African Cinema Watchlist

Twenty-two landmark and modern films from across the continent, with a line on why each matters.

African cinema spans more than sixty years of storytelling, from the pioneers of Senegal and Mali to Nollywood, South Africa and a new wave of East African filmmakers. Use this list to explore it, and check local streaming services and film festivals for availability.

Film	Year	Country	Director	Why watch
Black Girl (La Noire de...)	1966	Senegal	Ousmane Sembène	A founding work of sub-Saharan African cinema
Touki Bouki	1973	Senegal	Djibril Diop Mambéty	Bold, experimental road movie
Xala	1975	Senegal	Ousmane Sembène	Sharp satire of post-independence elites
Yeelen	1987	Mali	Souleymane Cissé	Mythic, visually stunning epic
Sarafina!	1992	South Africa	Darrell Roodt	Musical drama of the 1976 student uprisings
Hyènes	1992	Senegal	Djibril Diop Mambéty	A fable about greed and a town for sale
Moolaadé	2004	Senegal	Ousmane Sembène	Powerful story of women's resistance
Hotel Rwanda	2004	South Africa / UK / Italy	Terry George	True story set during the 1994 genocide
Tsotsi	2005	South Africa	Gavin Hood	Oscar winner set in Johannesburg
Nairobi Half Life	2012	Kenya	David 'Tosh' Gitonga	Gritty, energetic Nairobi crime story
Timbuktu	2014	Mauritania / Mali	Abderrahmane Sissako	Poetic portrait of life under occupation
Kati Kati	2016	Kenya	Mbithi Masya	Haunting drama set in the afterlife
I Am Not a Witch	2017	Zambia / UK	Rungano Nyoni	Daring satire with a striking visual style
Rafiki	2018	Kenya	Wanuri Kahiu	Vibrant love story; premiered at Cannes
Supa Modo	2018	Kenya	Likarion Wainaina	Moving story of a village rallying for a child
Lionheart	2018	Nigeria	Genevieve Nnaji	Warm Nollywood family business drama
The Burial of Kojo	2018	Ghana	Blitz Bazawule	Magical-realist tale of two brothers
Atlantics	2019	Senegal	Mati Diop	Ghostly romance; Grand Prix at Cannes

Film	Year	Country	Director	Why watch
This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection	2019	Lesotho	Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese	Breathtaking images and a fierce elderly heroine
The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind	2019	Malawi / UK	Chiwetel Ejiofor	Inspiring true story of a young inventor
Softie	2020	Kenya	Sam Soko	Documentary on activism and family
Mami Wata	2023	Nigeria	C.J. Obasi	Black-and-white folklore thriller

How to explore further

- Follow festivals such as FESPACO (Burkina Faso), Durban International Film Festival and the Zanzibar International Film Festival.
- Look for African film collections on major streaming services and local platforms.
- Rate and review each film you watch to build your own African cinema diary.