



# YITZHAK RABIN: CHRONICLE OF AN ASSASSINATION FORETOLD

## INTERVIEW WITH AMOS GITAI

**You directed last year a film-investigation into the political circumstances that led to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel and Nobel Peace Prize winner, on 4 November 1995, in Tel-Aviv. You then presented a multimedia installation at the MAXXI in Rome on the same subject. Today, you're creating for the Festival d'Avignon a show dedicated to that political assassination. Why choose to represent this historical event through three different forms of artistic expression?**

**Amos Gitai:** I believe that the best way for an artist to pay homage to his own culture is to be critical towards it. The assassination of Rabin twenty years ago was a turning point in contemporary Israeli history. And we're still living through the consequences of that brutal act. The dialogue between Israel and Palestine, which is crucial for the Middle East, has been progressively stopped and made impossible. In such a context, the problem of the artist, of the filmmaker or writer, is this: what to do when you live right next to a volcano? What artistic form can you offer? A few years ago, we decided to work on this project about the assassination of Rabin as a gesture of remembrance, and even with the hope that... Sometimes, when you resurrect memory, it can lead to change. But you have to remain modest: art isn't the most efficient way to change reality. Politics and machine guns have a much more direct effect. But sometimes, art has a delayed effect, for it preserves memory at a time when those in power would like to erase it, because what they want is obedience, they don't want to be disturbed or contested. So I felt the need to treat this particular event, the assassination of Rabin, through three different forms, with all the echoes it creates, and now is the time for theatre. The idea of this three-pronged presentation is a deeply political act.

**How did you conceive the show that will be presented in Avignon?**

In all my projects, whether we're talking about a film, an exhibition, or a show like here in Avignon, I like to work with space. The show is told from the point of view of Leah, Rabin's widow. It's like a lullaby, or a story about some mythological event. The part will be played by three actresses: Hanna Schygulla, Hiam Abbass, and Sarah Adler. They come from three different cultures, but they'll share with us their memories of the assassination as if they were singing us a lullaby, or telling us a fairy tale.

**Will you use film elements in the show? Will there be references to the movie and the exhibition?**

We'll install 3 tables of different sizes and shapes for the 3 female protagonists. On the great façade of the Palais des papes, we will project fragments of archive footage that have to do with the event. We will also sometimes project the faces of the actresses as they perform. There will also be two musicians on the stage, who will provide a lyrical presence or counterpoint. Pianist Edna Stern will play Johann Sebastian Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in E Minor*, and Alexei Kochatkov, on the violin, will play fragments from the play we created with Jeanne Moreau in the Boublon quarry 7 years ago, *War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*. One could think that that title could also apply to the show we're creating this year in Avignon. I liked what Jeanne Moreau told me when we worked together a lot. She said that she decides whether or not to work on a project based on whether or not she can learn something that she doesn't already know from it. I think it's a good attitude to have. A lot of people like to do what they already know how to, a lot of actors reproduce acts they've already performed. But if you can discover something you don't already know, it enriches your human experience. Either way, Jeanne Moreau is fully aware of how brief our time here on earth is, and that every new project should be an opportunity to broaden our wisdom and knowledge. By working on those three forms of representation about the assassination of Rabin, we went through an experience together, and I say together because it isn't just me, but all the people who gave their time and energy, their interpretation and reading of those events. All of that is fertile.

Interview conducted by Francis Cossu

Translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

# A FEW HISTORICAL POINTS OF REFERENCE FROM THE THREE YEARS PRECEDING HIS ASSASSINATION

## **1992**

As president of the Israeli Labour Party, Yitzhak Rabin wins the elections and forms his second government as Prime Minister. He changes the priorities of the Israeli government, choosing to invest more in education and infrastructure, and to reduce financing for the colonies.

## **September 1993**

Signature of a Declaration of Principles (the Oslo Accords) in Washington. Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the executive committee of the PLO, and Bill Clinton, President of the United States, establish the foundations of Palestinian autonomy to bring peace to the region.

## **July 1994**

Great demonstration by right and far-right parties in Zion Square in Jerusalem. Standing above a banner that reads "Death to Arafat," the leader of the Likud Party, B. Netanyahu, calls "the crowd to go to every intersection, everywhere, and demonstrate against the government."

## **14 October 1994**

Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Yasser Arafat are awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

## **Autumn 1994**

Beginning of a series of attacks perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist organisations in Israeli urban centres. Yitzhak Rabin's political position is weakened. Settlers, radical rabbis, and far-right movements launch a campaign to undermine Rabin, now systematically called a "traitor."

## **April – October 1995**

Attacks against Rabin intensify. Settler newspapers and the far right openly attack him. In a weekly newspaper, a psychologist diagnoses Rabin as a schizophrenic who should be committed. Op-ed writers compare him to Pétain, and his "satanic" government to the Vichy regime.

## **Summer 1995**

The Zo Artzeinu ("This is our land") movement blocks the roads in Jerusalem and organises actions throughout the country. Led by Netanyahu, demonstrators display a coffin bearing the inscription "Rabin is killing Zionism." Chief Rabbi Goren enjoins soldiers tasked with evacuating the settlements concerned by the Oslo Accords to disobey their orders.

Yitzhak Rabin receives death threats.

## **28 September 1995**

Signature in Washington of an Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (also known as Oslo II), which calls for the creation of different areas in the Palestinian territories in which Israeli and Palestinian control would apply differently, as a temporary measure while waiting for the completion of the peace negotiations.

## **5 October 1995**

Huge gathering of the far right and settlers in Zion Square in Jerusalem. In front of TV cameras, posters showing Rabin dressed up as an SS officer are torn apart. The crowd shouts "Death to Rabin," "Rabin Traitor," "With blood and fire, we will drive Rabin out."

B. Netanyahu encourages the demonstrators to oppose the Oslo Accords. A frenzied crowd marches on the Knesset where the vote on Oslo II is taking place. Official cars are attacked. The events are shown on television. Called out in the Knesset, Netanyahu denies any responsibility in the events of the evening.

### **6 October 1995**

Itamar Ben-Gvir, a young far-right radical, brandishes Rabin's Cadillac's emblem in front of a journalist, declaring that it is possible to get to the Prime Minister himself.

### **10 October 1995**

Yitzhak Rabin is attacked by rabbi Natan Ofir at the Wingate Institute during an official ceremony. The question of the security of the Prime Minister is asked by experts and in the press.

### **25 October 1995**

In front of the official residence of the Prime Minister, rabbi Avigdor Eskin organises a Pulsa diNura, a medieval ceremony supposed to call death on Yitzhak Rabin.

### **3 November 1995**

Student Yigal Amir takes part in a demonstration in front of Yitzhak Rabin's house. The demonstrators threaten to "hang Leah Rabin by her feet with her husband, like Mussolini and his mistress."

### **4 November 1995**

A rally "for peace and against violence" is organised at the Kings of Israel Square in Tel-Aviv, attended by Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, several Ministers, and ambassadors from Arab countries. With 200,000 participants, it is a huge success.

As he is leaving the rally, Yitzhak Rabin is killed by Yigal Amir, a student with close ties to far-right movements.

### **19 November 1995**

Judge Meir Shamgar, former President of the Supreme Court, is tasked with leading a State investigation into the circumstances of the Prime Minister's assassination.

### **19 November 1995 – 31 March 1996**

The commission studies 4,072 testimonies and hears 72 people. A few officers from the secret service and the police are fired, demoted, or quit. The report given to the head of the government contains a classified section, which isn't made public.

### **May 1996**

Benjamin Netanyahu wins the elections.

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