

The Museum of Modern Art

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VITTORIO D: DE SICA BEHIND THE CAMERA AND ON THE SCREEN

October 4 - November 12, 1991

The first comprehensive film retrospective of the Italian director and actor Vittorio De Sica opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 4, 1991. The most versatile figure in the history of Italian cinema, De Sica was a star performer of remarkable charm and individuality who became a great director in the humanist tradition. Continuing through November 12, **VITTORIO D: DE SICA BEHIND THE CAMERA AND ON THE SCREEN** surveys both aspects of his extraordinary and prolific forty-year career.

The retrospective features all the well-known works of De Sica's directing career, including the neorealist classics *Shoeshine* (1946), *The Bicycle Thief* (1949), *Miracle in Milan* (1951), and *Umberto D* (1952). Also shown are many rare works such as *Il Boom* (1963), his scathing satire of Italian materialism featuring Alberto Sordi, and *The Children are Watching Us* (1943), the first of his insightful portraits of childhood.

As an actor, De Sica appears in films in three different languages, opposite such international stars as Anna Magnani (*Teresa Venerdì*, 1941, which he also directed, and *Peddlin' in Society*, 1946), Danielle Darrieux (*The Earrings of Madame De...*, 1953), Clark Gable (*It Started in Naples*, 1961), and Gina Lollobrigida (*Bread, Love, and Dreams*, 1953 and *Times Gone By*, 1952).

Also included in the series are numerous films De Sica made with Sophia Loren. He was her costar and director in *The Gold of Naples* (1954) and her director in *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (1963), *Marriage Italian Style*

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(1964), and *Two Women* (1960), for which Loren received the first Academy Award for best actress for a foreign-language performance.

De Sica was the preeminent Italian matinee idol in a host of sophisticated comedies throughout the 1930s. After the war he matured into a character star, alternately witty and pensive, in Max Ophuls's *The Earrings of Madame De...* and Roberto Rossellini's *General Della Rovere* (1960). His directorial career began in the early 1940s with a series of conventional romantic comedies, but the subsequent wartime *The Children are Watching Us* pointed the way towards the innovative approach of his postwar work. Together with the work of Rossellini, De Sica's films of the late 1940s and early 1950s defined Italian neorealism to a world of moviegoers.

Vittorio De Sica was born in 1901 in the small town of Sora, near Rome, but spent much of his childhood in Naples. His father, a bank employee of Bohemian bent, encouraged his son to pursue a theatrical career, and, by the early 1920s, the young De Sica began a long show-business apprenticeship touring Italy with various dramatic troupes. He became a star in the early 1930s, crooning and clowning in musical revues. Throughout that decade, he teamed frequently with Mario Camerini, the most prestigious Italian director of the era, in a series of lighthearted films, two of which are featured in this series. De Sica's closest artistic collaborator was screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, with whom he would work in close harmony from the early 1940s to his final film.

Despite the international acclaim the De Sica/Zavattini masterworks of neorealism received, they were scorned at home by right-wing politicians as defeatist works which gave a distorted picture of Italian life to audiences abroad. As the neorealist movement waned, De Sica began to make more

conventional entertainments. After an artistic slump in the 1960s, De Sica's directorial talents enjoyed a final flowering in his later years with *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970) and *A Brief Vacation* (1973). De Sica's international successes include many awards such as four Academy Awards for best foreign-language film for *Shoeshine*; *The Bicycle Thief*; *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*; and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*.

De Sica married twice, first to stage actress Giuditta Rissone, by whom he had a daughter Emi, then to his frequent costar, the Spanish-born actress Maria Mercader. They had two children, Manuel, a jazz musician and film composer who wrote the score for *Finzi-Continis*, and Christian, a popular comic actor and director. Vittorio De Sica died on November 13, 1974.

A catalogue accompanying the exhibition features essays by Stephen Harvey, associate curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and Gian Luigi Rondi, former director of the Venice Film Festival and a close personal associate of Vittorio De Sica.

VITTORIO D: DE SICA BEHIND THE CAMERA AND ON THE SCREEN was organized by Stephen Harvey with the collaboration of Manuel De Sica. The retrospective is a project of Cinecittà International, a division of the Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema, under the auspices of The Italian Ministry of Performing Arts. Support is also provided by the Giorgio Armani Corporation and the Italian Cultural Institute, New York.

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For further information or film stills, contact Barbara Marshall, Film Press Representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752.