly extractivist process to be able to construct architecture. The open outdoor plan of the ground floor that is elevated by columns feels reflective of local building practices. This design typology is reflective of tropical modernism as the form of the building is modern but the principles of design being applied are tailored to suit the climatic conditions of the region.

- 1
- The main screening hall at al-Assi cinema taken in 2017,
image source Ahmad Al-Bazz
- 2
- Demolition of al-Assi Cinema taken in 2017, image source
Ahmad Al-Bazz
- 3
- Old film reels dating back to the 1950s on the abandoned
floor of the al-Assi taken in 2017, image source Ahmad
Al-Bazz
- 4
- The projection room at al-Assi cinema taken in 2017, image
source Ahmad Al-Bazz



Other Name(s): Cinema al-Assi
Location: Nablus
Date(s): 1952
Architect: Niazi Kan'an

Statement of Significance

After the nearly two decades of Palestinian cinema being put on hiatus by the mass exodus. Filmmaking and screening in Palestine virtually disappeared, however, Palestinians continued to make films abroad. Ibrahim Hassan Sirhan, for example, was involved in Jordan's first feature film, The Struggle in Jerash (1957), while another Palestinian, Abdallah Ka'Wash, directed Jordan's second feature, My Homeland, My Love (1964). While the al-Assi Cinema was not the first one to open in Nablus it stayed open for decades which made it become a significant cultural institution. Further Israeli crackdowns on cinemas took place on either side of the Six-Day War in 1967, but a year later the efforts of the newly formed Palestine Film Unit (PFU) kick-started Palestinian cinema's revival.

This collective of Palestinian filmmakers and researchers, based initially in Amman and Beirut, documented daily life and important events that occurred in Palestine. Among their ranks were Mustafa Abu Ali, Sulafa Jadallah, Hani Jawhariah, Khadijah Habashneh Abu Ali. Despite the significant and persistent struggles the city faced, its cultural institutions like the al-Assi Cinema were meant to act as a symbol of protest against this oppression. The al-Assi Cinema and cinemas in general were symbols of modernity from the people of Palestine to the rest of the world. While the al-Assi Cinema was never allowed to reopen since its final closure in 2002 by Israeli incursions due to its hotly contested positioning in the city of Nablus the cinemas legacy of sociocultural resilience was embodied in the structure until its demolition.

After the opening of Cinema al-Assi, film was effectively functioning in a state of exile. More than sixty films, primarily documentaries, were made from 1968 to 1982. These movies were made with funding from organizations like the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Films like these were often barred from being shown in Palestinian cinemas and often found space in other middle eastern countries, like the film festivals of 1973, 1976, and 1980 held in Baghdad that were dedicated to showing Palestinian films. After being forced to shut down in 2002, the al-Assi Cinema ended up in a state of neglect. This left the building needing to service a new purpose within the social landscape. Before the site was demolished and leveled, its interior was sometimes used as a storage space, while its front yard was used as a parking lot. The open plan of the cinema enabled it to be easily converted to a place the town could use to store their possessions due to the abundance of space and the open ground floor allowed individuals to leave their cars in spots that would be covered, thus more secure and protected from the elements.

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(by Bleona Velic, May 3, 2024)



Other Name(s): Theatre Arts Group, Shawk Theatre, Al-Jameel Cinema
Location: Hospital Street, Ramallah, Jerusalem
Date(s): 1970-72
Architect(s): Al-Kabasa NGO

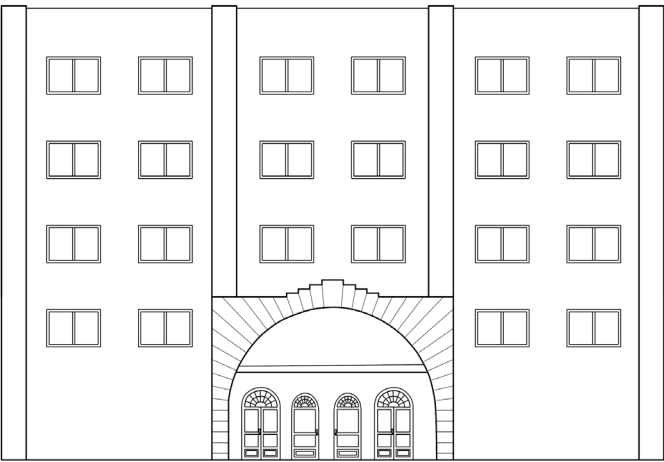
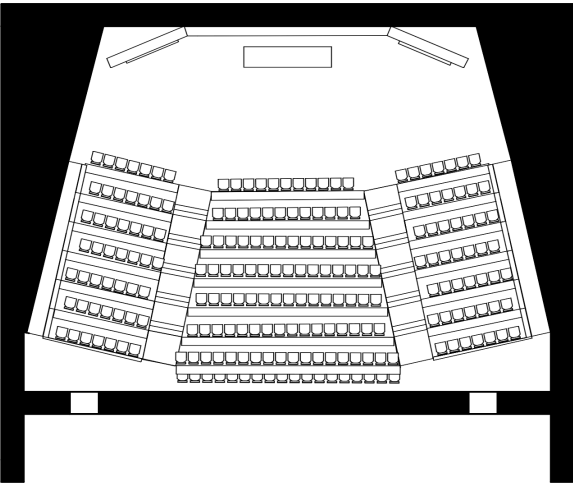
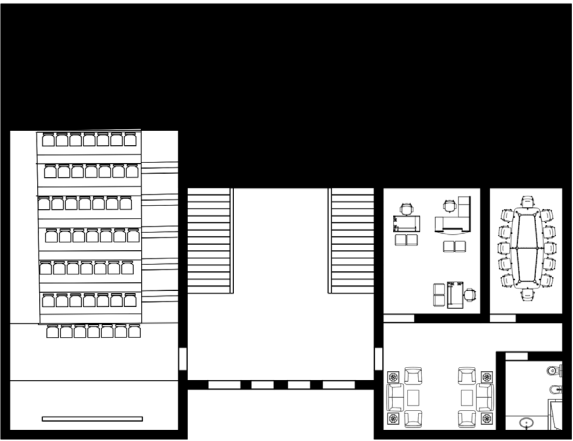
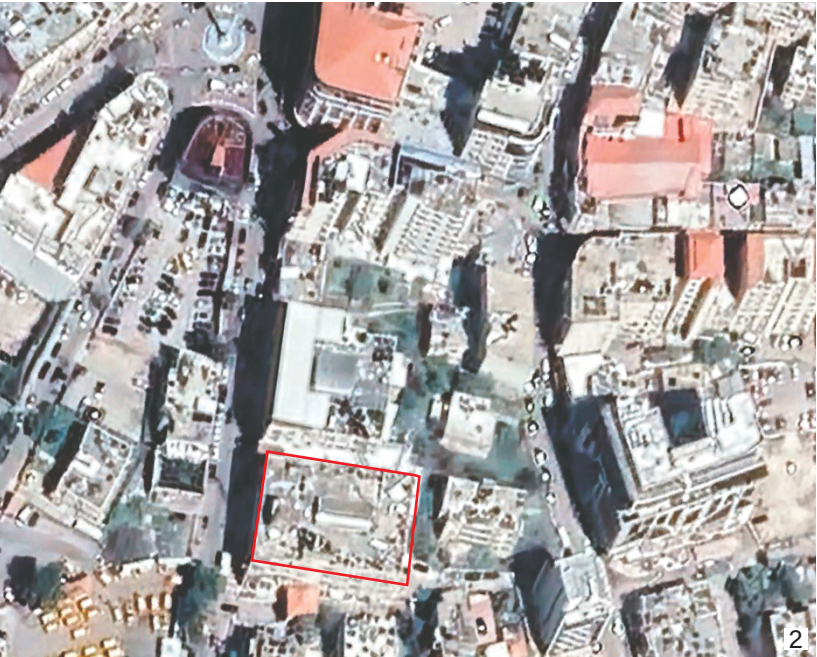
Description / Important Facts

The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque was originally opened in Jerusalem in 1970 as the Theatre Arts Group. In 1984, it was then renamed Shawk Theatre. Afterward In 1998, it underwent a renovation to become the Al-Jameel Cinema in Ramallah, which closed down in 1987. Finally it became the Al Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque in 2000. Since its opening in 2000 it is one of the few venues in the region that allows Palestinian artists, actors, and filmmakers to produce and present their productions.

The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque is located in the outskirts of the city of Ramallah, but still functions as a cultural heart. The intention of the theater is to offer a stage for both local and international performances of the dramatic arts. The theater has become an integral part of the local community by offering space for Palestinians to have access to local and international stories. In order to stay true to its intention of providing locals with a breadth of stories, the programming of the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque reflects a diverse range of genres and creates space for community interaction within the theater to foster a sense of collaboration and discussion surrounding the arts.

The limitations and restrictions placed on Palestinian arts resulted in significant isolations between the Palestinian people and the rest of the world to form. The work of the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque tries to remedy this issue through the recultivation of the arts in Palestine and through the exposure of international works to the Palestinian people. The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque further instills its goal of reigniting the artistic core of the Palestinian people through attempting to spread the arts throughout Palestinian territories especially in areas where people no longer have the ability to travel to the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque. This is done through performances by the theater being done at refugee camps and makeshift performance spaces throughout the West Bank.

(by Bleona Velic, May 3, 2024)



1. Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque front view taken in 2019, image source Fernando Guadarrama
2. Aerial view of Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque and surrounding contexts, image source Google Earth
3. Performance of "Chairs" Play at Al Kasaba the last work of Juliano Mer-Khamis taken in 2011, image source The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive
4. Performance of "Martin Luther King Stations" Play in Al Kasaba during Al Manara International Theatre Days taken in 2011, image source The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive
5. Ground floor plan of Al Kasaba
6. Second floor main theater of Al Kasaba
7. Elevation of Al Kasaba

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Design Context(s)

The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque was established with a vision to enrich the cultural life of the city of Ramallah. Today the Al-Kasaba Theatre has become renowned for its quality entertainment and thought-provoking performances. The was designed with an auditorium, that is meticulously designed to provide an immersive experience for the audience, ensuring that every seat in the house offers a clear view of the stage and high quality acoustics. The exterior is meant to appear as inconspicuous, by its positioning on a side road the theater does not draw significant attention allowing the arts to flourish freely. The front facade does not feature many windows and the main apertures are protected by solid metal doors. This is done both to protect the institution from bombardments, but also to allow for a more immersive theatrical experience. The entire building once entered is meant to allow for the community to engage with performances. This means that entry stairs and corridors are often utilized for performances.

The fake archway entry is indicative of the presence of postmodernist ideas surrounding ornamentation as a way to communicate the social significance of a space. Additionally, it signifies moving past strict modern ideals of minimalism and simplicity and a return to the heritage of an Islamic architectural style in Palestine that dates back to the Ottoman era when stone arches became a part of the local vernacular style of building. Palestinian filmmaking continues to be a significant part of the preservation of Palestinian social and cultural histories, thus reflecting the historically strong presence of archiving efforts. Various organizations attempted to establish archives for these films and in 1982 the largest of these archives was run by the Palestine Liberation Organization's Film Foundation. When the organization was forced out of Beirut the archive was then put into storage in the Red Crescent Hospital and then the record went missing. Renently, some of the films from this archive were found by curator Rona Sela in the Israeli Defense Forces archive in Tel HaShomer. Sela called for the release of such films as well as a declassification of the archive, however her request has yet to be granted.

The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque intends to revitalize the lost culture of Palestinian cinema through screening of films and live performances. The screenings include both modern films and any films that have been preserved overtime and are accessible to the cinematheque. The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque also works to spread cinema and arts to Palestinian people regardless of their proximity to the physical space of the Cinematheque This is done through non-permanent pop-up screenings and performances organized by the faculty of the Cinematheque at refugee camps throughout the West Bank. This new age of cinema marks a return of Palestinian cinema to Palestinian territories as well as a continuation of a global spread of these films through platforms like Netflix, which now feature several films made by Palestinian directors.

1. "The Golden Fish", a Photograph of a Theatrical Performance
by al-Kasaba Theatre taken in 1996, image source TPMDA
2. Performance of "Martin Luther King Stations" Play in
al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque During Al Manara
International Theatre Days in 2011, image source TPMDA
3. Effects of the Israeli Occupation Army Breaking into
al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque During the Second
Intifada in 2002, image source TPMDA
4. Theatrical Improvisations in al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinema-
theque after the Assassination of Juliano Mer-Khamis taken
in April 2011, image source TPMDA



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Other Name(s): Theatre Arts Group, Shawk Theatre, Al-Jameel Cinema
Location: Hospital Street, Ramallah, Jerusalem
Date(s): 1970-72
Architect(s): Al-Kabasa NGO

Statement of Significance

The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque is assisting in making serious changes to the perceptions of Palestinian people on an international scale through the arts. The theater is vitally important to the local community as it is seen as a hub of cultural development and expression. The theater features film screenings, artistic shows, theatrical performances, and film festivals. The Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque is also known to have played witness to significant cultural events in Palestinian history such as in early 2002, it hosted Nobel Literature Prize laureates Wole Soyinka and Jose Saramago.

However, the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque is not without adversity. During the April 2002 invasion of Ramallah, the theater was made a target of the Israeli army which resulted in the ransacking of offices, and the destruction of files and computers. The theater responds to this adversity through innovation, like with the mobile arts outreach initiative that intends to make the arts accessible to a wider range of people. The theater was also the site of many important protests, such as the demonstrations against the assassination of Juliano Mer-Khamis in 2011 who was a director that had films screened at the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque. Mer-Khamis was assassinated for his political beliefs as well as his activism in spreading the arts to the Palestinian people. Today the Al-Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque still stands as the only functioning multipurpose cinema in the Palestinian territories and is continuing its mission to make the cultural arts more accessible and relevant to all parts of Palestinian society.

The Ak-Kabasa is connected to postmodern architecture in that it does not need to exist with traditional cinema typology to service its purpose. The staff at the Al-Kabasa intends to bring film and arts throughout Palestine and in order to do so they operate outside of the cinema physical space and set up temporary screening and performance spaces in refugee camps and villages across the West Bank. This breaks the rule of singularity and argues against the idea of traditional architectural structures being the only solution to how we create and define spaces for arts and culture. Overall this cinema operates outside of the binary idea that we must have four walls and a roof to call a space a theater and that we can push the boundaries of what can be considered the built environment to consider temporary structures that service the community needs more effectively.

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