

# The Museum of Modern Art

168  
For Immediate Release  
October 1995

## **STRICTLY OZ: A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN FILM**

October 27, 1995 - January 18, 1996

The first comprehensive retrospective of Australian film to be presented in the United States opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 27, 1995. Covering a period of almost ninety years and comprising one hundred films, **STRICTLY OZ: A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN FILM** traces the development of a distinctive national cinema that is wry and engaging. The "Oz" in the title of the exhibition is an affectionate colloquialism for (Oz)tralia as a distant and extraordinary place. Continuing through January 18, 1996, **STRICTLY OZ** focuses on works made on the continent by resident filmmakers whose works reflect the culture, concerns, mythologies, and the spirit of a nation.

The exhibition ranges from what may be the world's earliest feature, Charles Tait's *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), to such recent films as Stephan Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) and Chris Noonan's recent U.S. box-office hit, *Babe* (1995). Other highlights include Raymond Longford's *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), a benchmark classic of the silent era; Paulette McDonagh's *The Cheaters* (1930), the most suspenseful of the McDonagh sisters' films; and Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955), Australia's first color feature and the first fiction film in which Aboriginals were not played by white actors.

Early films by such notable filmmakers as Peter Weir (*The Cars that Ate Paris*, 1974), Bruce Beresford (*Money Movers*, 1979), Phillip Noyce (*Backroads*, 1977), and Fred Schepisi (*The Devil's Playground*, 1976) are included, as well

- more -

as first features by Jane Campion (*Sweetie*, 1989), Michael Thornhill (*Between Wars*, 1974), Ken Hannam (*Sunday Too Far Away*, 1975), and Don McLennan (*Mull*, 1989). Also shown are several Australian films yet to be introduced in the United States, such as Carl Schultz's detective story *Goodbye Paradise* (1983).

While primarily concentrating on feature-length fiction films, the exhibition also includes short works by such well-known filmmakers as Gillian Armstrong (*One Hundred a Day*, 1973, and *The Singer and the Dancer*, 1976), George Miller (*Violence in the Cinema...Part 1*, 1972), and P.J. Hogan (*Getting Wet*, 1989), as well as documentaries and avant-garde films.

The history of Australian cinema is almost as old as film itself and has experienced divergent production cycles varying from extreme productivity to almost complete drought. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the film industry quickly developed into a substantial homegrown entity with little influence from abroad. Although the first decade of the twentieth century was particularly rich, many films remain only in fragments. A steady flow of film production continued through the late teens and early twenties, distinguished by the masterful work of Raymond Longford (*The Sentimental Bloke*, 1919, and *On Our Selection*, 1921).

Film production was stalled by the Depression in the 1930s, World War II in the 1940s, and the influence of television in the 1950s. Notable exceptions to these lean times are Ken G. Hall's *Orphan of the Wilderness* (1936), Charles Chauvel's *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933) and *Sons of Matthew* (1949), and Cecil Holmes' *Three in One* (1957). In the early 1970s, prompted by federal support for film culture and by the desire of Australians for films that would define their national identity, film production experienced a renaissance that continues today.

Women directors emerged strongly in the 1980s, including the documentarian-turned-fiction-filmmaker Glenda Hambly, whose disturbing, social-realist film *Fran* (1985) is one of the strongest Australian works still unknown abroad. Noteworthy films of these times include Jackie McKimmie's *Australian Dream* (1987), a satire about a suburban mother frustrated by her husband's political aspirations, and Ann Turner's *Celia* (1989), a complex look at growing up in the Australian suburbs.

The output of films in the 1990s has been prolific and exciting, with extraordinary theatrical feature film debuts by Jocelyn Moorhouse (*Proof*, 1991), Ana Kokkinos (*Only the Brave*, 1994), Baz Luhrmann (*Strictly Ballroom*, 1992), Stephan Elliott (*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*), Chris Noonan (*Babe*), and others.

**STRICTLY OZ: A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN FILM** is organized by Laurence Kardish, Curator, Department of Film and Video, The Museum of Modern Art, in association with the Australian Film Commission. It is supported in part by the Embassy of Australia, Washington, D.C.; the Australian Consulate-General, New York; The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art; and the St. Moritz Hotel, New York.

After its New York showing, **STRICTLY OZ: A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN CINEMA** travels to The UCLA Film and Television Archive and The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (early 1996).

\* \* \*