

The Museum of Modern Art

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A COMPLETE RETROSPECTIVE OF THE FILMS OF JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

All of the Influential Director's Thirteen Feature Films
With a Special In-Person Appearance by Actress Nicole Stéphane

Melville: The French Connection
November 1-19, 1996
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters 1 & 2

Greatly revered by several generations of filmmakers, including Truffaut, Godard, Scorsese, and Tarantino, Jean-Pierre Melville remains one of the most influential postwar French film directors. Beginning November 1, The Museum of Modern Art presents a complete retrospective of Melville's thirteen feature films and single short work.

Melville: The French Connection includes a rare screening of Melville's first feature *Le Silence de la mer* (1947), starring Nicole Stéphane, who also appeared in the director's renowned second film, *Les Enfants terribles* (1949). Ms. Stéphane will speak before both films on Saturday, November 2. She will be introduced by writer Susan Sontag, with whom she has worked on recent film and video projects.

The series, which also includes a new 35mm print of *Le Samourai* (1967), starring Alain Delon, and *Jean-Pierre Melville: Portrait in 9 Poses* (1970), a French television documentary, concludes on November 19, following screenings of three American films that Melville adored: *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Robert Wise, 1959), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946), and *The Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston, 1950).

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A maverick writer, director, and producer, Melville was fascinated by those who lived on the edge, in the urban criminal demimonde. Looking himself like a French gangster, with his fondness for trenchcoats, sunglasses, and American cars, Melville created now-iconic underworld figures by brilliantly casting Alain Delon (*Le Samourai*; *Le Cercle rouge*, 1970; *Un Flic*, 1972), Jean-Paul Belmondo (*Le Doulos*, 1962; *L'Ainé des ferchaux*, 1962), and the less well known Lino Ventura (*Le Deuxième souffle*, 1966; *L'Armée des ombres*, 1969) as insolent, amoral killers and hoods.

An ardent admirer of American movies who evinced little interest in the French cinema of his time, Melville was a consummate outsider who lived in a cinematic world entirely of his own making. He built, and lived above, his own film studios (which twice burned to the ground), where he forged, in the words of critic David Thomson, "a Hustonian dream of tough, self-sufficient men in trench coats, fickle girls, and a maelstrom of treachery and heroic gestures."

Melville was a laconic romantic who created haunting tragedies of love and loyalty, betrayal and deceit. Though he is admired for his gangster films, he also made three striking literary adaptations from provocative novels of the time: *Le Silence de la mer*, an austere and powerful story of the Occupation; *Les Enfants terribles*, about which Truffaut said, "Cocteau's best novel has become Melville's best film;" and *Léon Morin, Prêtre* (1961), starring Belmondo and Emmanuele Riva, an ambiguous tale of spiritual redemption, again set against the backdrop of the Occupation.

Born Jean-Pierre Grumbach in Paris in 1917, Melville changed his name out of admiration for his favorite author, Herman Melville; a member of the French Resistance

during World War II, he was decorated under his adopted name. His independence, breadth of cinema knowledge, and taut, economical style greatly inspired the young directors of the French New Wave—in homage, Godard cast Melville in *Breathless* (1959), which will also screen in the series—and a generation of American filmmakers, notably Martin Scorsese and, more recently, Quentin Tarantino, who share a love for *Le Doulos*, in particular.

Born in 1928, Nicole Stéphane fought with the French Liberation Army from 1943 to 1946. After the war she enrolled in acting classes and made her film debut in Melville's first feature. Her role in *Les Enfants terribles* gave her cult status but, several films later, a car accident put an end to her acting career. Stéphane has since been a very successful producer of short films, including Susan Sontag's *Promised Lands* (1973). She also produced and directed Sontag's 1993 video *En Attendant Godot a Sarajevo*.

The Department of Film and Video is grateful to Cappa Productions for its support of *Melville: The French Connection*, which is presented in association with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in Los Angeles and New York. The new print of *Le Samourai* is courtesy of Artificial Eye, which will re-release the film in early February.

Melville: The French Connection was organized by Dennis Bartok, Programmer, the American Cinematheque, Los Angeles, and coordinated for the Museum of Modern Art by Adrienne Mancia, Curator, Department of Film and Video.

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For more information, please call Graham Leggat, Film and Video Press Representative, at 212/708-9752.

You are cordially invited to press screenings for

Melville: The French Connection

to be held Wednesday, October 16 and Thursday, October 17
at The Museum of Modern Art

Wednesday, October 16

10:30 *Le Silence de la mer (The Silence of the Sea)*. 1947. France. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. With Nicole Stéphane, Howard Vernon, Jean-Marie Robain. In French, English subtitles. 86 min.

A disturbing and poetic study of the Occupation, this film of interiors and silence stars Nicole Stéphane, who also plays in Melville's second feature film, *Les Enfants terribles*. Ms. Stéphane will be in New York to introduce both these films at their public screenings on November 2.

Thursday, October 17

10:00 *Le Doulos (The Finger Man)*. 1962. France. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. With Jean-Paul Belmondo, Serge Reggiani, Michel Piccoli. In French, English subtitles. Courtesy Interama, New York. 108 min.

This archetypal Melville *policier*, a tour of a stylized Paris demimonde, stars an insolent Belmondo as a professional snitch.

12:00 *Deux Hommes dans Manhattan (Two Men in Manhattan)*. 1958. France. Written and directed by Jean-Pierre Melville. With Melville, Pierre Grasset, Christiane Eudès. In French and English. 84 min.

A French journalist (Melville) and a photographer follow the trail of a missing diplomat who appears to have died in his mistress's apartment. The film was criticized for having no stars, no dramatic structure, and no suspense—but, says *Cahiers* critic Jean Domarchi, "If you tell me *Deux Hommes* is not cinema, I answer: No, it is not, it is poetry."

To RSVP, or for more information, please call Graham Leggat at 212/708-9752.