

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR RELEASE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART SHOWS FILM OF 1936 OLYMPIC GAMES



The magnificently filmed Olympic Games of 1936 held in Berlin will be shown on the screen of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, the week beginning Monday August 25. Special interest is lent to the showing as the first Olympics to be held since Berlin will be next summer in London. The film, entitled Olympia, will be shown in two parts. Part I, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (August 25, 26, 27 and 28) at 3:00 and 5:30 daily and on Thursday night at 8:00. Part II Friday, Saturday and Sunday (August 29, 30 and 31) at 3:00 and 5:30 Friday and Saturday and at 1:30, 3:30 and 5:30 on Sunday.

Probably no sports event in the world has ever been so completely recorded by the motion picture camera--in this instance by scores of cameras filming the events in the most infinite and intricate detail and yet achieving a panoramic sweep. No spectator present in person at the 1936 Olympics could possibly have seen as much and as minutely as the battery of cameras brings to the audience viewing this film.

Iris Barry, Director of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, comments on Olympia as follows:

"To document the Olympic Games of 1936 in Berlin, Leni Riefenstahl and her corps of cameramen registered over a million feet of film, much of it in slow motion. From Leicas to huge telescopic cameras, every kind of apparatus was used, often concealed in pits, operated underwater, mounted on electrically propelled tracks, on travelling cranes, cars, boats, balloons. Out of that footage, this film was composed, issued in 1938 in two parts, prepared in four languages and in several versions.

"Beyond its beauty and interest as a sports record, Olympia perpetuates a singular refutation of Nazi racial theory; for Jesse Owens and not Hitler is inevitably the hero.

"Minor imperfections in the prints remain to testify to the considerable use made of them when on loan from the Museum to the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy during the War."

Perhaps the most moving part of the film, and one of the most beautiful, is its beginning when a young Greek, who might have stepped out of Homer, runs up the rocky slope of the Acropolis to the Parthenon to light his torch at the sacred fire. The movie camera records in dramatic light and shadow the start of his long journey as he runs with flaming torch over hills, through valleys and along the shores of the Aegean Sea. Here and there in the Greek countryside villagers stand by the road watching for him. The torch is passed from youth to youth through Europe and north to Berlin where at the hour of twelve the final torch bearer carries the flame into the vast stadium and lights the fire for the eleventh Olympics.

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It is almost a shock to the 1947 spectator--accustomed to so many years of military parades and manoeuvres on the screen--to see the marching youths in peacetime array: the phalanx of American men in white trousers, dark coats and straw hats, the girls in dark coats and white skirts and hats. It is a thrilling moment when the flags of the fifty-one nations rise above the huge amphitheatre packed with crowds of spectators from every part of the world.

As event after event flashes across the screen with young men and women from many different nations establishing new records, the spectator is filled with wonder at the stupidity of the human race in its wartime slaughter of its finest youth--a parallel to ancient Greece which fed its most perfect youths and maidens to the Minotaur. The thought completes itself with the knowledge that now Berlin lies in ruins more vast but far less noble than those of the ancient temples on the Acropolis. To the 1947 spectator of the film the question recurs: where are they now--wondering how many of those 1936 spectators as well as young contestants died in the war. One wonders where the winners of 1936 are and what they are doing today? Where is Jesse Owens, the young Negro from the United States whose name was chiseled on the stone walls of the Berlin stadium as the champion at the 1936 Olympics who won the 100 and 200 meters runs and the broad jump, breaking the Olympic record in the latter two events? And the three other American Negroes who also won for the United States: Archie Williams in the 400 meters run, John Woodruff in the 800 meters run, and Cornelius Johnson in the high jump? And the Japanese, Kitei Son, who won the Marathon? Handrick, German winner of the Military Pentathlon? The three Finns who placed first, second and third in the 10,000 meters run? Ferenc, the Hungarian winner of the 100 meters freestyle swim? Jack Medica, USA, who broke the Olympic record in the 400 meters freestyle swim? Lovelock, the New Zealander, winner of the 1500 meters run? The Dutch girl, Rita Mastenbroek, winner of the 100 and 400 meters freestyle swim for women? The two American girls, Marjorie Gestring and Dorothy Poynton-Hill, champion Olympic divers? The three American boys who placed first, second and third in the pole vault with Earl Meadows establishing the new Olympic championship record? Ken Carpenter, winning discus thrower? The eight-oar crew from the University of Washington who made a magnificent spurt in the last 100 yards to vanquish their Italian and German rivals? And Glenn Morris, most versatile athlete of them all, winner of the Decathlon with his two team-mates, Clark and Parker, placing second and third behind him?

Any of these champions or other winners in the 1936 Olympics whose names are not given here the Museum would be happy to welcome to showings of the film in which their brilliant achievements are recorded.