

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
April 1990

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: THE EYES OF A POET

April 27 - May 29, 1990

A month-long retrospective of the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini opens at The Museum of Modern Art on Friday, April 27, 1990. As a filmmaker, poet, novelist, and political thinker, Pasolini was one of the most complex and influential forces in Italian cultural life from the fifties until his violent death in 1975. This tribute features all of his directorial work, including several unfamiliar documentaries and shorts, as well as films to which he contributed as screenwriter. Although many of Pasolini's films were shown in the United States, almost all are no longer in theatrical distribution. Continuing through May 29, PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: THE EYES OF A POET presents twenty-two films, most of them newly subtitled by William Weaver, the distinguished American writer and translator.

Pasolini, a passionate and prolific artist, embodied many of his era's central contradictions. A committed Marxist drawn to proletarian themes, his unflinching candor alienated many of his ideological allies and scandalized conventional society. As a filmmaker, Pasolini's works were inexorably tied to his politics, yet were drawn from sources as divergent as classic Greek drama, medieval literature, Arabian tales, and contemporary political and social issues.

Although Pasolini's films vary widely in content and style, they nonetheless reveal a coherent summation of the themes that engaged him. These include his excoriating portraits of the latter-day bourgeoisie in Pigsty (1969) and Teorema (1968); his rendition of classic fables and legends in The

- more -

Decameron (1970-71), Medea (1969-70), and Oedipus Rex (1967); and his vibrant, despairing visions of the Roman lower class in Accattone (1961) and Mamma Roma (1962).

Among the highlights is a program of four comic episodes featuring such performers as Orson Welles, Silvana Mangano, and Laura Betti, as well as two works virtually unknown in this country, The Earth Seen from the Moon (1967) and What are Clouds? (1968), made with the legendary comedian Totò.

Pasolini's experience as a journalist (he had his own newspaper column for a few years) is reflected in such rare films as Love Meetings (1963-64), Locations in Palestine (1964), Notes for an African Orestiad (1969-70), The Walls of Sana'a (1970-71), and The Anger (1963). Pasolini appeared in many of these films.

The program also features The Gospel According to St. Matthew (1964), a modern interpretation of the scriptures in which Pasolini cast his mother in the role of the Virgin Mary; his fable trilogy, The Decameron (1970-71), The Canterbury Tales (1972), and The Arabian Nights (1974); and his final feature, Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom (1975).

Born in Bologna in 1922, Pasolini began to write poetry when he was seven years old and was published at age nineteen while a student at the University of Bologna. In 1947 he became the secretary of the Communist Party at Casara, his hometown, and although he was later expelled from the party, he remained a Marxist throughout his life. In 1949 he was arrested for allegedly corrupting minors and subsequently was fired from his teaching job at Casara School. He moved to Rome with his mother and taught school briefly in a suburb of that city. By the mid-fifties Pasolini was an established novelist, essayist, and poet and began an active career as a screenwriter. He

collaborated on the scripts of such films as Fellini's The Nights of Cabiria (1956) and Mauro Bolognini's La Notte Brava (1959) and Il Bell'Antonio (1960). He made an immediate impact with his directorial debut, Accattone, which was based on his novel A Violent Life (Una Vita Violenta). Pasolini died in 1975, the victim of a homicide.

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: THE EYES OF A POET was organized by Adrienne Mancina, curator, and Stephen Harvey, associate curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, in collaboration with the Fondo Pier Paolo Pasolini. The New York showing is supported by grants from Giorgio Armani, The Italian Cultural Institute, the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo, the Regione Lazio, and The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art. Additional support was provided by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri and the Ente Autonomo Gestione Cinema.

A gallery exhibition of film-still enlargements relating to the work of Pasolini, on view in the lobby of the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1, was organized by Mary Corliss, assistant curator, Department of Film.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Pasolini's work is celebrated in an evening of poetry readings on Thursday, May 3, at 6:30 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Participants include Laura Betti, who starred in Pasolini's films, Norman MacAfee, a translator of Pasolini's poetry, the actress Jennifer Beals, and others. Tickets are \$8 for the public, \$7 for Museum members, and \$5 for students and are available at the lobby information desk.

* * *

No. 38

For further information or film stills, contact Sarah Eaton, Film Press Representative, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9750.