

RED DESERT **(IL DESERTO ROSSO)**

Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni
with Monica Vitti, Richard Harris, Carlo Chionetti

Italy-France 1964 | 117 mins | Cert 12A

A BFI release

www.bfi.org.uk/releases

Release date: 27 July 2012

Opening venues: BFI Southbank, Curzon Soho, Irish Film Institute, Dublin plus selected cinemas nationwide

To mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of the great Michelangelo Antonioni (1912 - 2007), **Red Desert** will be released by the BFI on 27 July in a beautifully restored version. Celebrated as a visionary work and as an influential landmark in modern cinema, **Red Desert** is a powerful expression of ecological anxiety about industrial pollution and waste. It also explores the effect of industrialisation on human psychology. Antonioni's ninth feature, his first in colour, and the last he was to make with his collaborator and lover Monica Vitti, was awarded the Golden Lion at the 1964 Venice Film Festival.

Monica Vitti stars as Giuliana, a deeply troubled young mother who is struggling to adjust to modern life. Her husband Ugo (played by the non-professional Carlo Chionetti) is an engineer and seems disconnected from his anxious wife. They live in a satellite town of the industrialised north and have a young son Valerio (Valerio Bartoleschi). Giuliana has already tried to kill herself. Plagued by nameless, inexplicable fears, she cannot bear to be alone and seeks refuge in an adulterous affair with her husband's colleague Corrado Zeller (played by Richard Harris whose visceral performance in *This Sporting Life* had brought him to the attention of the film's producer).

The film is set in northern Italy, an area which had recently experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, thanks in part to the discovery of natural gas in the Po delta. This was a region that Antonioni knew well, and in an interview published in *Humanité dimanche* (23.9.64) he said: "I always thought of **Red Desert** in colour. The idea for it came to me as I was going through the countryside around Ravenna. I was born in Ferrara, which is about seven kilometres from Ravenna, and for a long time I went there many times a year for different reasons, but especially to take part in tennis tournaments. Since then, Ravenna has become the second port of Italy, after Genoa. The violent transformation of the countryside around the city has had a strong effect on me. Before, there were immense groves of pine trees, very beautiful, which today are completely dead. Soon even the few that have survived will die and give way to factories, artificial waterways, and docks. This is a reflection of what is happening in the rest of the world. It seemed to be the ideal background for the story I had in mind - naturally, a story in colour."

Red Desert has been acclaimed as one of the great colour films. Working with cinematographer Carlo Di Palma and art director Piero Poletto, Antonioni had surfaces specially painted - trees, grass, whole streets and fields - to represent precise emotional states. Shots were also taken out of focus to create abstract patches of colour. Antonioni's use of sound was no less striking: the noises of factories and docks were electronically processed and combined with Vittorio Gelmetti's electronic score to heighten the discordant atmosphere. In this BFI restoration, based on the original 35mm film negative, **Red Desert** is revealed anew in all its eerie, apocalyptic beauty.

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Notes to editors:

Red Desert is on release in UK cinemas from 27 July, and plays at BFI Southbank and Curzon Soho plus selected cinemas nationwide.

To coincide with the film's cinema release, **Red Desert** will also be available to watch at home and on the go via Curzon on Demand. www.CurzonOnDemand.com

Antonioni: Centenary Essays, edited by Laura Rascaroli and John David Rhodes is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

<http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=417546>

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- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

***** PICTURE DESK ALERT *****

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