

Document Citation

Title	Shadows
Author(s)	
Source	<i>San Francisco International Film Festival</i>
Date	1997
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Shadows, Cassavetes, John, 1960

Indelible Images



Shadows

Selected by Lynn Hershman

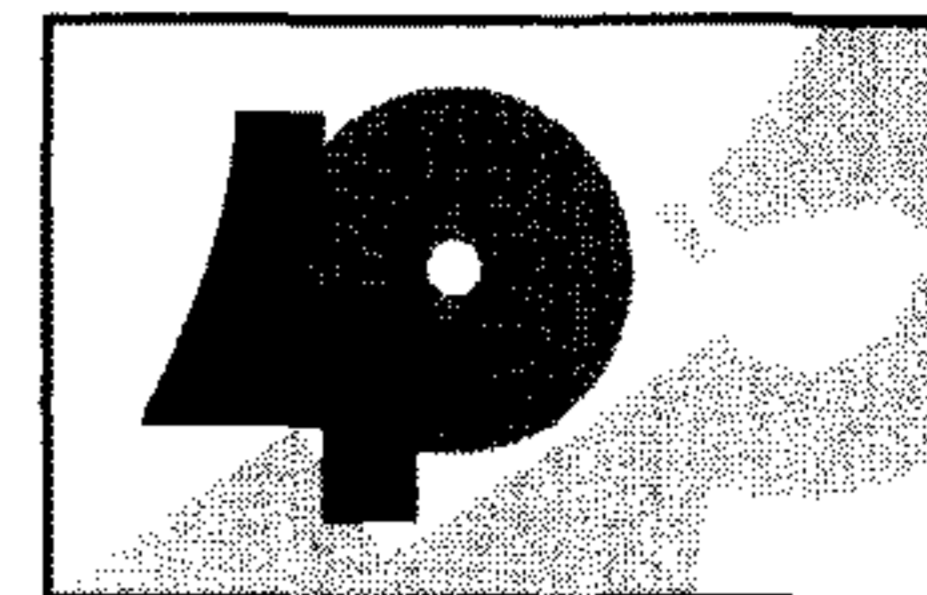
USA 1959, 87 min.

DIR John Cassavetes

PROD Maurice McEndree, Seymour Cassel CAM Erich Kollmar ED Maurice McEndree CAST Hugh Hurd, Lelia Goldoni, Ben Carruthers, Anthony Ray, Rupert Crosse DISTRIBUTOR Castle Hill Productions

Hailed upon its 1959 release as a radical departure from the conventional narrative structure of American film, John Cassavetes' **Shadows** is a fluid, emotionally rich visit into questions of race and relationships. Inspired by donations following a radio show about his improvisational work with an actors' workshop, Cassavetes and his remarkable cast created this film with little money and no script. The result was a sparse, spontaneous film that abandoned predictable pacing and pat endings for the uncertainty of "real" emotions and open-ended social problems. Stoked by the powerful, unsettling jazz riffs of Charles Mingus and Shifi Hadi, **Shadows** captures a moment in the lives of three Black siblings, two of whom (Lelia and Ben) pass for white more often than not. The third (Hugh) is a failing, dark-skinned trumpet-player who vacillates between affection and anger—especially when confronted with his impression of Lelia's new white boyfriend and what he modestly calls "a little problem of the races." The depths of this seemingly parentless family are probed against a backdrop of Lelia's literary pretensions and the antics of Ben and his dead-end cronies. From lofty intellectuals contemplating self-induced hysteria to comically daft musings in a sculpture garden ("If you feel it, you feel it, stupid"), Cassavetes and his actors manage to make this film whimsical, insightful and the most famous of improvised American dramas.

Selected Filmography: John Cassavetes (b. New York, 1929–d. 1990) *A Woman Under the Influence* (SFIFF 1984), *Gloria* (SFIFF 1984), *Opening Night* (SFIFF 1984), *Faces* (SFIFF 1968)



Shown in
1960

Feature films still competed for the Golden Gate Awards, and Grigori Chukhrai's **Ballad of a Soldier** won Best Film, beating out Fellini's **La Dolce Vita**. Serving on the distinguished panel of jurors was none other than Jean Renoir.

"The restrained freshness and energy unleashed by the improvisational techniques John Cassavetes invented in the cinema vérité style



Lynn Hershman

of his work exploded out of the slick Hollywood aesthetic of his time. His work offers a deep and insightful look at the hidden underside of America and, by reversing the dominant,

pretentious myths, he was able to construct a new, honest vision of this country's hidden dimension; the trauma of races and women shown with humility and humor. Cassavetes brought vital awareness to audiences who had not before been exposed to the afflictions of everyday life, diseases of oppression and mental illness that had been unspoken diseases of this society. His courage and originality revised the consciousness of filmmaking."

Lynn Hershman is not as well known in this country as she is in Europe, where her experimental films and videos have been continually praised for their imaginative use of the latest in computer technology. She has spent the last three decades exploring the outer limits of various media and genres—from film to interactive video disks, from narrative to the diary documentary. Her latest venture, *Conceiving Ada*, starring Tilda Swinton, Karen Black and the late Timothy Leary, may help bring her celebrity status on this side of the Atlantic.