The American Action Movie, a program of popular westerns, thrillers and war films made from 1946 to 1964, selected by art critic, Lawrence Alloway, will be shown from April 25 to June 6 at The Museum of Modern Art. The series begins with the 1946 film version of Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers," directed by Robert Siodmak, with Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner; and ends with the 1964 adaptation of the same story made by Don Siegel, starring John Cassavetes and Angie Dickinson.

Other films in the program are "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955) from the novel by Mickey Spillane, with Ralph Meeker and Albert Dekker; "Pickup on South Street" (1953) with Richard Widmark; "The Big Heat" (1953) with Glenn Ford, Gloria Grahame, and Lee Marvin; and two Orson Welles thrillers, "Lady from Shanghai" (1948), starring Rita Hayworth and Welles; and "Touch of Evil" (1958) in which Welles appears with Marlene Dietrich, Akim Tamiroff, Janet Leigh and Charlton Heston.

This type of characteristic American movie, "at once over familiar and understudied," will be examined by Mr. Alloway in the program. It includes several Richard Widmark films to illustrate the importance of an actor's presence as distinct from his dramatic role, since Mr. Alloway recognizes the contribution of the actor's personality to the acceptance of popular films. He also emphasizes the role of the producer and the influences of such men as Hal Wallis, Aaron Rosenberg, and Albert Zugsmith, whose films have given evidence that they were attuned to contemporary popular taste.

Alloway contends that "sometimes the actor, sometimes the producer may be the decisive personality in a movie." He also points out that thematic preoccupations and conventions shape films regardless of the director's identity. His program is designed to expose characteristic cinema patterns in contrast to what Alloway labels "the compulsive expertise of director recognition."

Typical of a conventional genre is the motorcycle film, discussed by Alloway in his forthcoming book. The cycle was started by Marlon Brando in "The Wild One." Brando's
role derives from the melancholy ill-fated types played by Jean Gabin in the French films of the thirties. The heroes in the later films in this cycle, however, are more detached, and so reflect the temper of modern audiences who are indifferent to the origin of a contemporary and conventional idol.

Mr. Alloway contends that other media are "full of echoes of movies echoing the style, the stars and the content." Consequently his selection of American films of the past two decades "in extra-personal terms" is an attempt to single out what constitutes representative themes and conventions common to groups and cycles of films that have proven popular with American audiences. "Audiences understand these conventions," says Alloway, "Now, perhaps, critics can begin to."

The program follows:


(more)


(over)


Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 212-320-