

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
October 1988

ANNA MAGNANI

October 28 - November 27, 1988

The first major American retrospective of the films of Italian actress Anna Magnani opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 28, 1988. During Magnani's singular career, which spanned four decades and numerous genres, the actress collaborated with such internationally acclaimed directors as Sidney Lumet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, and, Luchino Visconti. Continuing through November 27, ANNA MAGNANI includes a number of her early films which have never been shown in the United States. Others films have not been seen since they enjoyed brief art-house runs in the forties and fifties.

On October 28 at 6:00 p.m., Luca Magnani, son of the actress, and Gene Lerner, a close associate of many years, will open the series by introducing Luigi Zampa's earthy political comedy, The Honorable Angelina (1947).

The exhibition features over twenty films ranging from neo-realist melodrama and satirical comedy to sumptuous period pieces and adaptations of stage plays by Tennessee Williams and Jean Cocteau. Highlights include her landmark appearances in Rossellini's Open City (1945) and The Miracle (1948), Jean Renoir's wry tribute to commedia dell'arte, The Golden Coach (1952), and Pasolini's despairing fresco of contemporary working-class Rome, Mamma Roma (1962).

Rare films in the series include the comedy Tempo Massimo (1934), Magnani's second screen appearance; several escapist comedies made during World

-more-

War II, including Vittorio De Sica's Teresa Venerdi (1941); and a pair of films made at the end of Magnani's career for Italian television, La Sciantosa (1970) and 1870 (1971), costarring Marcello Mastroianni. Highlights of Magnani's American films include her Academy Award-winning performance in Daniel Mann's The Rose Tattoo (1955), written by Tennessee Williams; and George Cukor's Wild is the Wind (1957), for which the actress won an Academy nomination.

Born in 1908 in Rome, Anna Magnani was raised by her grandmother in modest circumstances. After contemplating a career as a pianist, she studied for two years at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome. Magnani began her career playing maids in a traveling Italian theater troupe. During the thirties, her theatrical roles gradually increased in stature as she alternated between serious drama and singing and clowning in satirical revues. It was in one of these plays that her fiery temperament aroused the attention of her future husband, film director Goffredo Alessandrini, who cast her in two of his films. While married, she continued to work on the stage and, later, despite her husband's doubts concerning her aptitude for the screen, occasionally made films. She and her husband were later separated.

In 1941 Magnani appeared in her first important film, Vittorio de Sica's Teresa Venerdi, which hinted at the satirical wit that had made her popular on the stage during the war. It was Rossellini's Open City (1945) and the birth of Italian neo-realism, however, that instantly made her a screen star in Italy and abroad. Her performance in Open City won her both the National Board of Review award as the best foreign actress of the year and the Venice Film Festival award for best actress. In 1947 Magnani was awarded Italy's Silver Ribbon for Rossellini's Love, a film in two segments (The Human Voice and The Miracle).

The seven years following Open City were the most prolific period in Magnani's career; she made over a dozen films. Through her strikingly instinctual approach to acting, fueled by a primal emotional force, the actress came to symbolize the national spirit of her homeland during the postwar years. Celebrated for her candor, spontaneity, and naturalism, Magnani became the first screen performer of her nation to achieve international stature.

The beginning of Magnani's popular decline in Italy paralleled her brief period of success in Hollywood during the mid fifties. Her last commercial success in her homeland was Visconti's Bellissima (1952). Magnani's emotionally taxing films were no longer popular with an audience who wanted to enjoy the prosperous fifties and forget the hard times of the post-war years. Nevertheless, such films as Mario Monicelli's Risate di gioia (1960) and Pasolini's Mamma Roma (1962) still showcased her volcanic talents. Before her death in 1973, Magnani had one more burst of acclaim through a series of four films created for Italian television.

ANNA MAGNANI was organized by Stephen Harvey, assistant curator, and Adrienne Mancina, curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with Patrizia Pistagnesi of the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte (Rome) and Gene Lerner. It has been supported by the Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema and the Ministero di Spettacolo e Turismo, with an additional contribution from the Italian Institute of Culture.

* * * *

No. 114

For further information or film stills, please contact Sarah Eaton, film press representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752.