

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## YIDDISH FILM BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

November 14, 1991 - January 12, 1992

The first major exhibition of Yiddish films made in Europe and the United States from the 1920s through the 1980s opens at The Museum of Modern Art on November 14, 1991. The films featured in **YIDDISH FILM BETWEEN TWO WORLDS** depict the concerns and values of Yiddish culture and preserve the nuances of the Yiddish language. The exhibition continues through January 12, 1992.

**YIDDISH FILM BETWEEN TWO WORLDS** includes melodramas, farces, tragedies, musical comedies, and documentaries that capture the talents of such international stars as Ida Kaminska, Solomon Mikhoels, Molly Picon, Ludwig Satz, and Maurice Schwartz, America's foremost Yiddish actor.

Chronicling the struggle for Jewish identity on both sides of the Atlantic, the exhibition features many classics of Yiddish cinema: *Yiddle with His Fiddle* (1936; starring Molly Picon) and *The Dybbuk* (1937), from Poland; *Jewish Luck* (1925) and *The Return of Nathan Becker* (1932), from the Soviet Union; *East and West* (1923), from Austria; and *Uncle Moses* (1932; starring Maurice Schwartz), *Tevye* (1939), and *God, Man, and Devil* (1950), from the United States. Several recent films, including *Brussels Transit* (1980), from Belgium, and *Everything's for You* (1989) and *Hester Street* (1975), from the United States, offer a glimpse of contemporary Yiddish-language drama.

While only a fragment of the once vibrant world of Yiddish theater and cinema survives, these films are invaluable for their representation of a

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popular culture that flourished in the period 1911 to 1948 in Poland, the Soviet Union, Austria, and the United States. This is a national cinema without a nation-state. Not just a language and a folk culture, Yiddish also evokes an entire Jewish world, a *Yidishland*.

The heart of the exhibition is the golden age of Yiddish cinema, films made from the 1920s through the 1940s that drew upon the established dramatic and literary tradition of Yiddish theater and literature. The films from this period address the dislocation between the old country and the New World, parent and child, and folk community and industrial society, as well as the conflict between tradition and modernity. In films such as *Uncle Moses*, ancient folkways are savored alongside emblems of Jewish progress, and images of successful assimilation compete with yearning for the simplicity of *shtetl* (small town) life.

The National Center for Jewish Film has preserved and restored for the exhibition more than twenty-five films from its Rutenberg and Everett Yiddish Film Library. Many films that have not been seen for decades, as well as some that have never been shown before in the United States, are presented in new prints with new English subtitles or intertitles. Unless otherwise noted, the silent films will have live piano accompaniment arranged and performed by Peter Sokolow and directed by Henry Sapoznik, curator, sound archives, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

A gallery exhibition of film-still enlargements and posters, on view in the lobby of the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, has been organized by Mary Corliss, assistant curator, Department of Film.

"Celebrating Yiddish," an evening of music, poetry, and performance, is presented on Monday, December 9, at 8:00 p.m.

In conjunction with the exhibition, two lectures are planned in cooperation with YIVO. On Saturday, January 4 at 5:00 p.m. Henry Sapoznik discusses the role of music in Yiddish cinema. On Sunday, January 12 at 5:00 p.m. Dr. David Roskies, a Yiddish scholar, discusses *The Dybbuk*, a film based on Sh. An-Sky's play.

After the New York showing, the exhibition will travel to Berkeley, Boston, Berlin, London, and Jerusalem, among other cities.

**YIDDISH FILM BETWEEN TWO WORLDS** was organized by Adrienne Mancia, curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art; Sharon Pucker Rivo, executive director, The National Center for Jewish Film, located at Brandeis University; and J. Hoberman, author and film critic, *The Village Voice*. The exhibition is supported by a grant from The Nathan Cummings Foundation. Funding for the accompanying publication was provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The gallery exhibition is made possible by the Rita J. and Stanley H. Kaplan Foundation in memory of Gladys and Saul Gwartzman.

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For further information or film stills, contact Barbara Marshall, film press representative, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9752.

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