

IL CINEMA RITROVATO 2022: HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Carla Marcantonio

This summer, *Il Cinema Ritrovato* celebrated, perhaps for the first time since its inception, the rediscovery not only of old films but also of its audience. During 2020–21, the festival, organized every summer by the Cineteca di Bologna, ran in a hybrid format, with online and limited in-person attendance, but this year's edition marked the first time its audience of international cinephiles reassembled for a wholly in-person experience since the onset of the COVID pandemic. The mood was tangibly celebratory even though the pandemic has far from abated. As one of the cocurators, Cecilia Cenciarelli, noted in her greeting at the festival's opening:

We are happy to have you, the humans, not the assets, not the contents, not the talents, but the people, the artists, the friends, the archivists, all those who work with us, and we are finding you [the audience] again. You are never to be taken for granted.

The excitement of being “back” in the theaters was also accompanied by a new format with seats reserved online. I was worried that movement through the festival would feel much less fluid, but overall the reservation system was a relief: no need to arrive in advance to stand in line, and plenty of spaces held for last-minute entries or anyone who wanted to just wait in line.

The festival's official opening touted a “surprise” that began with a screening of *Éruption volcanique à la Martinique* (1902), a Georges Méliès film considered lost until a tinted, nitrate copy was found by the Filmoteca de Catalunya in 2007 and restored. The film is a reconstruction, with miniature models, of the Mount Pelée eruption of 1902, which destroyed the town of Saint-Pierre, Martinique. With the ephemeral beauty of its tinted images and model

reconstructions, Méliès's film was a hardly subtle metaphor for the state of the world after two and a half years of a pandemic and with a war raging in Ukraine.

The reminder of war and the threat of escalation was amply evident in the festival's selections, starting with Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), which opened the screenings at Bologna's Piazza Maggiore during the aptly titled segment that serves as a festival warm-up, “Verso/ Toward *Il Cinema Ritrovato*.” This warm-up also included Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1970). The world-wide crescendo of right-wing populism was thus tangibly reflected on the piazza's large-scale screen, its rediscovered films seemingly crying out the well-worn warning that history repeats itself.

Curators Gian Luca Farinelli (also the festival's director), Mariann Lewinsky, Cecilia Cenciarelli, and Ehsan Khoshbakht opened the festival with the requisite invitation to the public to come into contact with the past—this time, with an emphasis on the quasi-spiritual dimension of this endeavor, which Lewinsky described as ritualistic in its yearly occurrence and unthinkable without its physical connection to this place. Film, they noted, brings the audience into close contact with the dead—always a risky proposition. The festival also remembered its founders, Gian Paolo Testa and Vittorio Guarini, who were missing from the opening for the first time, having just recently passed away.

The small gem that closed the inauguration program was billed as a film from “a nation that no longer exists.”¹ It was a nineteen-minute Yugoslavian (now Macedonian) film, *Bunt na kučkite* (*The Rebellion of the Dolls*, Dimitrie Osmani, 1957), that was nothing short of delightful. A story of war and play told through children's eyes, it is mostly composed of dream sequences featuring ingeniously designed camera tricks and a menacing group of dancing dolls to showcase the uprising of conscience against the spirit of cruelty.

Bunt na kučkite was included in “‘Tell the Truth!’ A View into Yugoslav Cinema (1954–1969),” where another standout was the Serbo-Croatian film *Tri* (*Three*, Aleksandar Petrović, 1965), which generated much word of

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mouth. A landmark of the New Yugoslavian Film movement, it is considered an essential introduction to the work of Petrović. With its triptych of loosely related stories set during three different stages of World War II, bolstered by stunning cinematographic compositions.

Much in the same spirit, Ettore Scola's sublime *Una giornata particolare* (*A Special Day*, 1977) was screened as an alternate introduction to the festival. A quiet and subtle film, set classically over the course of a day, it bears witness to the unlikely friendship that blossoms between two neighbors: a gay liberal radio broadcaster waiting to be taken away for internment and a conservative housewife and mother, who meet on the day that Hitler visits Mussolini in Rome in 1938. Their unlikely friendship foregrounds human connection over the Fascist reality that is kept off-screen. Scola's film foreshadowed the festival's focus on Sophia Loren, "Forever Sophia," which included films where her tangible on-screen chemistry with Marcello Mastroianni was on display—stardom, Italian style. It wasn't all doom and gloom in Bologna! After all, Il Cinema Ritrovato calls itself a "cinophile's heaven."

One of the Loren–Mastroianni collaborations that was also one of the most pleasant discoveries at the festival was Alessandro Blasetti's *Peccato che sia una canaglia* (*Too Bad She's Bad*, 1954), which definitively marks Italian cinema's transition away from neorealism. Not Sophia Loren's

debut, it was the first film written specifically for her—an act of casting that apparently met producer Carlo Ponti's skepticism regarding whether the young actress could carry a movie; in fact, he would marry her three years later, and together they would forge one of cinema's longest-lasting partnerships. *Canaglia* ("scoundrel") became her first star vehicle. This masterpiece of comedic timing placed her, for the first time, alongside the eminently watchable Mastroianni and the (surprising) comedic talent of Vittorio De Sica, who plays her swindling, sweet-talking father.

De Sica is better known, of course, as one of the key directors of the neorealist period, and his *Sciuscìà* (*Shoeshine*, 1946) was one of the restorations featured in the festival's "Rediscovered and Restored" program. De Sica also directed (with Ponti producing) Loren and Mastroianni in *Ieri, oggi, domani* (*Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, 1963). And it was De Sica, again, who directed Loren in what became her international debut, the devastating *La ciociara* (*Two Women*, 1960), in a role that garnered her an Oscar for Best Actress, one of only two ever awarded for an actor's performance in a non-English-language film. And with the Cineteca di Bologna overseeing the restoration of his entire body of work, De Sica will be visible again.

Sophia's beauty was always deemed exotic, even for Italy, and she often was cast in roles that underlined that. In the only Western George Cukor ever directed, *Heller in*



Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren in *Peccato che sia una canaglia/Too Bad She's Bad*.

Pink Tights (1960), he seemed as enamored of multicolored fabrics and the ability that one woman (Loren—even donning a blond wig) possesses to outsmart all the men as he was of the landscape and tropes of the Western or the group of traveling actors led by Tom Healy (Anthony Quinn). In *Arabesque* (1966), Stanley Donen’s slightly tongue-in-cheek thriller, Loren plays an Arab woman. To make the best of shooting Loren—and her fabulous outfits—both films were shot in Technicolor. Loren’s mythic beauty was amply on display—where it best belongs, on the large-scale cinema screen—but so was her acting range, a nice reminder that she has been more than an icon or a superstar.

Career retrospectives of both a male and a female actor are a mainstay of the festival. This year, Peter Lorre was Loren’s counterpart—an odd pairing, perhaps, but less so if one considers that a certain exoticism, foreignness, distinct otherness was attached to both actors and how they were cast throughout their careers. Lorre is known for his off-beat persona: the queerly coded Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) is perhaps the role for which he is best known. The retrospective of his films revealed an actor whose interpretative talents also covered a broad spectrum, from the sweet to the menacing to the lunatic. Lorre possessed a notable skill for careening toward hysteria at the drop of a pin, but he’s also capable of conveying a palpable sweetness and vulnerability. Apparently, Chaplin himself once referred to Lorre as “the greatest living actor.”²²

Lorre’s retrospective, “Stranger in a Strange Land,” was aptly titled. Unlike Loren’s, his work in the United States was a result of necessity, as he was a German émigré of Austro-Hungarian origin and Jewish descent who left Germany when Hitler came to power. Two standouts at the festival, beyond the restored *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931), which screened at the piazza in 35 mm, were two Hollywood B films. One was the campy horror film *The Beast with Five Fingers* (Robert Florey, 1946); the other, a film that showcased Lorre’s notable range and fine abilities as a leading man, was *The Face behind the Mask* (Robert Florey, 1941), a tragic noir romance about a naive émigré turned criminal mastermind. He may have been known for the “small” roles he played, but he worked with A-list directors such as Lang, Hitchcock, von Sternberg, and Huston. The festival even showed his single directorial effort, *Der Verlorene* (*The Lost Man*, 1951), made after his return to West Germany, but I unfortunately missed it.

Sophia Loren wasn’t the only woman in the line-up. In other sections, the festival screened films by Sara Gómez (*Iré a Santiago*, 1964), Tuija-Maija Niskanen (*Auskedet* [*The Farewell*], 1982), and Lotte Reiniger (*Aschenputtel*

[*Cinderella*], 1922–23; *Dornröschen* [*Sleeping Beauty*], 1922; *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, 1954; and *Puss in Boots*, 1954). The 16 mm portion of the festival dedicated an entire program to experimental women filmmakers from German-speaking countries (1960s–2000s) from an archive at the University of Paderborn. Most notably, the festival premiered two restored films—*Korotkie vstrechi* (*Brief Encounters*, 1967) and *Dolgie provody* (*The Long Farewell*, 1971)—by the great postwar director Kira Muratova, who is receiving much well-earned attention of late outside of Eastern Europe.

The Long Farewell was banned, and her films are still largely unseen in the countries of the former USSR. She nonetheless went on to become a prolific director and is one of the most celebrated figures of Russian-language cinema. *Brief Encounters*, her first film, also banned in Russia for twenty years, demonstrates elements of her aesthetically rigorous, realist-lyrical style that would become her signature. It stars Vladimir Vysotsky and also showcases his music, which functions as a kind of voice-over. Two women meet because they are both in love with the character he plays: one is a government employee, a local district committee leader (Valya, played by Muratova herself), and the other is a young woman from the countryside who takes a job as her maid. The film is focused less on romance or conflict than on the women’s mundane daily activities, their marked solitude, and their daydreams. Her elliptical narrative style plunges the audience into its strange universe, breaking entirely with the aesthetic expectations of Soviet realism in favor of a thinly veiled critique of state institutions and their ineffectiveness.

It is always difficult to call out highlights or discoveries in the context of a festival that provides so many of them—and



Peter Lorre in *The Face Behind the Mask*.

when it is impossible to see many of its thirty-five to forty screenings per day, with a total of close to four hundred films, silent shorts included. Still, two standouts this year that exemplify much of what makes Il Cinema Ritrovato a place of encounter with history were *Smog* (Franco Rossi, 1962) and *Ludwig* (Luchino Visconti, 1973).

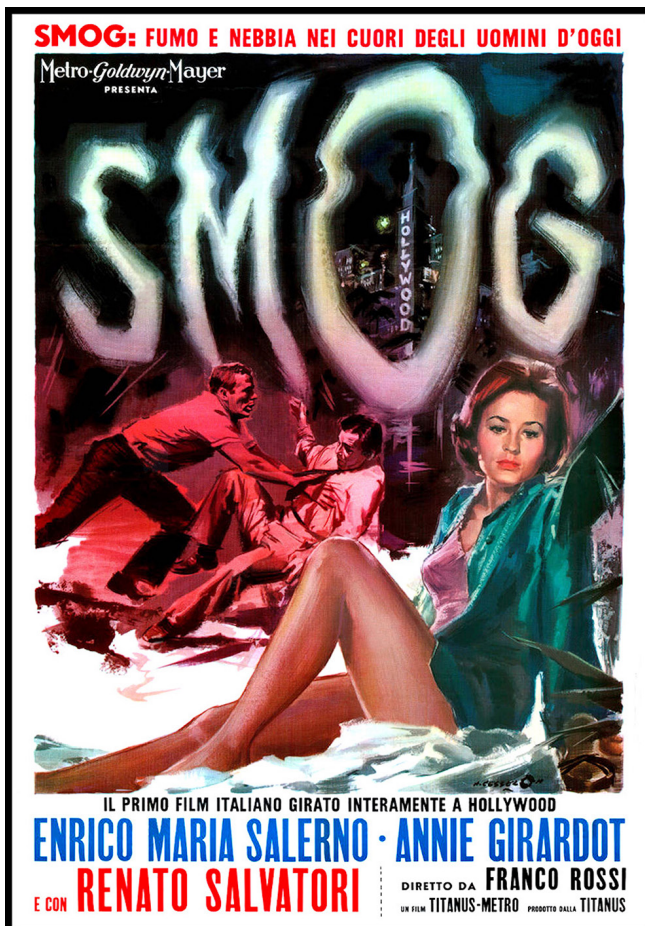
Smog is a film not screened since its debut at the Venice Film Festival in 1962. In essence forgotten, it was the first Italian film shot in Los Angeles, the first to be shot entirely in the United States, and the first film to employ the famous Stahl House as its setting. *Smog* stars Enrico Maria Salerno alongside Annie Girardot and Renato Salvatori—and is as much a document of European attitudes toward American culture as it is of 1960s LA.

Running at 238 minutes, Visconti's opulent *Ludwig* and the story of its restoration tell epics in and of themselves. *Gorgeous*, *lavish*, and *luxurious* are all redundant adjectives that are necessary to underscore the visual grandeur—enhanced by a pristine restoration—of the film's cinematography, mise-en-scène, and narrative scope. It is a sprawling story, told in four parts, of the tormented Bavarian prince

Ludwig II, who preferred art to governing, forged a friendship with the composer Richard Wagner, and ended up building exuberantly expensive castles (one of which he dedicated to Wagner). Ludwig was an aesthete who rejected reality for illusion and beauty; he lived an eccentric and solitary existence, was declared insane, and ultimately met a mysterious death. The film stars Helmut Berger and Romy Schneider (reprising the role of Elisabeth of Austria for which she was already known), with a soundtrack of the unpublished original piano composition by Wagner *Elegy in A-flat Major*, his final work for piano.

The story behind the restoration of the most ambitious chapter in Visconti's "German trilogy" was shared with the audience at a "cinema talk" by Silvia and Caterina D'Amico, the daughters of Suso Cecchi D'Amico, who are director-producer-writers in their own right. They recounted the story of the superhuman efforts that the eighty-three-year-old Visconti went through to make the film, suffering a stroke shortly after the conclusion of the film's shoot that left half of his body paralyzed, then editing, dubbing, and assembling the final cut of the film alongside some collaborators while convalescing at his sister's home, where a Moviola had been installed for him. Distributors refused to pick up the four-hour film. Those who finally did distribute it "mutilated" it, in different ways in different countries, with most censoring its homosexual content to such an extent that abbreviated two- to three-hour versions of the film were screened in 1973.

The film failed terribly. Its producer, Ugo Santalucia, went bankrupt, the film negatives and its distribution rights were confiscated by the banks, and after Luchino Visconti died three years later, the film entered a permanent limbo. Until 1978, when Suso Cecchi D'Amico took notice of an auction, announced in the newspaper, for the rights to the film. Caterina D'Amico summoned former collaborators of Visconti's to battle. Through ingenuity and perseverance, they finally obtained the rights to a film no one expected would once again be picked up for distribution; nonetheless, they reassembled the 238-minute version that had been intended by Visconti—an effort that took three years to accomplish. Caterina saw to it that the film was distributed on television in episodic format (thus its current four-part structure) and—here condensing the many twists and turns of a story itself worth its own movie—the film now returns to screens in a brand-new, 4K restoration undertaken by Studio Canal, the Cinémathèque française, and the Cineteca di Bologna. These are the encounters with cinema, its makers, its history, and its passionate followers that make this festival so unique.



Poster for the Italian film *Smog*, shot in Los Angeles.

A relatively new section of the festival, “Great Small Gauges: Super8, 9.5 mm, 16 mm,” celebrated the centenary of the 9.5 mm Pathé-Baby—which made possible the invention of home cinema. The screening I attended included a short film, *Visages d’enfants* (Jacques Feyder, 1924), and home movies capturing Bolognese life of the 1930s–60s immortalized on celluloid.

The 9.5 mm screenings were a first for the festival, as was the return to the lineup of venues of Cinema Europa, the theater where Il Cinema Ritrovato began in 1986, before Cinema Lumière was established. “Pratello Pop,” a reference to the theater’s location near the popular restaurant and pub-lined Via del Pratello, was dedicated to the more eccentric of the restorations, those that were colorful both visually and thematically. In total, the festival screened seventy-three restorations, thirty-two of them silent (including shorts). Cinema Europa was home to late-night screenings of cult films such as *Invaders from Mars* (William Cameron Menzies, 1953) and *Pink Flamingos* (1972, John Waters).

The festival’s grandest venue is Piazza Maggiore with its outdoor screenings, showing chosen restorations and archival projects on its large-scale screen to massive audiences (with an average of three to five thousand spectators at every show). Tribute screenings there included *Written on the Wind* (Douglas Sirk, 1956), *Singing in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), *The Blues Brothers—Extended Version* (John Landis, 1980), and *The Beatles: Get Back* (Peter Jackson, 2021). Music and spectacle are united at the piazza every year, with the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna performing original scores composed and conducted by Timothy Brock. This year, two films celebrated their centenary. Erich von Stroheim’s *Foolish Wives* (1922) was once publicized for having the first budget to surpass a figure of 1 million dollars. F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, 1922) showed in a breathtaking restoration culled from a nitrate print, with scenes and extensive intertitles that even most cinephiles had never before seen.

Piazzetta Pasolini, while not as grand as Piazza Maggiore, is the heart of the festival. Its more intimate outdoor screenings boast a vintage carbon-arc light projector (affectionately called “*la nonna*,” the grandmother), which lights up the screen for three nights and accompanies the films it projects with an industrial melody all its own (along with a live musical accompaniment). The throwback to the silent era of cinema is never more complete than on these nights. Two of the highlights this year were the centenary screening of Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) and “The Best of 1902,” a program that

boasted Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) in a restoration, transferred to 35 mm, that made one feel that one was watching this iconic film for the first time (and without the annoying voice-over that accompanies so many of the available DVD versions).

Ever so sublime was a restoration of *Ménilmontant* (Dimitri Kirsanoff, 1926), a film I had not seen in decades and that mesmerized once again in its mix of narrative and poetry, as embodied in Nadia Sibirskaja’s harrowing performance. *All That Money Can Buy* (aka *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, William Dieterle, 1936), which some have called Dieterle’s American *Faust*, is a tale—of an American farmer who sells his soul to the devil (a man resembling Uncle Sam, played by Walter Huston) in order to become rich—that was quite strange and premonitory. The “Cinemalibero” program screened iconic Latin American films, each brutal in its depiction of violence and the fall of the innocent, such as *Dios e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*, Glauber Rocha, 1964) and *Canoa: Memoria de un hecho vergonzoso* (*Canoa: A Shameful Memory*, Felipe Cazals, 1976). The program also included films from Algeria and Iran, as well as films by Djibril Diop Mambéty, among other gems.

Black God, White Devil is a film that impressed Pier Paolo Pasolini with its depiction of the desperation and hunger of the people of Brazil’s *sertão*, which it placed at the center of the film’s narrative and used as the motor behind its radical aesthetic choices. The festival also celebrated the centenary of Pasolini’s birth (in Bologna in 1922) with an ambitious exhibit, “Folgorazioni Figurative” (Figurative Lightning Strikes), aimed at celebrating his life and work. Pasolini was not just a filmmaker but an intellectual and activist who employed a myriad of artistic and expressive forms: he was a film director, but also a poet, novelist, journalist, and actor. The exhibit explores the dialogue between celebrated works of art history and Pasolini’s cinematographic work—chronologically from *Accattone* (1961) to *Salò* (1975).

As one of its “surprises,” the festival included a never-before-screened, restored, four-minute movie from Agnès Varda’s personal archive: an interview with Pasolini as they both stroll around New York’s 42nd Street in 1967 (with images of Pasolini on-screen, Varda and Pasolini both in voice-off). In the short film, Varda prompts Pasolini to reflect on cinema’s relationship to reality and fiction. Unearthed from the personal archive of one of cinema’s legendary directors, it brims with nostalgia for a once culturally vibrant New York whose same streets have now been replaced by the very bastions of capitalism that Pasolini would have found abhorrent.

These images and these directors' voices were a throw-back to an era where cinema, in a quest to renew its own language, embraced the vision of directors such as Varda and Pasolini, who spoke from a gendered and sexual "otherness." Under the gaze of these directors, the female-gendered and the homosexual body took on a material form that they never quite had on celluloid before this moment. Pasolini himself was viciously murdered—in part for his communist ideology and in part for his "aberrant" sexual orientation. In his lifetime, Pasolini railed against Fascism and fascisms of all types—which most likely cost him his life. As with Varda, his commitment to cinema was an avenue through which the personal took the mantle of the political.

An ominous sense of warning extended beyond the fine Piazza Maggiore projections. Indeed, the festival's opening remarks underlined historical events occurring on distant shores: alongside the war in Ukraine was the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, a decision that was issued the day before the festival began. In her opening remarks, Cenciarelli acknowledged history at a crossroads as she noted: "[*Il Cinema Ritrovato*] is about freedom; cinephilia is about freedom. I can't help but mention that today is a dark day because the US Supreme Court has repealed the right for women to have an abortion." She went on to note

that "the films [that have been programmed for] this year seem more daring and brave and willing to bend the rules" than those made today. Like a medium leading a séance, she also allowed herself the power of prophetic hyperbole: "If everyone in the Supreme Court were a cinephile; if they were all exposed to the three hundred and seventy some films that you [the audience] are going to see at this year's festival, I am sure there would never have been a repeal to [a woman's] fundamental rights."³ While this has been true of cinema in the past, this is indeed a moment to wish that an art form may call forth its public's better selves and carry one and all toward more inclusive and just futures.

Notes

- 1 Cecilia Cenciarelli and Gian Luca Farinelli, Ehsan Khoshbakht, and Marianne Lewinsky, "A Guide to *Il Cinema Ritrovato* 2022," *Il Cinema Ritrovato XXXVI* (Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2022), festival catalog, 10.
- 2 Alexander Horwath, "A Stranger in a Strange Land," *Il Cinema Ritrovato XXXVI* (Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2022), festival catalog, 283.
- 3 Transcribed with the aid of the introduction's recording on YouTube; remarks abridged for clarity. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaUhNtzyxHE.