

The Museum of Modern Art

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IMAGES IN THE SHADOWS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPANISH CINEMA

December 16, 1988 - January 23, 1989

The works of major film directors and movements within the Spanish cinema, from the silent era to the present, are surveyed in a five-week film series opening December 16 at The Museum of Modern Art. IMAGES IN THE SHADOWS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPANISH CINEMA includes more than thirty films from 1926 to 1985 with particular emphasis placed on works from the forties, fifties, and sixties. The exhibition was organized by Richard Peña for the Film Center of the School of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Despite longstanding public admiration for the work of Luis Buñuel and more recent interest in contemporary filmmakers such as Carlos Saura, Gutiérrez Aragón, and Pedro Almodóvar, the origins of Spanish cinema are not widely known. Richard Peña attributes this to Spain's virtual isolation from the rest of the world during the dictatorship of Generalissimo Francisco Franco (1939 - 1975). Peña also notes that the history of Spanish cinema, like much else in recent Spanish history, can be divided into the periods before, during, and after the reign of Franco.

A surge in nationalist sentiments brought on by the declaration of the Spanish Republic in 1931 produced pre-Franco era films which generally centered around lives of common, working citizens and presented an egalitarian country in which social harmony between races prevailed. Examples include Florián Rey's Clara The Brunette (1936), a story of a judge who eschews more advantageous matches in favor of a gypsy servant

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girl with whom he is in love, and Benito Perojo's Paloma Fair (1935), a story of the romance between a typesetter and a seamstress.

An examination of cinema under Franco reveals remarkable attempts by filmmakers to give expression to the national experience while coping with the realities of intense censorship. This period produced the first works of the "New Spanish Cinema," such as Francisco Reguero's The Good Love (1963), which quietly illustrates the ruinous effects of facism on sympathetic characters. Experimental works of the same period are represented by Lorenzo Llobet Gracia's subtle yet disturbing Life in Shadows (1947). More commonly, the types of filmmaking that flourished under Franco included fascist fantasies like José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's Race (1941). Based on a novel written by Franco using a pseudonym, Race relates the story of a patriotic man whose ancestry is populated by military heros. Nationalist epics such as Antonio Román's The Last Stand in the Philippines (1945), a successful historical film glorifying Spain's imperial past, were also produced during the Franco regime.

Since Franco's death Spanish cinema has been characterized by a diversity of styles and themes, as well as by the emergence of important regional filmmaking in Catalonia and the Basque country. Antoni Ribas's The Burnt City (1976) was made in the Catalan language--unthinkable under Franco--and became an enormous hit. Berta's Motives (1985), directed and written by José Luis Guerin, charts a girl's passage from childhood to adolescence and creates an atmosphere of dark mystery set in the silent countryside. Tasio (1984), written and directed by Montxo Armendaviz, is a warm, realistic chronicle of a man's life from childhood through middle-age.

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IMAGES IN THE SHADOWS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPANISH CINEMA was coordinated for the Museum by Adrienne Mancía, curator, Department of Film. The exhibition was made possible by the generous support of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, Iberia Airlines of Spain, and the Council on North American-Hispanic Cultural and Educational Cooperation.

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