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# Venice Film Fest

## Il Deserto Rosso (Red Desert) (ITALO-FRENCH-COLOR)

Venice, Sept. 8.

Cineriz release of Film Duemila-Francois coproduction. Stars Monica Vitti, Richard Harris; features Carlo Chionetti, Xenia Valderi, Lili Rheims, Valerio Bartoleschi, Emanuela Carboni, Bruno Borghi, Peppe Conti, Giulio Cotignoli, Giovanni Lolli, Hiram Madonia, Giuliano Missirini, Arturo Parmisani, Carla Ravasi, Ivo Scherpani, Rita Renoir, Aldo Grotti. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay, Antonioni, Tonino Guerra. Camera, (color) Carlo di Palma. Music, Giovanni Fusco. Editor, Eraldo da Roma. At Venice Film Festival. Running time, 120 MINS.

|          |       |                      |
|----------|-------|----------------------|
| Giuliana | ..... | Monica Vitti         |
| Corrado  | ..... | Richard H            |
| Ugo      | ..... | Carlo Chionetti      |
| Linda    | ..... | Xenia Valderi        |
| Emilia   | ..... | Rita Renoir          |
| Max      | ..... | Aldro Grotti         |
| Son      | ..... | Valerio Bartoleschi. |

A film of high quality and artistry in the now-traditional style of Michelangelo Antonioni, "Red Desert" should provoke infinite discussions about meanings, and entertainment values, but remains a film to see and see again for its intrinsic contribution to cinematography. The fact that film is also a milestone in color lensing approach provides an added filip for the curioseeker and student. From a more practical standpoint, the pic has certain name values in Monica Vitti and Richard Harris, as well as that of Antonioni, but must basically be pegged for specialized outlets or general release conditioned by territory and preceded by an adroit preparatory campaign.

"Red Desert" is many things, and symbol-chasers should have a field day for interpretation. Basically, it is on one level an un-traditional study of a neurosis, on another a frightening fresco of the destructive dangers and crises implicit in present-day life, with its intensive pace, mechanization, disintegration of established values and traditions.

Antonioni's latest tells of a woman (Monica Vitti) who has tried suicide and emerged from the car crash with increased mental injuries. She nevertheless still desperately seeks an escape from the neurotic state of which she is conscious. Her quest for an "oasis" in the desert makes her seek the company of a colleague of her husband (Richard Harris) who is almost as unprepared and unwilling to sufficiently assist her as is her husband. Her crisis has its ups and downs, reaching a head after her son fakes a serious illness. She again seeks an escape, first by seducing the friend, later by thinking of sailing away in a ship docked nearby. Windup however finds her returned to her relative normality, having realized that there's no escape from her situation. There remains an implied hint that her problem may be resolved, but it remains only a hint.

Stylistically, the film is unmistakably Antonioni's—though he treats problems, situations, and moods which have in other guises been touched on by the films of Ingmar Bergman, for one. The pace is slow, objects play as important a role as humans, etc. The novelty here is color, and the director's contribution is masterful—perhaps the first time tint has been used creatively with such effect and power. It should prove a textbook for further efforts. But other elements, notably sound and music, also contribute strongly to the obsessive mood of anguish which Antonioni manages to instill, the anguish which the director suggests is in all of us and which in the Vitti character symbolizes modern civilization and the dangerous rhythm it is acquiring. A way out? Physical escape, a journey to a distant land where the relatively pure, calm, idyllic conditions of youth still exist (and which Antonioni depicts in a beautifully lensed insert illustrating a fairy tale told by the mother to her son during his fake illness) is becoming more and more difficult.

Conversely, the director suggests that all too often we are unwilling or unprepared to help our fellow man, provide the proper escape for him, due to an ultimate lack of communication. These and many more thoughts are provoked by a picture which stimulates from every angle. The color also hints a mood, vivid colors indicating normality, their absence a need for contact with the world, a loneliness, non-participation in life, pastels show relative tranquility. Greys domin-

ate exteriors as well, and fog is also used symbolically as a sort of mobile screen between normality and the neurotic state. Factory noises, brief snatches of electronic music all help to add to the obsessive mood of the settings, as does the contrast between the monstrous cold and sterile modern structures (home, hotel, or factory) and the few crumbling remnants of the old way of life.

The acting spotlight is clearly on Miss Vitti, in keeping with the pic's theme, and she gives another of her moving incarnations of a desparate woman in quest of a solution to her inner struggle. Other roles are played against her. Richard Harris is effective as the friend (though at times his make-up proves disconcerting for those who've seen him in other pix), as is Carlo Chionetti, an improvised thesp, as her husband. Xenia Valderi, Aldo Grotti, and others have relatively little to do. Carlo di Palma deserves praise for the way he has carried out the director's intentions in color (Eastmancolor stock, Technicolor prints), which very often achieve the stature of a masterful moving abstract. Other credits measure up, not the least those for producers Antonio Cervi and Angelo Rizzoli, who made such an offbeat film financially possible.

Hawk.