

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
June 1987

BERLINART: 20 FILMS

June 11 - September 5, 1987

BERLINART: 20 FILMS, the film component of The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition BERLINART 1961-1987, reflects the integral role of film in the Berlin art community. Organized by Laurence Kardish, curator in the Department of Film, the thirteen programs include fiction and nonfiction works by more than twenty filmmakers. The film series takes place on Thursdays and Saturdays from June 11 through September 5, 1987, in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2 (complete schedule enclosed).

The program offers independent, often defiant works that reverberate with the tensions characterizing contemporary Berlin life. The filmmakers represented here have responded in a variety of ways to the cultural, political, and economic conditions resulting from Berlin's unique geographic position. They explore psychological, spiritual, and social issues, working in an environment supported by a progressive film and television academy, as well as alternative distributors and exhibitors. Federal and municipal grants and production money from German television have also attracted German and American filmmakers to West Berlin.

BERLINART: 20 FILMS opens with Helma Sanders-Brahms's romantic drama Laputa (1986), in which the director compares Berlin to the floating island in Swift's Gulliver's Travels. She depicts the city as a transit station for the brief encounters of two foreign lovers, played by Krystyna Janda and Sami Frey.

- more -

The constricted parameters of their relationship recall the physical and spiritual boundaries of Berlin itself.

The films in this series treat themes related to Berlin's unique cinematic subculture. In "Berlin and Film," an essay included in the catalog accompanying the exhibition, Mr. Kardish writes: "Dislocation is an experience familiar to Berlin life and a theme frequent in Berlin art. The dislocation derives in part from the city's spectacular resurrection and its disassociation with a past that in spite of cursory reminders becomes increasingly, not less, unthinkable."

The dislocation born of Berlin's isolation is the salient characteristic of these films. For example, the female protagonist and the city each function as a metaphor for the divided other in Helke Sander's ironic The All-Round Reduced Personality--Redupers (1977). In Ulrike Ottinger's highly exaggerated Portrait of a Woman Drinker (1979), the city provides congenial spaces and anonymity for the female protagonist's narcissistic acts of shocking others.

The theme of dislocation is also prominent in the works of Rosa von Praunheim and Lothar Lambert, both known for their provocative depictions of Berlin's gay subculture. Substar American performers attempt to work in an alien cityscape in von Praunheim's idiosyncratic musical City of Lost Souls--Berlin Blues (1983). Lambert's low-budget 1 Berlin-Harlem (1974) describes a black American soldier who chooses to remain in Berlin after his discharge.

Dislocation also characterizes films in the series by Americans Steve Dwoskin, Ernie Gehr, and Yvonne Rainer. Dwoskin focuses on consumerism in Just Waiting (1975). Establishing the city as an international arena, Gehr interprets the question of collective guilt in Signal--Germany on the Air

(1985). And while Rainer does not photograph the city itself in Working Title: Journeys from Berlin/1971 (1979), she uses her experiences there to examine the contradictions between social and personal concerns.

The peculiar geography, topography, and architecture of Berlin figure strongly in Alfred Behrens's Images of Berlin's City Railway (1982), a poetic exploration of the vast, largely unused public transit that connects East and West Berlin; and Elfi Mikesch's Macumba (1982), a mystery in which the city's haunting interior spaces seem to determine the actions and moods of the characters.

The films's wide range of unconventional narratives and styles expresses numerous ideological concerns. For example, Berlin has been a center of feminist filmmaking. Eight films in the program are directed by women, including Helga Reidemeister's candid Who Says It's Fate! (1979).

Social problems specific to Berlin underlie Jeanine Meerapfel's Melek Leaves (1985), a film revealing the complex personality of a Turkish woman, one of Berlin's large population of foreign workers; Manfred Stelzer's Tales from Twelve and One Years (1985), a documentary examining the lives of former squatters who had occupied an abandoned hospital more than a decade before; and Christian Ziewer's Dear Mother, I Am Well (1971), a docudrama investigating conflicts between labor and management in a factory where a worker has organized his reluctant colleagues.

BERLINART: 20 FILMS includes a program of super-8mm works directed by filmmakers, painters, and performance artists. Berlin is one of the few cities where this format is widely used and exhibited. Among these artists is Michael Brintrup, who is also presenting several short films in the Museum's CINEPROBE series on Monday, June 22, at 6:30 p.m.

A symposium entitled "Berlin and Film," presented in cooperation with Goethe House New York, takes place on Thursday, June 26, at 8:30 p.m., in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Moderator is Laurence Kardish; panelists include Ulrich Gregor, Clara Burckner, Eric Rentschler, and Ingrid Scheib-Rothbart. Tickets are free with Museum admission. Those attending the 6:30 p.m. screening of The All-Round Reduced Personality--Redupers may remain in the theater for the symposium. Separate tickets for the symposium only are available at the information desk in the Museum lobby.

. BERLINART 1961-1987, on view from June 4 to September 8, is the first museum exhibition in the United States to present and assess Berlin's contribution to contemporary art. Fifty-five artists from ten countries are represented.

* * *

No. 53

For further press information or photographic materials, contact Howard Feinstein, film press representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752.