

Giuseppe De Santis

To celebrate Giuseppe De Santis today also means to celebrate a certain stance: He stood **for a truly popular, epic and communist cinema**. He believed in peasants and workers, in their common sense and organizational skills – a belief that reaches its fullest expression in his monumental and lyrical film about an act of civil disobedience, *La strada lunga un anno* (*The Year-Long Road*, 1958). **He believed that people watch movies in order to reach a different understanding about their lives and the society in which they live.** Because, at the movies, we are not alone with our issues; in the darkness we search collectively for answers – thus, he made *Roma ore 11* (*Rome 11 O'Clock*, 1952), a morality-tale about a catastrophic accident. He believed that films should make demands on us, that they were meant to tell us: *This* is meaningful, *This* is not; *this is how* you trespass against your friend, your neighbor, your comrade, and *this is how* you act in solidarity with those who have so little yet number so many – which is the story of De Santis' Sicilian “western”, *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* (*Under the Olive Tree*, 1950).

He also believed that we **have the right to lead our lives so that they are beautiful, exciting, exhilarating and hopeful** – which is why he made class-conscious, entertaining and sometimes disturbing melodramas like *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, 1949) and *Un marito per Anna Zaccheo* (1953). He believed in courage and patience, condemned laziness and procrastination, cheap compromise and indifference – which is why, in *Giorni di gloria* (1945), he and some of his peers documented the achievements of the partisans and the suffering of the Italian population during the last months of the war. And half a century later, in *Oggi è un altro giorno* (1995), he looked at this era again, countering its false depiction by the state media. **Giuseppe De Santis was cut from the same cloth as Kurosawa, King Hu, or Sam Peckinpah: a humanist, a fighter for enlightenment through action.**

De Santis was born in 1917 in Fondi, from simple but solid stock. In 1935, he went to Rome to study philosophy and literature – his first great love among the arts. But he learned more from those with whom he associated, especially in the anti-fascist circles surrounding Mario Alicata, Giaime Pintor, Antonello Trombadori and Pietro Ingrao. During those years, De Santis came to understand that by means of cinema he could communicate more clearly to the people he cared most about: the peasants and workers about whom he had already written short stories. He abandoned his studies, entered the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and quickly became a key film critic at Vittorio Mussolini's magazine, *Cinema*. Here, along with Luchino Visconti, Carlo Lizzani, Gianni Puccini, Antonio Pietrangeli and others, he developed the theoretical **principles of neo-realism**. His notion of neo-realism was formed from elements of fascist modernism, socialist realism and progressive Hollywood cinema.

As a co-writer of films such as *Ossessione* (Visconti), *Desiderio* (Pagliero & Rossellini), and *Il sole sorge ancora* (Aldo Vergano) **and as the director of *Caccia tragica* (*The Tragic Hunt*, 1947), *Riso amaro*, *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* and *Roma ore 11*, De Santis was one of post-war Italy's most respected and successful directors worldwide.** Like few others, he stood for the greatness of this cinema, for its decisive historical break and the spirit of a new beginning. This changed in the late 1950s: his passion project *La strada lunga un anno* could only be made in Yugoslavia, and both *La Garçonnière* (1960) and *Italiani brava gente* (1964) were met with sedate indifference. Before his death in 1997, he was only able to direct one more feature film; dozens of screenplays for film and television projects remained unrealized. His stance had come to a stop.

The retrospective is organized in collaboration with Cinecittà Luce and the Italian Cultural Institute.

January 7 to February 8, 2012

Elio Petri

During his lifetime, **Giuseppe De Santis' master student, Elio Petri**, was far better received abroad than at home: the leading Italian intellectuals of the new left did not know what to make of his **baroque-sardonic, Pop Art vision** of Brecht's "theatre of the people" – even as Petri remained so close to them politically, as a scourge of the Christian Democrats. After his death, many of these writers confessed: we were wrong, we had blinders on; he was one of the greatest Italian filmmakers of the 1960s and 70s.

Like De Santis, Elio Petri came from humble beginnings: born in Rome in 1929, he grew up as the son of a coppersmith in a working-class suburb. He was politicized early, joined the Communist Party and worked for their youth organization, wrote for *L'unita* and *Gioventù nuova*. After the Hungarian uprising, however, he kept his distance from all PCI organizations. During those years Petri also met De Santis, and handed him a wonderful piece of material, the story for ***Roma ore 11*** (1952). He became De Santis' most important artistic collaborator and co-writer of the screenplays for *Un marito per Anna Zaccheo* (1953), *Giorni d'amore* (1954), *Uomini e lupi* (1957), *La strada lunga un anno* (1958) and *La Garçonnière* (1960). Petri also wrote scripts for other filmmakers such as Carlo Lizzani and Gianni Puccini, but as he said later, the man from whom he learned everything about cinema, and life, was Giuseppe De Santis.

As early as 1954, Elio Petri directed his first short documentary, *Nasce un campione*, but it took another seven years before he was able to complete his feature film debut, ***L'assassino*** (1961), with Marcello Mastroianni in the title role. The film indicated the direction in which Petri would develop – grim, penetrating considerations of society in genre form. Not that he necessarily wanted to go there: in his little-known masterpiece ***I giorni contati*** (1963), Petri used a very different aesthetic register – something like "existential realism". However, starting with his fourth film, the Science-Fiction allegory ***La decima vittima*** (*The Tenth Victim*, 1965, again starring Mastroianni), Petri remained faithful to genre cinema.

This tendency reveals itself even in Petri's realistic narratives such as ***La classe operaia va in paradiso*** (1971), which he imbued with the fury and energetic *mise-en-scène* of his thrillers – Italy portrayed as a nightmare that made even the most seemingly paranoid fantasy seem like an exercise in cinema vérité. In ***Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*** (1970), a high-ranking police officer murders his lover and leaves behind a crime scene full of clues – with little doubt about the killer's identity – just to see if his colleagues will dare to accuse him. **Gian Maria Volonte** shines in both films; he was Petri's favorite actor next to Mastroianni.

In one of Petri's major works, the two actors appeared together: ***Todo modo*** (1976). Among the most radical Italian films of the decade, *Todo modo* was an allegory about the Gladio conspiracy, Gladio being the code name for a reputedly NATO-backed anti-communist organization with ties to the neo-fascist lodge P2. Petri obviously knew what he was talking about: The film was released just as this entire network of organized crime and fascist elements in the armed forces became publicly known... By this time, Petri had developed into a kind of public enemy; attempts were made to neutralize him and remove the film from Italian movie theaters. Before his untimely death in 1982, he was only able to direct one more feature film, the uncannily "soft" *Le buone notizie* – and a television adaptation of Sartre's "Dirty Hands": Petri's reckoning with the legacy of Stalinism.

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January 7 to February 9, 2012

Hall of Mirrors

Hollywood on Hollywood, 1950-62

In the nineteen-fifties, the American film industry discovered a major new theme: itself. This is not to suggest that there had not previously been examples of films about fallen stars or the glamour of the California "film colony," but rather that the enormous increase in films about these subjects after 1950 marks a striking dividing line – and mirrors the dusk of the "Golden Age" of Hollywood cinema.

When undertaking this self-reflection of its own history and conflict-ridden present, Hollywood remained faithful to its most reliable genres: whether **film noir** (*Sunset Boulevard, In a Lonely Place*), **color-drenched musical** (*Singin' in the Rain, A Star is Born*), **fiery melodrama** (*The Bad and the Beautiful*) or **psychological horror film** (*What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*) – most of these tales take place in a relatively familiar narrative space. Stylistically however, many works in this series tend towards excess and high flights of mannerism – towards forms of representation and perception that are known from walking through a hall of mirrors.

The reasons for this peculiar compression of themes are varied – from the new media competition (American television experienced its greatest expansion between 1947 and 1952) and the restrictions on major studios arising from anti-trust legislation (1948-49) to the Hollywood witch-hunts of Senator McCarthy and the far-reaching transformation in the concept of realism after the Second World War: disillusionment, myth-busting, and anti-heroes abounded. The gain in credibility that always accompanies such processes allows the spiral of the culture industry to continue turning: Whoever is established and "mature" enough to allow a look behind the scenes and to acknowledge the myth as a *myth* also gains a second wind and a new freedom. In the mean time, the myth can be modernized and new sets and scenery can be developed.

If Fifties American cinema celebrates **its own historicity and artifice**, this also occurs **in service of emancipation** – employing very different means but aiming for similar goals as those pursued by Italian neo-realism or the French New Wave. This hall of mirrors reflects an era of popular culture which, for the next quarter-century or so, would grant cinema a real starring role in public discourse: because it had finally gained an awareness of itself.

The retrospective includes 12 features and several shorts, as well as a lecture by Drehli Robnik. The project is presented in collaboration with the Vienna Jewish Museum where the exhibition "Bigger Than Life – 100 Years of Hollywood" is on view until April 15, 2012. For more information, go to www.jmw.at

January 19 to February 9, 2012

Premiere:

"In the Loop" by Armando Iannucci

In Great Britain, the art of comedy has seen numerous highpoints during the last decade, the majority of which have come from writers & comedians working in television. Alongside Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant (*The Office, Extras*), **Armando Iannucci**, creator of the celebrated series *The Thick of It* (2005-2009), is a central figure of this renaissance. The bite and precision of his political satire on the later Blair years is unparalleled, as is the cast that he brought together on this occasion.

Expanding on the television series and employing some of the same characters, Iannucci also directed a feature film: ***In the Loop*** premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and became a surprise hit with audiences and critics in the U.S. – **including comparisons to *Dr. Strangelove*** in relation to its **topical humor and verbal wit**. *In the Loop* draws a picture of **Anglo-American relations** on the eve of the Iraq war and the **world of the respective "courtiers" of the political-media complex**. In the midst of all the comedy, a sort of media-horror film rears its head: in an era of continuous "spin," language and information have become the weapons of evil.

Shot vérité-style and partially improvised, the film relies on Iannucci's outstanding team of actors, two of which shall be spotlighted here: **Peter Capaldi**, a veteran of the TV series, returns as the "demon-eyed and ninja-tongued" (Melissa Anderson) spin-doctor of the British prime minister; and **James Gandolfini**, who gives us the portrait of a skeptical U.S. general – a hybrid between Tony Soprano and Colin Powell.

The Film Museum presents the only two theatrical screenings of the film in Austria.

February 2 and 3, 2012

For more information and photos, please visit www.filmmuseum.at or contact:
Sabine Maierhofer, s.maierhofer@filmmuseum.at, phone 43-1-533 70 54 ext 19 or:
Alessandra Thiele, a.thiele@filmmuseum.at, phone 43-1-533 70 54 ext 19