

Press Release



Claude Lanzmann to Present *Le dernier des injustes* in Berlin

To honour Claude Lanzmann as a great artist and intellectual for his never-ending productivity and intense commemorative work, the Berlinale and Deutsche Kinemathek are showing his most recent film, *The Last of the Unjust* (*Le dernier des injustes*, France/Austria 2013, OV with English subtitles) in cooperation with the Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art. Claude Lanzmann will personally present the German premiere of his film at the Arsenal Cinema in Berlin on November 24, 2013 at 2 pm.

“Claude Lanzmann is one of the greatest documentarians. His latest film shows that his portrayal of inhumanity and violence, anti-Semitism and its consequences has taken on still another perspective,” says Berlinale Director Dieter Kosslick.

Born in Paris in 1925, Claude Lanzmann fought in the Resistance, studied philosophy in France and Germany, and was a lecturer at the newly established Free University of Berlin in 1948/49. He was also an active supporter of the Algerian independence movement in the early 1960s. His exploration of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and political struggles for freedom are topics that pervade both his cinematic and journalistic work. Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985) made film history as an epochal masterpiece of commemorative culture.

In February of this year, the Berlinale honoured Claude Lanzmann with an *Homage* and the Honorary Golden Bear for his lifetime achievement. The award ceremony was one of the most moving moments in the history of the festival. When expressing his thanks, the director stated: “I knew that *Shoah* would be a liberating film for the Germans.”

Lanzmann’s *Le dernier des injustes* focuses on Benjamin Murmelstein and his fate as the last “Elder of the Jews”, as the Nazis called the president of the Jewish Council at Theresienstadt, the concentration camp in the city of Terezín. The film also provides insight into the genesis of *Shoah*. In 1975, Claude Lanzmann had already interviewed Benjamin Murmelstein in Rome. While researching for his film *Shoah*, they had talked for eleven hours. Ultimately, Murmelstein - who was considered a controversial figure because of his position at Theresienstadt - was not included in Lanzmann’s monumental work on the genocide of European Jews. The filmmaker later gave the material to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington for storage.

**64. Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
06. – 16.02.2014**

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Now, some forty years later, Claude Lanzmann has returned to his interviews with Marmelstein. He has done so because, in his eyes, the other depictions of the “Elders of Jews”, even those based on his own interviews with Marmelstein have been both inadequate and unjust. In the film, Lanzmann visits the places that play a central role in the interviews, in part a very difficult and depressing journey. The director also augments Marmelstein’s statements with excerpts from files, following his accounts and reconstructing the horrific dilemma of this “last of the unjust” who had to carry out Nazi orders and, as their puppet, try “to pull the strings himself”. For Lanzmann, Marmelstein was the “exact opposite of a collaborator” and his film attempts to give a just picture of him.

“The fascination of Benjamin Marmelstein as an extraordinary personality forms the basis of this film that counters simple, quick judgments with detailed research. It is a study of the profound depths and extremely limited possibilities of this man who was turned into a functionary against his will,” remarks Rainer Rother, Artistic Director of the Deutsche Kinemathek, about the film.

Press Office
October 18, 2013