



סינמטק ירושלים - ארכיון ישראלי לסרטים (ע"ר)  
Jerusalem Cinematheque - Israel Film Archive

## Press Release

### The Jerusalem Cinematheque mourns the passing of its Founder and President, Lia van Leer



The Jerusalem Cinematheque is deeply saddened to announce that its Founder and President, Pioneer of Israeli Cinema, Lia van Leer passed away on March 13, 2015 at the Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem. Israel Prize winner, Lia van Leer, was the founding force behind the Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv Cinematheques, she established the Israel Film Archive, and managed the Jerusalem Cinematheque and Jerusalem Film Festival. Details on her memorial service and funeral to follow.

Lia van Leer dedicated her life to the art of cinema in Israel. Her numerous projects helped expose the Israeli public to quality cinema and played a significant role in the collection and preservation of films in Israel. Already during the early 1950s, together with her husband Wim, Ms. Van Leer held cinema evenings in her home by screening rare cinematic gems. Very quickly, the couple decided to formalize their hobby and established the Film Club at the Rothschild House on the Carmel, the same venue that would go on to become the Haifa Cinematheque. During that time, van Leer and her husband also worked relentlessly in order to bring to Israel copies of films that they purchased during their travels abroad.

In 1960, once she acquired a unique film collection, van Leer was made a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP). This was the first step in the establishment of the Israel Film Archive, enabling relationships with film archives worldwide and collecting films that had yet to be viewed by the Israeli public. In the following years, van Leer continued to care for the activities of the film club and enrich the Archive's collection with works from Israel and abroad, all the while enabling the



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distribution of films throughout the entire country, in different kibbutzim and at independent film clubs operating in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

At the beginning of the 1970s van Leer was involved in the establishment of the Tel Aviv Cinematheque, but after a short period she moved to Jerusalem and began working on the creation of a Cinematheque in the country's capital. Initially, the Jerusalem Cinematheque operated out of Agron House. George Ostrovsky reached out to van Leer and offered a one-million-dollar donation to establish the first establishment of its kind in Israel inspired by the French Cinematheque, and so, her lifelong mission was born. Van Leer and Ostrovsky joined forces with then Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, the Jerusalem Foundation, and the Van Leer Group Foundation, and together, they set out to build the Jerusalem Film Center on Guy Ben Hinnom, across Jerusalem's Old City walls.

The JFC opened its doors in 1981 and included the Cinematheque screening halls, the Film Library, and the newly housed Israel Film Archive. Three years later, van Leer also established the Jerusalem Film Festival – a major feat in the development of film culture in Israel, offering a rich selection of films not slated for local distribution and hosting leading filmmakers from all corners of the globe.

Van Leer's persona and many accomplishments became known in Israel and abroad. Over the years, she presided on the juries of three of the world's leading film festivals – Berlin, Venice, and Cannes. She was the recipient of the Israel Prize (2004), Honoris Causa from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2009), Life Achievement Award from the Israel Film Academy (1998), Life Achievement Award from the Berlin Film Festival (2011), and attained a long list of honors and achievements from numerous local and international bodies. Seven years ago van Leer became the Jerusalem Cinematheque President and handed over her managerial role, yet she continued to be actively involved at the Jerusalem Cinematheque until her very last days. Her trailblazing and unique work contributed tremendously to the development of the culture of cinema in Israel, among which one may include the impressive achievements of Israeli cinema over the past few years.

Dr. Noa Regev, Director of the Jerusalem Cinematheque:

"Lia was Israel's film culture pioneer. She worked until her very last day with an unceasing love for humankind and for the culture of cinema in Jerusalem, in Israel, and all over the world. I will miss her very much; she was a constant source of inspiration and hope in my life. For so many years, she served as a leading figure in Israel's cultural life. She will be missed by us all."