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Michelangelo, 1981

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Michelangelo/Antonioni: Modernist Master
at the Castro Theatre

JANUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 4

The San Francisco Film Society and
the Istituto Italiano di Cultura present
Modernist Master: Michelangelo Antonioni

"Antonioni is one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century"

- Martin Scorsese

"The cinema is not, in essence, moral. It is emotional."

- Michelangelo Antonioni

Few directors have so radically transformed our perception of the possibilities of film as has Michelangelo Antonioni. Indeed, Antonioni's films constitute a monument of modernism. Their evocation of postwar alienation and anomie, their formal innovation and figurative beauty, created one of the most influential and inexhaustible canons in the history of cinema. •

-James Quandt, Cinematheque

Ontario

Presented by the San Francisco Film Society in association with the Istituto Italiano di Cultura under the auspices of the Italian Consulate general and made possible by Cinecittà International, a division of Ente Cinema, Rome. Thanks to Mr. Gillo Pontecorvo, Prof. Antonio Breschi, Ms. Rosanna Santececca, James Quandt and Jack Nicholson. The following notes are excerpted from James Quandt's writing on Antonioni.

Each film is a separate admission (\$7). Antonioni Series Pass (\$75) available in advance beginning December 2 at the following locations: San Francisco Film Society, 1521 Eddy Street, Monday through Friday 10-5; Cavalli Italian Bookstore, 1441 Stockton Street, Monday through Saturday 9:30-5; Lost Weekend Video Store, 1034 Valencia (cash or check only); and the Castro Box Office (cash only). Charge by phone through the San Francisco Film Society by calling the Box Office at (415) 929-5043, or fax a request for an order form to (415) 921-5032. Passes charged in advance will be available for pick up at the Film Society Box Office through Thursday, January 22. After that prepaid passes will be held at the will call window at the Castro Theatre. For more information call (415) 931-FILM.

FRIDAY JANUARY 22

Story of a Love Affair (Cronaca di un Amore)

7:00 Antonioni's first feature is as great as it is little known. Like Visconti before him (in *Ossessione*), Antonioni transposed James M. Cain's "The Postman Always Rings Twice" to an entirely different setting: here, the post-war world of the Milanese aristocracy. An industrialist hires a detective to investigate his wife's past, and in doing so unwittingly reunites her with her high school sweetheart. The two lovers conspire to

kill the suspicious husband. Semiotically sleek and impossibly chic with its glistening succession of cars, boudoirs and boîtes, *Affair* is a work of astonishing plastic beauty, and prefigures the thematic and stylistic preoccupations of Antonioni's later work. With: Lucia Bosè and Massimo Girotti. (1950) 96 mins.

This film will show again on February 3.

The Girlfriends (Le Amiche)

9:30 *The Girlfriends* is based on a Pavese novella about a young woman who returns to her native Turin to open a fashion salon. She falls in with a "smart set," including the suicidal daughter of an eminent family, a painter who is jealous of his wife's success, and a viperous woman who vents her despair by attacking her closest friends. In its emphasis on the spiritual and moral malaise of the wealthy, and in its stunningly abstract style looks forward to the ground-breaking trilogy of the early Sixties.

With Eleanora Rossi Drago and Valentina Cortese. (1955) 105 mins.

This film will show again on February 3.

SATURDAY JANUARY 23

Blow Up

1:30, 4:15, 7:00, 9:30 "*Blow Up* is the movie of the year. It is to Antonioni what *Lola Montes* was to Ophüls, *Ugetsu* to Mizoguchi, *Contempt* to Godard, *French Can-Can* to Renoir, *Limelight* to Chaplin, *Rear Window* to Hitchcock, *8 1/2* to Fellini - a statement of the artist, not on life but on art itself as the consuming passion of an artist's life." - Andrew Sarris.

One of the revelations of our Antonioni retrospective is to find that *Blow Up* has not dated, as so many films set in the "swinging London" of the mid-Sixties have, but instead seems richer, more complex and enigmatic than ever. David Hemmings plays a disaffected young fashion photographer who stumbles upon a murder while taking pictures of a young couple making love in a secluded park. Or, so the blown-up photographs of the tryst seem to suggest. Such Sixties icons as Jane Birkin and Veruschka make guest appearances, as do The Yardbirds singing "Stroll On." (Most of the music, though, is vintage Herbie Hancock.) As the woman who may or may not have been used as a lure to kill her suitor, Vanessa Redgrave is incandescent, her erotic anxiety palpable as she tries to wrest from Hemmings an image that has both literally and metaphorically captured her. Three decades after its making *Blow Up* continues to elicit intense critical scrutiny...It has been seen as a metaphysical meditation on the nature of reality and illusion, an ethical treatise about a search for meaning, and as a tiresomely chic example of what Pauline Kael (who hated the film) called the "come dressed as the sick soul of Europe" genre. That *Blow Up* can reward any number of readings places it with *Last Year at Marienbad*, as a work of lasting importance and enduring enigma. (1966) 111 mins.

SUNDAY JANUARY 24

Antonioni's Short Films

12 noon, 5:00, 10:00 Throughout his career, Antonioni made short films: essays, travelogues, small meditations, thematic contributions to anthology films. Far from marginalia, they offer a fascinating traversal of Antonioni's concerns and stylistic transformations. GENTE DEL PO (People of the Po)-A seemingly jinxed project about a barge trip down the river Po. (1943-47) 9 mins. NETTEZZA URBANA (N.U.)-Antonioni's second film, which chronicles a day in the life of Roman street sweepers. (1948) 9 mins. SUPERSTITION (Superstizione)-A bizarre and amusing film about superstition (charms, spells, exorcisms) in the village of Camerino in the Marches. (1949) 9 mins. LIES OF LOVE (L'Amorosa Menzogna)-A satire about the making of a fumetto, or photoromance, in a shabby little studio in Rome. (1949) 10 mins. THE VILLA OF MONSTERS (La Villa dei Mostri)-A study of the grotesque sculptures that fill the park of the ancient villa of Bomarzo. (1950) 10 mins. SUICIDE ATTEMPT (Tentato Suicidio)-In his section of the omnibus film LOVE IN THE CITY Antonioni brought together a group of young women in a film studio and, instead of having them explain their desire to kill themselves, asked them to act out the actual attempt. (1953) 20 mins. PREFACE (Prefazione; il Provino)-This rare short work served as the "preface" to a now lost anthology film, The Three Faces, which was designed by Dino de Laurentis to turn Soraya, who was once the empress of Iran, into a movie star."A bridge between the gorgeous industrial wasteland of Red Desert and the hypnotically vacuous scene-mongering of Blow Up (both of which were also shot by Carlo Di Palma)" (J. Hoberman). (1965) 25 mins. KUMBHA MELA-Antonioni's 1977 footage of the most important Indian religious festival, which takes place at the confluence of the Ganges, Jamuna and Saraswati rivers. (1977-89) 18 mins. NOTO MANDORLI VULCANO STROMBOLI CARNEVALE-Made in June 1992 for the Italian pavilion at the Seville Expo, this film is structured around five different outlooks on Sicily: a return to Noto, one of the places of L'Avventura; an in-depth look at the Stromboli and Vulcano volcanoes; images on an almond tree in bloom on the hills of Noto; and, finally, a look at the carnival of Acireale. (1992) 8 mins.

Antonioni's Short Films will show again on February 3.

Red Desert (Il Deserto Rosso)

2:40, 7:40 When recently re-released, Red Desert was hailed by critics as more innovative and relevant than ever: Antonioni transformed Ravenna, the city of Dante's tomb, Byzantine murals and marble churches, into a terrifyingly beautiful desert of slagheaps, factories and sulphurous skies. (Grass, sand, buildings, even hair and fruit were painted and dyed to accomplish this disturbing effect.) Monica Vitti is the traumatized heroine who, in a desperate search for love, has a brief affair with the owner of a factory which her husband manages. Prescient in its connection of existential and ecological concerns, Red Desert is counted by many as one of the greatest works of European cinema. With Monica Vitti and Richard Harris (1964) 116 mins.

MONDAY JANUARY 25

The Lady Without Camellias (La Signora Senza Camelie)

7:00 A devastating work *Camelias* was originally conceived for Gina Lollabrigida, who turned it down because of its stinging portrait of the Italian film industry and of actresses very much like her. The "lady without camellias" is a Milanese shopgirl who is discovered by a sleazy movie producer. He becomes insanely jealous of her consorting with actors, marries her, and attempts to change her image by casting her as Joan of Arc in his first art film. With Lucia Bosè and Andre Cecchi (1953) 105 mins..

The Mystery of Oberwald (Il Mistire de Oberwald)

9:20 Time Magazine chose *Oberwald* as one of the ten best films of the year, and called it "Antonioni's most impressive experiment yet...a bold new direction for the cinema, a work of dazzling ambition and achievement." Monica Vitti, appearing in an Antonioni film for the first time since *Red Desert*, plays the queen who falls in love with the man sent to assassinate her in this very strange version of Cocteau's *The Eagle Has Two Heads*. Antonioni shot *Oberwald* on video and transferred it to 35mm film, manipulating colour and texture to transform each image into a startling signifier of emotional states. (Dawn arrives as a wave of cerulean light; a blizzard of vermilion swirls around the lovers as they struggle against their fated deaths; the sky blazes crimson as their passion ignites....)*Oberwald* was never distributed in North America, so this is your only chance to see it. With Monica Vitti, Franco Branciaroli. (1980) 129 mins.

This film will show again on February 2.

TUESDAY JANUARY 26

Il Grido (The Cry)

7:00 An imposing portrait of a worker who wanders the Po Valley with his little daughter after his wife leaves him, *Il Grido* is one of the director's personal favorites: "When I saw *Il Grido* after some time, "Antonioni said, "I was stunned to find myself faced with such nakedness, with such great solitude. It was like what happens on some mornings when we look in the mirror and are startled by the reflection of our own face." With Steve Cochran, Alida Valli. (1957) 116 mins.

This film will show again on February 4.

L'Avventura

9:30 Antonioni's epochal masterpiece provoked derision and outrage at the 1960 Cannes festival, but quickly established its claim as "the most important film since *Citizen Kane*" (Robert Benayoun). During a yachting party, a woman argues with her architect lover and then disappears from the Sicilian island they'd been exploring. Her lover and her best friend set out to find her, but the urgency of their search dissipates as they fall into an uneasy sexual relationship. With Monica Vitti and Lea Massari. (1960) 145 mins. Preceded by: *RETURN TO LISCA BIANCA* (*Ritorno a Lisca Bianca*)-An eerie return visit more than two decades later to the island setting of *L'Avventura*. (1983) 9 mins.

This film will show again on February 4.

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 27

Chung Kuo China

1:30, 7:30 The rarest of rare, this epic documentary is as legendary as it is unseen. Invited by the Chinese government to film a portrait of their country (which was then in the throes of Mao's Cultural Revolution) Antonioni spent eight weeks shooting with the full cooperation of officials. The result was less a documentary or travelogue than a classic Antonioni meditation on the "faces, gestures, habits" of the people and the textures, spaces, and contours of the urban and rural landscapes. (As Sam Rohdie has observed, "Chung Kuo China is a film about a China seen but not known, observed, but not explained and that is its wonderful power and secret happiness.") A year after the film's release, Antonioni was violently attacked by the Chinese government as "a worm who speaks for the Russians." (1972) 240 mins.

THURSDAY JANUARY 28

La Notte (The Night)

7:00 A key work of modernist cinema, La Notte still maintains its power to shock audiences into a new kind of seeing. (Its compositions are among the most striking in all of Antonioni's films.) Mastroianni plays an exhausted novelist coasting on his reputation, Moreau his disenchanted wife. As the title suggests, the film follows the couple to the end of the night, from an afternoon visit to a dying friend in hospital, through a party for a book launch at the home of an industrialist, to separate morning forays: he into his study, she into the deserted streets of Milan. With Marcello Mastroianni and Jeanne Moreau. (1961) 122 mins.

This film will show again on February 1.

L'Eclisse (The Eclipse)

9:30 "Of all my old films, L'Eclisse is the one I like best," Antonioni claimed in 1967; "from the point of view of style it is the most rigorous, and therefore the most successful. Also it is the most modern." A tailspin in Rome's stock market serves as the backdrop for a love affair between a translator (Monica Vitti) and her mother's stockbroker. Antonioni's evocation of anomie and alienation was never so exquisitely articulated as in L'Eclisse. The final sequence, in which suspense is built out of an increasingly unbearable absence, is justly famous. (As David Thomson states: "Alas, [this], one of the seminal passages in modern cinema, makes so much else seem old-fashioned.") With Monica Vitti and Alain Delon. (1961) 125 mins.

This film will show again on February 1.

FRI - SAT JANUARY 29 - 30

The Passenger (Professione: Reporter)

1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 9:45 Jack Nicholson plays a television reporter who seizes the chance to assume a new identity when a man who looks like him

dies suddenly in an isolated hotel in Chad. Switching passport photos, Nicholson assumes the dead man's career as a weapons dealer, and begins an affair with a mysterious young architecture student. Antonioni's exploration of the tenuousness of identity "leads to a final sequence, a single shot lasting seven minutes which is one of the most extraordinary in film history" (Roud). (This is the European version, which is Antonioni's preferred cut; it is approximately 4 minutes longer than the American release.) With Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider. (1975) 126 mins.

SUNDAY JANUARY 31

Zabriskie Point

1:30, 4:15, 7:00, 9:30 Zabriskie Point split the critics: Time Magazine's Richard Corliss called it "the most entertaining of Antonioni's films" but many others dismissed it. Zabriskie deals with Sixties student unrest in southern California, specifically with the son of a rich L.A. family who "drops out" and steals a gun, intending to kill a policeman. When his plans backfire, he takes an airplane on a joyride and lands in Death Valley, where he encounters (and, in a renowned sequence, makes love to) a young woman who works for a property developer. Antonioni's vision of America offers semiotic splendor and surprisingly contemporary truths. With Mark Frechette and Daria Halprin. (1969) 110 mins.

MONDAY FEBRUARY 1

L'Eclisse

7:00 (See January 28 for description)

La Notte

9:35 (See January 28 for description)

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 2

Identification of a Woman

(Identificazione di una Donna)

7:00 Chic, oblique, and extraordinarily erotic, Identification is Antonioni in top form, and marks a return to the preoccupations and setting of his first film and of his great trilogy: ennui and desolation among the haute bourgeoisie. A filmmaker searches for two women: one to inspire his new film, the other to replace the wife he has divorced. His encounters with a beautiful, androgynous and bisexual aristocrat, and then with a stage actress, drive the director only further into artistic and emotional paralysis. With Tomas Milian and Christine Boisson. (1982) 128 mins.

The Mystery of Oberwald (Il Mistere de Oberwald)

9:40 (See January 25 for description)

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 3

Antonioni Shorts

2:00 (See January 24 for description)

The Girlfriends

4:30, 9:30 (See January 22 for description)

Story of a Love Affair

7:00 (See January 22 for description)

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 4

L'Avventura

7:00 (See January 26 for description)

Il Grido (The Cry)

10:00 (See January 26 for description)