

Oppositional and Stigmatized

program four

Blasphemy

Curated by Janis Crystal Lipzin and Caroline Savage

Sunday, April 8, 2007 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.

Since the origins of cinema, this medium has been under attack by censors, government, religious groups, and conformists that fear its potent influence. This series, *Oppositional and Stigmatized Cinema*, presents some notable examples of the aesthetically, sexually and politically subversive films that have emerged from diverse eras and cultural identities. These remarkable works have, at one time or another, been identified as oppositional or stigmatized by the mainstream. Many have been the source of heated controversy or censorship. Some actually have been banned or subjected to efforts at suppression.

The first recorded public protest against the exhibition of an erotic movie occurred in April 1894 in New York. Only two weeks after Thomas Edison's kinoscope motion picture machine first appeared in New York, angry citizens demonstrated against the exhibition of an erotic Edison film, *Dolorita in the Passion Dance*. Since this early moment in film history, filmmakers have been under pressure to refrain from producing or exhibiting controversial films. Nevertheless, San Francisco Cinematheque has, since its founding over forty-five years ago, demonstrated a courageous exhibition stance in the face of omnipresent censorious efforts of the disapproving.

Amos Vogel asserts in *Film as a Subversive Art*, "We are inundated by ambiguity, allegory, and complexity, by an existential humanism devoid of certainty or illusion. The committed artists of our day, [have] the most nakedly sensitized antenna extended toward our collective secrets." The artists included in this four-part series illuminate these secrets with works providing radical challenges to typical cinematic modes of presentation, production and representation, cinema that is forbidden, shocking, blasphemous, extremist, defiant.

Targeting and skewering bourgeois complacency, religious hypocrisy, patriarchal authority and European moral conventions, these two films continue to challenge and confront the audience. Irreligious and scandalous, Luis Buñuel's *L'Age D'Or* attacks the Church, the State, the family, not simply to shock for shock's sake but also to argue the case for the surrealist belief in giving our unconscious irrational desires free reign. As Buñuel states: "It is love that brings about the transition from pessimism to action: Love, denounced in the bourgeois demonology as the root of all evil. For love demands the sacrifice of every other value: status, family and honor." Although *La Coquille et le clergyman (The Seashell and the Clergyman)* by Germaine Dulac, is often regarded as the first Surrealist film and is based on Antonin Artaud's scenario, it was Dulac's passion for "films made according to the rules of visual music" that ignited Artaud's narrative about a clergyman struggling against his own eroticism and desire. Banned in England in 1929, the film was declared "apparently meaningless, but if it has any meaning it is doubtless objectionable."

La Coquille et le clergyman (The Seashell and the Clergyman) (1928) by Germaine Dulac; screened as 16mm, b&w, silent, 41 minutes, print from Em Gee Film Library

"By far the most important and the most prolific filmmaker of the [1920s] was Germaine Dulac, whose film style proceeded from psychological realism and symbolism through surrealism to documentaries and formal attempts at transposing musical structures to film; her ultimate goal was that film at its highest level of achievement should be a visual symphony. Yet Germaine Dulac has been largely overlooked or else slandered by most film historians. One reason might be that Dulac cannot be put into categories: for example, she was making films before the [...] surrealists, and she was still making films in the 1930s, when most of the Surrealists had stopped. Another reason might be that Dulac's films have never received wide distribution. Either in France or elsewhere. This second reason is linked with a third reason, perhaps the most important reason of all: Germaine Dulac was intensely interested in the image of women in film. (William van Wert, "Germaine Dulac: First Feminist Filmmaker," *Women and Film*, vol. 1, nos. 5–6)

L'Age D'or (1930) by Luis Buñuel; screened as 16mm, b&w, sound, 60 minutes, print from Em Gee Film Library

“Although Dali compared it to American film (undoubtedly from a technical point of view), he later wrote that *his* intentions “in writing the screenplay” were to expose the shameful mechanisms of contemporary society. For me, it was a film about passion, *l’amour fou*, the irresistible force that thrusts two people together, and about the impossibility of their ever becoming one.” (Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh*)

San Francisco Cinematheque’s series, Oppositional and Stigmatized, concludes Sunday, April 29, 2007.

The fourth and final screening will include L’Age D’Or by Luis Buñuel and The Seashell and the Clergyman by Germaine Dulac.

Please see www.sfcinematheque.org for complete details.