

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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MoMA TO HONOR LOUIS MALLE
WITH RETROSPECTIVE OF HIS FRENCH FILMS
OPENING APRIL 8

The Museum of Modern Art presents the first New York retrospective of Louis Malle's French features and documentaries as part of FRENCH FILM FESTIVAL 1988: "Perspectives on French Cinema." Opening April 8 and continuing through April 24, LOUIS MALLE TRIBUTE: FRENCH FILMS includes the celebrated director's French works, including the rarely seen original version of Viva Maria and the feature documentary, Calcutta. On April 22, at 6:00 p.m., Louis Malle will introduce the screening of a new print of Lacombe, Lucien, recently acquired, along with Murmur of the Heart, by the Department of Film.

The series opens Friday, April 8, at 2:30 p.m., with the 1956 thriller Ascenseur pour l'échafaud/Elevator to the Gallows, Malle's first solo feature, in which Jeanne Moreau stars as a rich woman plotting to murder her husband. At 6:00 p.m. that same day, the Museum presents Zazie dans le Métro (1960), a surrealist comedy about the whirlwind adventures of a precocious eleven-year-old visiting her peculiar uncle in Paris, played by Philippe Noiret.

Louis Malle was born in 1932, the fifth child of sugar heiress Francoise Beghin Malle and Pierre Malle, in Thumeries Nord, France, a small town near the Belgian border. His austere Catholic education culminated in studies at a Jesuit College in Fontainebleau during World War II. After graduation, Malle enrolled at the Sorbonne, eventually switching from political science, which his family preferred, to cinema studies.

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In 1956 Malle was selected as a cameraman for Jacques-Yves Cousteau to film underwater sequences for the documentary Le Monde de Silence/The Silent World. After an ear infection curtailed his diving, he joined Robert Bresson as assistant on Un Condamne a Mort s'est echappe/A Man Escaped (1956). Malle's first feature, a thriller, Elevator to the Gallows, also known as Frantic, was awarded by the French film critics the Prix Louis Delluc as the "Best French Film" of 1957.

In 1958, with Les Amants/The Lovers, in which Jeanne Moreau shocked audiences with her portrayal of an unfaithful wife, Malle accelerated his assault on the French bourgeoisie. The questioning of the complacent bourgeois marriage was to become a favorite theme of the French New Wave. Highly controversial, Les Amants was a major commercial success and established international reputations for Malle and Moreau.

Known for his versatility of subject matter, Malle followed Les Amants and Zazie dans le Metro with the Brigitte Bardot-Marcello Mastroianni film Vie privée/A Very Private Affair (1961), the poignant study of the rise of a Bardot-like film star. The somber, spare Le Feu Follet/The Fire Within, a film about the remaining days of an alcoholic playboy, followed in 1963 and won among other prizes a nomination for an Oscar that year for "Best Foreign Language Film." In this film Malle explored two of his almost constant themes--social isolation and personal alienation.

In 1964 Malle made a twenty-minute documentary on the "Tour de France," entitled Vive Le Tour. Rapidly switching subject matter, he then directed the Western parody Viva Maria (1965), starring two of the French cinema's leading ladies, Bardot and Moreau. Le Voleur/The Thief of Paris (1967), a period crime

drama with Jean-Paul Belmondo and Genevieve Bujold, faithfully recreated turn-of-the-century Paris.

"Tired of actors, studios, fiction, and Paris," Malle decided "to change everything at once." He embarked on a six-month sojourn to India resulting in the documentary Calcutta (1969) and a seven-part television series entitled L'Inde fantôme/Phantom India (1969), financed in part by the British Broadcasting Company. Though broadcast internationally to great acclaim, the series was resented by the Indian government because of what it considered Malle's excessive interest in India's poverty and overcrowding.

Malle returned to the direction of fiction films with the bittersweet Le Souffle au Coeur/Murmur of the Heart (1971), a sensitive treatment of an adolescent's coming of age. Switching back to the documentary format in 1973, he made a film about workers, Humain Trop Humain/Human, Too Human, shot without a word of dialogue in a Citroen factory.

Lacombe, Lucien (1974) raised the long-suppressed issue of French collaboration with the Nazis, and in the process raised a storm of controversy. Malle said about Lacombe, Lucien, "My films create trouble because I am trying to make people accept scandalous situations. That is, to admit ambiguity of character, to admit that one is capable of anything." The film earned him many international awards, including an Oscar nomination for "Best Foreign Language Film."

Malle's penultimate French film, the unorthodox Black Moon (1975), is spoken in part in English. Based on the principle of free association, this dreamlike film uses language as one sound among many. Malle's current film, Au Revoir les enfants/Goodbye Children (1987), a critical and popular success, and

nominated for an Academy Award for "Best Foreign Language Film," is playing in theaters across the United States.

The films of Louis Malle, whether French or American (including Pretty Baby, Atlantic City, My Dinner With Andre, Crackers, Alamo Bay, God's Country, and The Pursuit of Happiness) are thematically bold, stylistically adventuresome and socially provocative. His subject is the complex human animal whom he treats with passion and always in relationship to a community. The humor in his cinema derives from the ambiguities and ironies of behavior itself.

LOUIS MALLE TRIBUTE: FRENCH FILMS has been organized by Laurence Kardish and Adrienne Mancina, curators in the Department of Film. It is a regularly scheduled program of The Museum of Modern Art; tickets, included in the price of Museum admission, are available the day of the film at the information desk. Call 212/708-9490 for daily film listings.

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For further film press information, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750, or Jeffrey Wise, consultant, 212/460-8373.