

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## **NAPOLETANA: IMAGES OF A CITY**

November 12, 1993 - January 27, 1994

The first comprehensive survey of Neapolitan cinema ever presented in the United States is on view at The Museum of Modern Art from November 12, 1993, through January 27, 1994. **NAPOLETANA: IMAGES OF A CITY** includes more than eighty films made from 1909 to 1992 in Naples and the surrounding region of Campania, an area whose landscape and reputation for romance and adventure have made it the second most filmed city in Italy. The films highlight the city's early role as a pioneer of Italian cinema and reveal the importance of site and local traditions in the formation of cinema culture.

**NAPOLETANA: IMAGES OF A CITY** features a number of films starring Sophia Loren, a native of Naples, and the great comedic actor Totò, as well as films by such well-known directors as Liliana Cavani, Vittorio De Sica, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Roberto Rossellini, and Lina Wertmüller, and recent films by young Neapolitan filmmakers. The director Francesco Rosi introduces his film *Hands Over the City* (1963), on Tuesday, December 14, at 6:00 p.m. Also included are works by foreign directors inspired by Naples, such as Frank Borzage's *Street Angel* (1928, starring Janet Gaynor) and Billy Wilder's *Avanti!* (1972, starring Jack Lemmon). A number of works, especially the silent films, which include a newly restored toned print of *Assunta Spina* (1915, Gustavo Serena), are shown for the first time in the United States. Also screened for the first time in the United States is the complete six-part version of *Gold of Naples* (1954, Vittorio De Sica). It features two additional episodes, "The Little Funeral,"

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which was not included the original release version, and "The Professor," which was not included in foreign releases.

A highlight of the series are the films of Elvira Notari (1875-1946), the first and most prolific woman writer and director in Italy. She and her husband, Nicola Notari, founded the Dora Film company and shot many films in the underbelly of Naples, taking advantage of the city's natural resources. Notari's films, successful both in Italy and among Italian immigrants in the United States, are particularly sensitive to women's conditions. Only a handful of the sixty features and 100-plus documentaries and shorts Notari made between 1906 and 1930 have been preserved. Two of these, *The Little Girl's Wrong* (1921) and *The Holy Night* (1922), which is seen here in its American premiere, are included in the series.

The silent films shown in the first week of the exhibition are accompanied by live music performed by Guido Sodo and François Laurent, who play mandolin and classical guitar and sing Neapolitan songs. Many of the sound films are subtitled by the "Softtiter" system -- synchronized subtitles displayed below the screen.

From the turn of the century until the end of the 1920s, Naples was alive with a cottage industry of filmmakers who turned out *sceneggiate* -- films that narrate popular songs -- and films starring theater divas. The arrival of sound and the implementation in 1931 of the first laws pertaining to the film industry resulted in the concentration of all film production in Rome. Nevertheless, the 1930s and 1940s brought a Neapolitan cinema that continued to bear the stamp of its origins, even though the most colorful aspects were censored by the fascists.

The postwar period saw a return to authentic Neapolitan cinema, with films about the moral degradation of an impoverished society, as well as popular romances and melodramas like those of the past. In the 1950s and 1960s, filmmakers turned to positive images of their city and its history, and foreign directors used the area for the Mediterranean atmosphere. Many recent films from Naples concern survival in a harsh urban environment.

After its New York showing, a large part of the exhibition travels to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

**NAPOLETANA: IMAGES OF A CITY** was organized by Adrienne Mancina, curator, Department of Film and Video, The Museum of Modern Art; and Adriano Aprà, Aldo Bernardini, Vittorio Martinelli, and Patrizia Pistagnesi, Incontri Internazionali D'Arte, Rome. The exhibition is a project of the Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and the Incontri Internazionali D'Arte with the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome. **NAPOLETANA** is sponsored by Giorgio Armani. The exhibition was made possible by grants from the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo -- Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, the Assessorato Turismo e Spettacolo della Regione Campania, and by the support of Cinecittà International. The Department is grateful to Alitalia and participating public and private archives.

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#### PUBLICATION

*Napoletana: Images of a City.* Essays by Adriano Aprà, Aldo Bernardini, Giuliana Bruno, Gianni Borgna, Goffredo Fofi, Mario Franco, Vittorio Martinelli, Mirco Melanco, and Patrizia Pistagnesi, among others. Translation by Jennifer Franchina. 300 pages. 150 illustrations. Published by Fabbri Editori. Available in The MoMA Book Store.