

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA: PORTUGAL'S MASTER FILMMAKER TO OPEN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART NOVEMBER 9

Acknowledged as the premiere filmmaker of his country, still active after more than half a century of directing, Manoel de Oliveira will visit The Museum of Modern Art on Friday, November 9, to introduce a complete retrospective of his films. The exhibition will run in the Museum's Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters through November 25.

Despite the stature of his work, de Oliveira has only recently gained an international reputation, beginning with a tribute at the 1976 Venice International Film Festival. New York audiences first learned of him in 1980, when his masterwork Doomed Love was shown in the NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS series. Many of the people in attendance that evening followed de Oliveira out of the theater and into the Museum's lobby to learn more about this "new" director, who was then past 70 years of age.

Born in Oporto in 1908, de Oliveira began shooting his first film, a lyrical documentary of life along the river of his hometown, in 1929. Douro, Faina Fluvial, now regarded as a classic avant-garde documentary, was released in 1931 with modest critical success; but de Oliveira did not make his first feature film until 1942. Indeed, he has succeeded in realizing only six features and fewer than a dozen short and mid-length films in the course of his career. According to Adrienne Mancina, Curator of Film Exhibitions at the Museum, "this brief filmography and uneven career must be seen in the light of the turbulence of his own country, as well as de Oliveira's economic difficulties, uncompromising nature, sensitivity, lack of interest in the commercial cinema, fierce independence, and the high standards he has set for himself. There have been many aborted projects in his long artistic life, but he has never lost his enthusiasm and commitment to the art of film." At present, he is filming Le soulier de satin, based on the play by Paul Claudel, and is interrupting his shooting in order to attend the retrospective at the Museum.

The films de Oliveira has succeeded in making are remarkable for the variety of styles they exhibit, for their aspiration toward a fusion of documentary and fiction, for de Oliveira's masterly technique not only as director but also as cameraman and editor, and most of all for what British critic John Gillett describes as their "probing analytical sense." Adrienne Mancina notes that de Oliveira has "sometimes been compared to Bresson--as well as to Pasolini and Dreyer--and like Bresson he not only documents the moment but also reveals its inner drama, clarifying for the spectator its

underlying emotional truth. His films are demanding but they are richly rewarding."

The feature films began with Aniki-Bóbó, a journey into the deceptively simple world of children, shot (in the manner of the neo-realist cinema that was then emerging in Italy) with a non-professional cast in realistic locations. Rite of Spring, which followed, is a poetic and disturbing recreation of the Passion, acted by a dedicated group of amateurs drawn from the town of Curalha. Over twenty years had elapsed between the two features; it would be almost another ten years before de Oliveira would complete his third feature film, but from that point on he would create an extraordinary tetralogy on the theme of frustrated love.

The first of the tetralogy, Past and Present, is a fast-paced and biting satire, a comedy of manners based on a play by Vincente Sanches; critics have compared it with Buñuel's work and with Renoir's Rules of the Game. Benilde, or the Virgin Mother, the story of a young girl who claims her pregnancy is due to divine intervention, deliberately avoids the frantic comings-and-goings of Past and Present. Instead, it uses static, long and mid-length shots to frame the complexities of the drama, much as the proscenium arch framed the source of the film, a play by José Régio. Doomed Love, de Oliveira's next work, is described by Mancia as "one of the great, original films of the modern cinema." Based on a 19th century novel by Camilo Castelo Branco, it is a Rome-and-Juliet tale of thwarted love, realized with astonishing style, innovative technique, and great beauty. Francisca, the last of de Oliveira's features, is a story of perverse passions in a love triangle, written by the contemporary Portuguese novelist Agustina Bessa Luis and based on a true story involving Castelo Branco, the author of Doomed Love.

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA was organized by Adrienne Mancia, Curator of Film Exhibitions, The Museum of Modern Art. The Department of Film wishes to thank Isabel Tamen and the Instituto Português de Cinema, João Bénard da Costa and the Cinemateca Portuguesa, and João Paes and the Embassy of Portugal in Washington, D.C., for their generous collaboration. Thanks are also due to the Film Center of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, INA (Paris), Trans World Films (Rome), Fabiano Canosa, John Gillett, Stephen Klain, and José Vieira Marques. Most of all, thanks to Manoel and Maria Isabel de Oliveira for their support of this retrospective.

For further information, the public may call (212) 708-9500.

COMPLETE SCHEDULE IS ATTACHED

October 1984

For further PRESS information, please contact Stuart Klawans, Film Press Representative,
The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019 (212) 708-9752.

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SCHEDULE

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA: PORTUGAL'S MASTER FILMMAKER

- Fri. 11/9 3:00 Three documentaries by de Oliveira: Douro, Faina Fluvial. 1931-34. 18 min./Famalicão. 1940. Commentary in Portuguese. 23 min./O Pintor E A Cidade (The Painter and the Town). 1956. 28 min.
- 6:30 Francisca. 1981. Manoel de Oliveira. With Teresa Meneses, Diogo Dória, Mario Barroso. In Portuguese, English subtitles. 166 min. Manoel de Oliveira will introduce the film.
- Sat. 11/10 2:30 Aniki-Bóbó. 1942. Manoel de Oliveira. With Nascimento Fernandes, Horácio Silva, Fernanda Matos, António Santos, António Morais Soares. In Portuguese, English subtitles. 102 min.
- 5:30 Three documentaries by de Oliveira: See 11/9 at 3:00.
- Sun. 11/11 2:30 Acto Da Primavera (Rite of Spring, a/k/a The Passion of Jesus). 1963. Manoel de Oliveira. With Nicolau da Silva, Ermelinda Pires, and the people of Curalha (Trás-os-Montes). In Portuguese, English subtitles. 94 min.
- 5:30 O Pão (Bread). 1959. Manoel de Oliveira. 58 min./A Caça (The Hunt). 1963. Manoel de Oliveira. 21 min. In Portuguese, English subtitles.
- Thu. 11/15 3:00 O Pão (Bread) and A Caça (The Hunt).
- 6:30 Aniki-Bóbó.
- Fri. 11/16 2:30 O Passado E O Presente (Past and Present). 1972. Manoel de Oliveira. With Maria de Saïset, Manuela de Freitas, Pedro Pinheiro, António Machado, Alberto Inacio, Barbara Vieira. In Portuguese, English subtitles. 115 min.
- 6:00 Acto da Primavera (Rite of Spring, a/k/a The Passion of Jesus).
- Sat. 11/17 2:00 O Passado E O Presente (Past and Present).
- 5:00 Benilde Ou A Virgem Mãe (Benilde, or The Virgin Mother). 1975. Manoel de Oliveira. With Maria Amélia Aranda, Jorge Rolla, Varela Silva, Glória de Matos. In Portuguese, English subtitles. 110 min.
- Sun. 11/18 2:00 Amor de Perdição (Doomed Love). 1978. Manoel de Oliveira. With António Sequeira Lopes, Cristina Hauser, Elsa Wallencamp, António Costa. In Portuguese, English subtitles. 260 min. plus intermission.

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Fri. 11/23 3:00 Nice à Propos de Jean Vigo. 1984. Manoel de Oliveira. In French. c. 58 min./Lisboa Cultural. 1984. Manoel de Oliveira. In Italian. c. 65 min.

6:30 Nice à Propos de Jean Vigo and Lisboa Cultural.

Sat. 11/24 2:30 Amor de Perdição (Doomed Love).

Sun. 11/25 2:30 Benilde Ou A Virgem Mãe (Benilde, or The Virgin Mother).

5:30 Francisca.

Screenings will be held in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, November 16-20.
Screenings in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2 November 9-13, 15, and 22-25.

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