

The Museum of Modern Art

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MUSEUM INTRODUCES NEW SWISS FILMS

In an endeavor to acquaint Americans with contemporary cinema in Switzerland which has attracted international attention at European film festivals, The Museum of Modern Art will introduce a series titled "New Swiss Films," starting December 19 and continuing until January 20th of next year. The films, produced since 1969, demonstrate not only artistic, thematic and technical advances, but, according to Adrienne Mancina, Associate Curator of the Department of Film, "they document the spirit as well as the new directions of Swiss filmmakers."

Two filmmakers, Georg Radanowicz and Yves Yersin, are arriving here from Switzerland to be honored at a luncheon the Museum is giving on this occasion. Both directors are represented in the show, Yersin by "The Last Home Lace-Makers," and Radanowicz with "Alfred R." Radanowicz is also president of the Association of Swiss Filmmakers which, together with the Swiss Consul General, Werner Sigg, the Swiss Embassy in Washington, the Pro Helvetia Foundation of Zurich, and the Swiss Film Center, are making this program possible.

Comprised of 38 pictures, the program was selected by Mrs. Mancina, and is the first comprehensive retrospective of Swiss films to be shown in this country. It will subsequently be presented at the American Film Institute Theatre in Washington, D.C., at the Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley, and at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal.

During the past five years, it was pointed out by Mrs. Mancina, Swiss films have been conspicuous at film festivals abroad. From this year's Mannheim Film Festival, the Variety correspondent noted that "the astonishing vitality of the recent production from Switzerland has prompted speculation that this small nation may become a major force in the cinema of western Europe." And from

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Cannes this year, Paul Barron reported in "Crawdaddy," that "the best films at Cannes were not limited to works by already credible directors. This year three unknown Swiss directors ... took the Festival by storm, announcing that there's a lot more than yodelling going on in the Alps."

Switzerland is a complex country in cinematic terms, a program note by Mrs. Mancina indicates. The films there are made in four languages. Some are in French; some in German; some in Italian; and still others in Swiss dialect. But regardless of the language, all of the films reflect this small nation's intricacies, and as one critic states, they contain the sense of exploration and discovery that gives the Swiss cinema its warmth and vitality.

Best known of the Swiss filmmakers is Alain Tanner, whose "La Salamandre" was a success in this country. It will be shown in the mini-festival together with two other films by Tanner: "Charles Dead or Alive?" and "The Middle of the World," which was just completed. Tanner is one of the co-founders of an independent production company in Geneva, Groupe 5, whose other members are presented in the present show. Included are Claude Goretta, who made "The Invitation," Michel Soutter, whose films are "James or Not," "The Surveyors," and "The Escapade," and Jean-Louis Roy, director of "Black Out." The films of these men were commented upon in the British publication Sight and Sound. Nigel Andrew refers to them as "quirky, astringent comedies of character," noting that "their deeper comic stings derive from a tension between social propriety and individual freedom that seems aimed at a more specific satire on Swiss character."

The German-speaking Swiss filmmakers express a concern with societal pressures and contradictions. These filmmakers, Mrs. Mancina indicates, have a sociological and analytical approach in an effort to understand present values, explode past myths, expose injustices, and express an appreciation of what is

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most admirable in Swiss culture and heritage.

Swiss filmmakers are also concerned with the Italian minority living in Switzerland. Italian language films mostly deal with the problems of the Italian workers in that country, as the titles indicate: "The Red Train," "Workers Yes, Humans No," "Workers' Marriage." Alvaro Bizzarri, himself a foreign worker born in Italy, made "The Seasonal Worker," to portray the situation of his countrymen in Switzerland.

A concern with social issues is not uncharacteristic of the Swiss filmmakers and can be found, for example, in "Swiss in the Spanish Civil War," a film by Richard Dindo, from which we learn that 600 Swiss participated in the International Brigade. An earlier social film that was known and acclaimed in this country, "The Last Chance" followed the isolation of World War II and dealt with the rehabilitation of war orphans.

Apart from its multi-lingual aspects, Switzerland has had many difficulties to overcome. It lacked a film tradition until the Swiss Film Library in Lausanne was formed in 1948. Then cinema societies developed and eventually independent filmmakers organized to exchange individual experiences, to arouse public response, and mostly to create a cinema image for the country, free of touristic cliches. As Freddy Buache, a Swiss historian indicates, there occurred "an unexpected phenomenon -- the birth of an original style conspicuous by its lack of stereotyped effects, its critical zest and its unusual poetry." The critical success of "La Salamandre" and other films convinced observers that Swiss films "were the result of deep-rooted consciousness and a hard struggle to finally give a voice on the screen to a country that had been mute."

The program of New Swiss Films (all films have English sub-titles) will follow under separate cover.

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