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LA HIJA DEL ENGAÑO
(DAUGHTER OF DECEIT)
Sunday, January 11 (3:00)
Thursday, January 15 (8:00)

BUNUEL IN MEXICO

January 8 - February 16, 1976

When at the end of 1946, Luis Buñuel left Hollywood for Mexico with his family, he had already made three of the most original, passionate, subversive films of our time: UN CHIEN ANDALOU, L'AGE D'OR, and LAS HURDES. Behind him lay the production of several Spanish comedies and documentaries, the trauma of the Spanish Civil War ("I thought the world was coming to an end"), and years of frustrated creativity, bureaucratic jobs, and comparative inactivity. He was almost 47 years old.

As Francisco Aranda succinctly stated, "The simple fact of going to Mexico was decisive in Buñuel's rediscovery of his road. Not only the idiom and the race, but the physical types, the dry and dusty landscape, the impassioned speech, the attitudes to life and death, the religious problem, the social structure which he attacked, all combined to restore him to conditions in which he could be himself. From the very first film his personality and his 'Spanishness' were engaged, while he observed, understood and analysed the idiosyncrasy of the Mexican people with a greater profundity than any of the cineastes who had preceded him. Like many other Spanish exiles, he definitively adopted Mexican nationality."

This program at The Museum of Modern Art - where Buñuel worked between 1939 and 1943 supervising, adapting, and editing documentaries - includes the masterworks as well as the too long neglected melodramas and cheap comedies produced with Mexican financing between 1947 and 1965. Each of the films reveals something of his private obsessions, his incisive observations, his penetrating wit and black humor, his exasperation with human folly and pettiness, and his ever-rebellious attitude toward bourgeois morality. Here is an artist attracted and repelled by the contradictions, by the reality of the human condition. His outrage, ironic laughter, or sympathetic shrug rise from the spirit of a man struggling to transcend himself. Buñuel is a man of uncompromising honesty, of intrinsic moral integrity. He is also a man who admires simplicity, who is himself an iconoclastic spirit of love, tenderness, and deep understanding.

Many of the twenty-one features have never been released in commercial English language theaters in the United States; therefore this retrospective bridges a significant gap in Buñuel's filmography. It offers an opportunity for further insight into the sensibility and the creative genius of a major living artist and poet who will celebrate his 76th birthday on February 22.

The Department of Film wishes to acknowledge its gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals and organizations that have made this program possible: Jeanette Bello, William K. Everson, Azteca Films, Banco Nacional Cinematográfico de Mexico, La Cineteca Nacional de Mexico, Columbia Pictures, Macmillan/Audio Brandon Films.

...Adrienne Mancía

EL GRAN CALAVERA (THE GREAT MADCAP). 1949. Luis Buñuel. Produced by Oscar Dancigers and Fernando Soler for Ultramar Films. Assistant Director, Moisés Delgado. Screenplay by Raquel Rojas and Luis Alcoriza based on a comedy by Adolfo Torrado. Photography, Ezequiel Carrasco. Art Director, Luis Moya and Dario Cabañas. Sound, Rafael Ruiz Esparza. Editing, Carlos Savage. Music, Manuel Esperón. With Fernando Soler (Don Famiro), Rosario "Charito" Granados (Virginia), Rubén Rojo (Pablo), Andrés Soler (Ladislao), Maruja Grifell (Milagros), Gustavo Rojo (Eduardo), Luis Alcoriza (Alfredo), Antonio Bravo (Alfonso), Francisco Jambrina (Gregorio), Antonio Monsell (Juan), Nicolás Rodríguez (Carmelito). Courtesy Macmillan/Audio Brandon. In Spanish with English Titles. 90 minutes.

"EL GRAN CALAVERA is a mischievous comedy about a drunken millionaire whose righteous family try to teach him a lesson by persuading him that he's lost all his money. When he finds out, he teaches them an even better lesson by persuading them that he has lost all his money. All of this permits many gentle digs at notions of respectability, family loyalty, the morally edifying effect of working for one's bread, and so on."...from "Luis Buñuel" by Raymond Durgnat (Studio Vista, 1967).

"Buñuel's second film in Mexico is a strange carryover of the corrosive Spanish world of the picaresque, Baltasar Gracián, and Calderon de la Barca's LA VIDA ES SUEÑO to that of Mexican slum melodrama. Better integrated than his previous film, in it Buñuel inveighs even more vigorously against bourgeois values which indubitably have their 'discreet charm' and pays tribute to simple manual labor as against the unproductiveness and idleness of the upper classes. Such praise is even more fervent in the rural scenes of VIRIDIANA (1961). Again, Buñuel eliminates kisses in the love scenes projecting subtle eroticism, as Rosario Granados and Ruben Rojo express their love inside a sound truck, their words being overheard by the entire neighborhood, as they exchange tender looks while nibbling at an ice cream cone. Also noteworthy is Buñuel's special use of dialogue in the scene in which the bride is being married to a man she does not love. Her lover interrupts the ceremony by announcing products over his loudspeaker. The advertising slogans mix with phrases from the Epistle of Saint Paul in a linguistic collage of gags reminiscent of Groucho Marx and Lewis Carroll, of which the following is an example: 'The chastity of marriage...is only possible with Sigh of Venus Stockings...'

The film has the rhythm and pace of the American comedies, particularly those in the manner of Frank Capra. This is true especially of the ending which is like that of IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT (1934) in which the bride leaves the church, to everyone's amazement, in order to follow the man she loves seeking love and happiness.

EL GRAN CALAVERA is a pleasant surprise among the Buñuelian opera in its rhythm and gag scenes." ...from the program for a presentation of Buñuel films at the Biennale of Venice in 1974.

EL GRAN CALAVERA is a pleasant piece of froth that follows all the canons of the commercial Mexican cinema. Buñuel gave only half-hearted attention to the making of it, and is right in dismissing it as one of his very minor works. There are, however, one or two situations that take a surprise turn; and the clichés of music hall and melodrama are sometimes turned inside out by twists in the plot."...Freddy Buache in "The Cinema of Luis Buñuel" (A.S. Barnes & Co. , New York, 1973)

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"...After the failure of GRAN CASINO and two years of inactivity, Oscar Dancigers asked me to suggest a treatment for a film for children. I timidly proposed the scenario of LOS OLVIDADOS, which I had already written with my friend Luis Alcoriza. He liked it and set me to work. Meanwhile there was an opportunity to make a commercial comedy, and Dancigers asked me to make this first, in exchange for which he guaranteed me a degree of freedom for LOS OLVIDADOS. So I made EL GRAN CALAVERA in sixteen days, and it enjoyed a tremendous success, and I was able to start work on LOS OLVIDADOS." ...Luis Buñuel in an interview with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in an interview in "Cahiers du Cinéma" (June 1954)