

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## FIRST ROBERT ROSSEN RETROSPECTIVE 10 MAJOR FILMS COVERING 17 YEARS

The first Robert Rossen Film Retrospective will be presented July 17 through July 27, at The Museum of Modern Art. Organized by Adrienne Mancina, Assistant Curator, Department of Film, it includes the major works of the late writer, director and producer, made from 1947 to 1964. Among the ten films to be shown are his own favorites "All the King's Men," "Body and Soul," and "The Brave Bulls."

The retrospective, devoted to one of the first American film-makers to control his work from inception to final editing, will also coincide with the publication by the Museum of the book The Films of Robert Rossen by Alan Casty.\* The author is a teacher of film at U.C.L.A. as well as an English instructor, whose previous works include Mass Media and Mass Man and The Shape of Fiction. Mr. Casty will appear at the 8:00 p.m. screening of the opening film, "Johnny O'Clock," on July 17, to talk about the film-maker.

In his book Casty claims that the violence and emotional intensity of a Rossen film are part of an inner struggle and a search for identity. "Typically, Rossen's searcher is a young man--often rootless or socially dispossessed--with a certain natural inner force, someone who cannot fully identify or control this energy, this source of grace and power. Under the shaping pressures of a corrupt society, his elan turns aggressive, perverse, destructive."

Rossen himself was somewhat like the heroes of his films, comments Donald Richie, guest curator in the Department of Film, in the program notes accompanying the films. Richie points out that Rossen always saw identity as power. "You become powerful when you know what you can do and that predicates what you are." In fact, the hero of "The Brave Bulls," asked why he fights bulls, replies, "It's what I do. Without it, I am nothing." Similarly, Charlie Davis

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\*THE FILMS OF ROBERT ROSSEN. By Alan Casty. 62 pages; 40 illustrations. paperbound \$2.50. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed in the United States and Canada by New York Graphic Society Ltd.; in the United Kingdom by Trans Atlantic Book Service, Ltd.; and internationally by Feffer and Simons, Inc.

In "Body and Soul" had to become a boxing champion; Eddie Felston in "The Hustler," a pool shark; Willie Stark in "All the King's Men", a big-time politician; and Alexander the Great, a world conqueror.

The element common to many of his films and to the American way of life, said Rossen in 1962, was "the desire for success." He found that modern society tends to reduce the stature and dignity of the individual more and more, and to maintain his dignity the individual was pressed to get on top of that society.

"I try to make films that mean something for me," the director was quoted as saying, and all his films seem to stress the impact of the social environment upon character. "The Hustler" was about the obstacles encountered by Fast Eddie, its protagonist, who wanted to win, though his tragedy was that psychologically he was a loser. The drive of many Rossen characters ended in defeat, as he once admitted, "because they either had burned all their bridges behind or they had lost all their energy."

In the words of Willie Stark, "A man don't have to be Governor...I wanted it, but a man wants something so badly it gets mixed up inside." This picture, which earned for Rossen an Academy Award, was based on the Pulitzer prize winning novel by Robert Penn Warren, who acknowledged that the screen adaptation was "extraordinarily good," but, added "It's Bob's movie."

Born March 16, 1908, on New York's Lower East Side, Rossen grew up in a tough slum neighborhood where fighting was a defense. For a while he boxed professionally, but he developed an increasing interest in literature and history, and he claims that he became visually minded "by looking out of a tenement window at a life of which he wasn't part." A director, he defined, is a spectator.

Starting his career in dramatic workshops, including The Washington Square Players, Rossen directed Richard Maibaum's "The Tree" in 1931. The next year he directed John Wexley's "Steel," and then, being well-acquainted with pool rooms, he wrote "Corner Pocket." The latter, a precursor of "The Hustler," was never produced.

His play "The Body Beautiful," lasted only four performances on Broadway but led to his first Hollywood contract as a screen writer for Warner Brothers. His first important film was one of social criticism, "They Won't Forget," directed by Mervyn LeRoy. It was written by

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Rossen in collaboration with Aben Kandel.

The scripts that followed include "Dust Be My Destiny" with John Garfield, foreshadowing his later films; "The Roaring Twenties," starring James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart; "The Strange Love of Martha Ivers" and "A Walk in the Sun," considered <sup>not so much</sup> anti-war as "pro-humanity."

With "Johnny O'Clock" Rossen became a screen director. He wrote the script, and Dick Powell, the star, insisted that Rossen direct the picture. This was followed by "Body and Soul" and several other directorial stints until Rossen exercised his triple talent as writer, director and producer.

Surviving a bleak period in Hollywood history, when political ties were scrutinized by Washington and took precedence over creative activities, Rossen nonetheless left the stamp of his personality on American films by incorporating his own inner feelings into most of his work. Convinced as he was that man was shaped by society, that he craved identity, that identity and power were often synonymous, and so, too, was identity and love, he put his theories to a personal test in every picture he made. Every film served as a challenge to pursue newer and more forthright vision.

The schedule of the Rossen Retrospective follows:

All showings at 2:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.; an extra 8:00 p.m. showing Thursday\*

Saturday showings at 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

- \*July 17 "Johnny O'Clock," 1947. With Dick Powell, Evelyn Keyes, Lee J. Cobb, Nina Foch. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. 85 min.
- July 18 "Body and Soul," 1947. With John Garfield, Lilli Palmer. Courtesy of Brandon Films. 104 min.
- July 19 "All the King's Men," 1949. With Broderick Crawford, Joanne Dru, John Ireland, John Derek, Mercedes McCambridge. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. 109 min.
- July 20 "The Brave Bulls," 1951. With Mel Ferrer, Anthony Quinn. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. 108 min.
- July 21 "Alexander the Great," 1956. With Richard Burton, Fredric March, Claire Bloom, Danielle Darrieux, Stanley Baker. Courtesy of United Artists. 141 min.
- July 22 "They Came to Cordura," 1959. With Gary Cooper, Rita Hayworth, Van Heflin, Tab Hunter. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. 148 min.

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- \*July 24 "Mambo," 1954. With Silvana Mangano, Vittorio Gassman, Shelley Winters, Katherine Dunham. Courtesy of Avco-Embassy. 94 min.
- July 25 "Island in the Sun," 1957. With James Mason, Joan Fontaine, Dorothy Dandridge, Joan Collins, Harry Belafonte. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Seven Arts. 119 min.
- July 26 "Lilith," 1964. With Warren Beatty, Jean Seberg, Peter Fonda, Kim Hunter, Anne Meacham. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures. 96 min.
- July 27 "The Hustler," 1961. With Paul Newman, Jackie Gleason, Piper Laurie. Courtesy of Warner Bros./Seven Arts. 135 min.

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Additional information and stills 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. 956-7501, 7296.