

Cinema of Desire: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk



Kinoteka at BFI Southbank, 1 - 29 May

May 2014 sees **BFI Southbank** join forces once again with the **12th Kinoteka Polish Film Festival**. This year the film focus turns to **Walerian Borowczyk** – most infamous for *The Beast* (*La Bête*, 1975) - in the first major UK retrospective of the director's feature films and shorts in a season titled **Cinema of Desire: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk**.

Additional events include an illustrated talk from writer **Kuba Mikurda** and illustrator **Kuba Woynarowski** in the **BFI Reuben Library** and a Poster Design Masterclass with **Tomasz Opasinski** for budding graphic designers and illustrators. The **ICA** will host the first exhibition of Borowczyk's artwork, along with some film shorts, then **Arrow Films** will release the restored prints of most of his films in a DVD box set: *Camera Obscura: The Walerian Borowczyk Collection*.

Walerian Borowczyk (1923 – 2006) trained as a painter and sculptor at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts, before establishing himself first as a poster artist in the 1950s and later as an animator and filmmaker. He relocated to France in 1959, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life, and produced a succession of startling, often comic short films, leading to his first feature films: *The Theatre of Mr & Mrs Kabal* (*Théâtre de Monsieur & Madame Kabal*, 1967) *Goto, Island of Love* (*Goto, l'île d'amour*, 1968). The latter starred his wife and muse, **Ligia Branice** as the wife of a bloodthirsty dictator. This film was banned in both Communist Poland and Spain, but, elsewhere, it inspired a generation of artists including Terry Gilliam, The Quay Brothers and Angela Carter.

Courting controversy even further, he followed with the medieval drama about a young, beautiful woman married to a senile baron played by **Michel Simon**, in *Blanche* (1971), and then the sexually explicit satire *Immoral Tales* (*Contes immoraux*, 1974) which caused a box office sensation in France, but spent most of the 70s embroiled in censorship battles around the world. Borowczyk depicted fantasy, eroticism and sexually voyeuristic stories that became more pronounced with the relaxation of censorship and challenged taboos. The intriguingly titled *A Story of Sin* (*Dzieje grzechu*, 1975) cast a critical eye on the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, thus adding to the filmmaker's infamy and reputation as an agent provocateur.

While some of his critics saw Borowczyk as a maker of 'sex films', he denied this, and his supporters viewed him as one of the finest filmmakers to emerge from behind the Iron Curtain. Yet his depictions of sex on screen certainly defy conventions. In *The Margin* (*Le Marge*, 1976), an uptight salesman (**Joe Dellasandro**) succumbs to the demands of an alluring prostitute (**Sylvia Kristel**) against a seedy Parisienne backdrop. But when consigned to the underground circles of cinema in the early 80s, he created a masterpiece of surrealist cinema with *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne* (*Le Cas étrange de Dr Jekyll et Miss Osbourne*, 1981).

The legacy and unique perspective of Walerian Borowczyk will be discussed in a special forum on 18 May, when his colleagues will meet with academics and season curator Daniel Bird. Through this programme and the Kinoteka celebrations we will exemplify why he was a filmmaker ahead of his time and why now is high time to re-evaluate this remarkable artist's major contribution to cinema.

Presented as part of the 12th Kinoteka Polish Film Festival, and in conjunction with the ICA exhibition 'Walerian Borowczyk: The Listening Eye' 20 May - 29 June kinoteka.org.uk

THE 12TH
POLISH
FILM
FESTIVAL

KINOTEKA

ICA

- ENDS -

BFI SOUTHBANK EVENT & SCREENING PROGRAMME:

The Theatre of Mr & Mrs Kabal *Théâtre de Monsieur & Madame Kabal*

France 1967. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. 73min. Digital restoration. EST. 15

Bizarre, grotesque and yet strangely moving, Borowczyk's existential soap opera eschews dialogue (for the most part) and conventional narrative to evoke the highs and lows of married life. Set in a barren wasteland thinly populated by exotic flora and fauna, Borowczyk's only animated feature (rendered in sparse, coarse and mainly monochrome graphics) serves as a stiff antidote to Disney's saccharine whimsy. Plus **Joachim's Dictionary** (France 1965. 9min) Joachim offers audio-visual definitions of 26 words.

Fri 16 May 20:45 NFT2, Sun 18 May 18:15 NFT2

Goto, Island of Love *Goto, l'île d'amour*

France 1968. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Guy Saint-Jean, Ligia Branice. 89min Digital restoration EST 15

A petty thief works his way up the absurd hierarchy of Goto, an archipelago cut off from civilisation by a tumultuous earthquake. His dream is to possess Glossia, a stifled beauty trapped in a loveless marriage to a melancholic dictator. Originally banned in Communist Poland and Franco's Spain, *Goto, Island of Love* features bizarre sights, poetic flashes of colour and the stunning deployment of Handel's organ concertos.

+ Angels' Games *Les Jeux des anges*

France 1964. 12min. Digital restoration. EST

A brutal, chilling and frequently sensual evocation of concentration camp horror.

Thu 1 May 18:20 NFT1 Introduced by Ian Christie, **Tue 20 May 20:40 NFT2**

Blanche

France 1971 Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Ligia Branice, Michel Simon 92min Digital restoration EST PG

Ligia Branice gives a heart-rending performances as Blanche, the young, beautiful wife of a senile baron, played by the legendary actor Michel Simon. When an amorous king pays a visit, not only does he fall under Blanche's spell, but also that of his page, the infamous philanderer Monsieur Bartolomeo... Resembling a medieval fresco, *Blanche* features stunning ancient musical arrangements drawn from the 'Carmina Burana' song book. Plus **Rosalie** (France 1966. 15min. EST) A servant girl confesses to smothering and burying her offspring.

Thu 13 May 18:30 NFT1, Thu 22 May 20:30 NFT3

Immoral Tales *Contes immoraux*

France 1974. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Fabrice Luchini, Charlotte Alexandra, Paloma Picasso, Florence Bellamy 103min. Digital. EST. PG

A veritable cavalcade of depravity, *Immoral Tales* comprises four historic episodes, and features cosmic fellatio, transcendental masturbation, blood-drenched lesbianism and papal incest. A box office smash in France, the film spent much of the 70s embroiled in censorship problems around the world. Plus *A Private Collection* (France 1973. 12min. EST) Borowczyk guides us through a collection of antiquated erotic paraphernalia.

Wed 14 May 20:45 NFT1, Fri 23 May 20:40 NFT3

The Story of Sin *Dzieje grzechu*

Poland 1975. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Grazyna Dlugolecka, Jerzy Zelnik, Olgierd Lukaszewicz. 134min. EST. 15

Grazyna Długolecka plays Ewa, the doomed heroine whose passion for a married anthropology student takes her on a perilous journey across early 20th-century Europe. Casting a critical eye on the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, *The Story of Sin* counts as Borowczyk's most passionate film – a delirious melodrama that reaches an ecstatic pitch. Plus *The Phonograph* (France 1969. 6min. EST) An old phonograph assembles itself and plays songs on wax drums before self-destructing.

Sun 11 May 18:00 NFT1, Mon 26 May 20:20 NFT3

The Beast *La Bête*

France 1975. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Sirpa Lane, Lisbeth Humel, Guy Trejan, Marcel Dalio. 94min. Digital. EST. 18

Bestial dreams interrupt the venal plans of a French aristocrat attempting to save a crumbling mansion by marrying off his deformed son to a horny American heiress. *The Beast* draws on the legends surrounding the Beast of Gévaudan, Prosper Mérimée's novella 'Lokis' and Freud's patient the 'Wolf Man', and is an erotic, black farce hell-bent on trampling every pretence of 'good taste'. Plus *Venus on the Half Shell* (France 1975. 5min. EST) A spritely parade of erotic snail drawings set to Romanian flutes.

Wed 7 May 20:45 NFT1, Tue 27 May 20:40 NFT1

The Margin *La Marge*

France 1976. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Sylvia Kristel, Joe Dallesandro. 95min. EST. 18

An uptight salesman loses himself in the arms of an ethereal prostitute, in a headlong rush towards the end of the night... Featuring the best performance of Sylvia Kristel (the Emmanuelle girl) as well as a stoic turn by Warhol favourite Joe Dallesandro, Borowczyk's most atypical film rivals *Taxi Driver* in terms of rendering urban life as a seedy inferno. An eclectic soundtrack features '10cc', Chopin, Elton John and 'Pink Floyd'. Plus *Diptych* (France 1967. 8min) Two film 'panels', antithetical in form and style, combine to make a unified whole.

Sat 3 May 21:00 NFT2, Thu 29 May 18:10 NFT2 Introduced by David Thompson

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne *Miss Osbourne (A.K.A Dr Jekyll et les femmes)*

France 1981. Dir Walerian Borowczyk. With Udo Kier, Marina Pierro, Patrick Magee, Howard Vernon. 95min. EST. 18

Taking its cue from the legend that Stevenson's cocaine-fuelled first draft of 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' was burned by his prudish American wife on account of its sexual excess, Borowczyk sets up a chamber piece spanning just one night as Henry Jekyll plunges into a bath of chemicals and emerges as the monstrously-endowed Mr Hyde. A masterpiece of surrealist cinema, Borowczyk mischievously flits between violent farce, bloody delirium and erotic frenzy.

+ Scherzo Infernal

France 1984. Walerian Borowczyk. 5min

The chance encounter between a rebel devil and a nubile angel.

Mon 12 May 20:45 NFT2, Thu 29 May 20:30 NFT3

Borowczyk: A Forum

Borowczyk's unique, provocative work and diverse, puzzling career gives the curious mind much to chew over, and offers innumerable points of conversation (and heated debate!). With a mixture of short presentations, in-depth discussions and screenings, the afternoon endeavours to consider a variety of angles from which we can look at Borowczyk, and will include contributions from season curator Daniel Bird, writer Michael Brooke, and academics Ewa Mazierska and Jonathan Owen. We're also delighted to welcome Cherry Potter and Peter Graham, both of whom knew and worked with Borowczyk.

Sun 18 May 14:00 – 17:00 NFT3

Eyetraps and Fetishes: On Borowczyk's Objects

We welcome writer Kuba Mikurda and illustrator Kuba Woynarowski to the BFI Reuben Library to give a richly-illustrated presentation that draws on their arresting visual essay on Borowczyk, *Corpus Delecti*, as well as their forthcoming film, from which they'll preview clips. Using ideas from psychoanalysis, surrealism and alchemical writings, they will explore how objects in Borowczyk's work constantly escape their utilitarian and narrative functions to become characters in their own rights – providing a fascinating and unique insight into our Borowczyk season.

Tickets £6.50 Mon 19 May 18:30 BFI Reuben Library

Bob Godfrey and Walerian Borowczyk

Although working in very different spheres, Bob Godfrey and Walerian Borowczyk displayed similar levels of dynamic, vibrant energy for many different styles of shooting and animating material in the 1950s and 60s. They tore up and re-wrote the filmmaking rulebook of those that went before, and fused live action, pixilation and stop-frame animation with bawdy wit, sharing similar obsessions with death, destruction and sex. In this programme we explore the rhythms and connections between the two sardonic artists as manifest in their early work – before they pursued very different careers – and present digital restorations of Borowczyk's *Les Astronautes* (1959) and *Renaissance* (1963), and a whole series of Godfrey's very early absurdist, explosive, non-linear shorts. It's a very different world to his *Roobarb and Custard* and *Henry's Cat*.

Tue 27 May 18:20 NFT2 Introduced by BFI National Archive curators, William Fowler and Jez Stewart

Poster Design Masterclass with Tomasz Opasinski

This masterclass (comprising two sessions) gives young graphic designers and illustrators the opportunity learn from highly successful (LA-based, Polish-born) designer Tomasz Opasinski. Coinciding with Kinoteka Polish Film Festival and Cinema of Desire: The Films of Walerian Borowczyk, the sessions will focus on developing artwork for Borowczyk's challenging, unclassifiable and often controversial films. Find out how a designer can contribute to our understanding and perception of cinema.

See bfi.org.uk for more details on how to apply for a place

Sun 11 May 15:30 Blue Room, Tue 13 May 17:00 Blue Room

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The 12th KINOTEKA Polish Film Festival takes place from 24th April – 30th May 2014
2. Further details www.kinoteka.org.uk. Contact Margaret for details of the press launch on 20 March
3. KINOTEKA is presented by Polish Cultural Institute in London www.PolishCulture.org.uk MyFerryLink www.myferrylink.com Polish Film Institute www.pisf.pl/en and the National Film Archive www.fn.org.pl
4. Twitter #Kinoteka2014 #Borowczyk2014

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- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £11.00, concs £8.50 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / May 2014 / Valerian Borowczyk