

## Press Release



### Forum 2015: Special Screenings

The *Forum* completes its programme with a series of special screenings dedicated to historical films and re-discoveries as well as new films that grapple with cinema and film history.

The 1973 gangster film *Joe Bullet* was South African producer Tonie van der Merwe's attempt to conquer a new market. Inspired in equal measure by the black pop culture of the time and the American Blaxploitation genre, Louis de Witt's action-packed film about a manipulated cup final was one of the first to be shot with an all-black cast. *Joe Bullet* offered its audiences a vision of life that did not correspond to the reality of most black South Africans under Apartheid. Although the film was not overtly political, it was swiftly banned and not screened for an extended period of time. Now this unique work has been restored and can be shown once again.

Until the end of the Apartheid era, state funding was granted to numerous so-called B-Scheme films, which were shot by mainly white producers for black audiences. *Umbango (The Feud, 1986)*, directed by Tonie van der Merwe, is one of the few Westerns still in existence from this period, a typical Wild West story about the battle between good and evil. With the exception of one solitary gringo (who is shot dead at the very beginning), this hugely entertaining film was also shot with an entirely black cast. Director and producer Tonie van der Merwe will be our guest in Berlin for the screening of his films.

Japanese director Kon Ichikawa (1915-2008) made more than 80 films over the course of his lengthy career, the last of which in 2006 at the age of 90. He never achieved widespread popularity outside Japan, mainly due to the fact that his cinematic oeuvre was pretty much impossible to categorise. Personal projects alternated with contract work of all different genres, with Ichikawa himself dividing his films into "light" and "dark". What makes him truly unique is the ironic view he takes of Japanese post-war society. Tormented characters are frequently at the heart of his films and are increasingly driven to take extreme action. The *Forum* is showing recently restored prints of three of Kon Ichikawa's films from the late 50s to the early 60s. *Enjo (Conflagration, 1958)*, which is based on a novel by Yukio Mishima, tells of how a novice at a Kyoto monastery despairs at the priests' double standards. *Ototo (Her Brother, 1960)* makes sophisticated use of colour to give dramatic shape to this portrait of a young woman at risk of being crushed by her dysfunctional family. Commonly regarded as a classic, *Yukinojo henge (An Actor's Revenge, 1963)* is a revenge drama set in the Kabuki milieu in which Ichikawa plays around with illusion and reality, weaving them together into a delirious widescreen work full of vivid colours.

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1940s and 1950s film noir is considered the most American of genres. What is less well known however, is that the same phenomenon took hold in neighbouring Mexico as far back as the early 40s. Alejandro Galindo's *Cuatro contra el mundo* (*Four Against the World*) is regarded as the prototype for Mexican film noir and can now be discovered in a newly restored version. The film tells the story of group of gangsters forced to hide out in the attic flat of the girlfriend of one of their number following a hijack on a money transporter that ends violently. The burgeoning liaison between the femme fatale and the most cold-hearted and unapproachable of the crooks ultimately breaks with film noir convention and moves towards the realm of the melodrama.

The Arsenal cinema's comprehensive "Asynchronous. Documentary and Experimental Films on the Holocaust" project is dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army. Two of the works digitised and to be screened as part of the project are also being shown at the *Berlinale Forum*. One rediscovery is *Ha'makah ha'shmonim ve'ahat* (*The 81st Blow*), a shorter version of which was already shown at the 1977 *Forum*. The documentary consists of archival images and sound recordings of witness statements given during the Eichmann trial in 1961. Composer Joseph Marchaim and Meir Russo from the Jerusalem Cinematheque will be our guests at the screening. *Me'kivun ha'yaar* (*Out of the Forest*) by Limor Pinhasov Ben Yosef and Yaron Kaftori Ben Yosef was shown at the *Forum* in 2004. The film reconstructs the events surrounding a series of mass shootings carried out in a forest in Lithuania, which took the lives of more than 100,000 largely Jewish victims between 1941 and 1944.

Leo Hurwitz's committed 1948 documentary *Strange Victory* has lost none of its topicality today. What did the victory over Hitler mean for the social harmony of US society? America may have won the war, but "in the country of the victors, the ideas of the defeated are still in fashion". A collage of documentary materials, newsreel footage, and re-enacted scenes, the film establishes that anti-Semitism and racism have very much survived in post-war America. Stickers saying "Save America - Don't Buy from Jews", signs stating "For Whites Only" and images showing the victims of ritual murders committed by the Ku Klux Klan are brought into correspondence with footage of Nazi rallies and concentration camp inmates. This seldom shown work put its director on Hollywood's black list; after an original negative of the film was found, it is now ripe for rediscovery.

The *Forum* programme is rounded with two films that explore the reception of film and film history and the passion for cinema. What are films and the cinema capable of accomplishing in the best case? There's



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no one able to give a wiser answer to this complex question than Naum Kleiman. The Russian film historian and head of the legendary Eisenstein archive used to be the head of the “Musey Kino” in Moscow, which was closed in 2005. *Cinema: A Public Affair* by Tatiana Brandrup reconstructs the events leading up to Kleiman’s scandalous dismissal in summer 2014. “Cinema has the ability to turn people into citizens.” Only a few film excerpts are needed to grasp that Naum Kleiman’s understanding of cinema in today’s Russia can hardly be surpassed in terms of force and topicality.

A film continues even after the final credits have rolled - when people talk about it and discuss it. German film critic Michael Althen, who died in May 2011, knew exactly how to get this sort of passionate dialogue with cinema going in the most beautiful manner with the texts he wrote. Art and fairground, documentary and fantasy, everyday life and ecstasy - it was these contrasts that drew Michael Althen into the cinema. *Was heißt hier Ende? Der Filmkritiker Michael Althen (Then is It the End? The Film Critic Michael Althen)*, Dominik Graf’s tender portrait of his friend, gets its message across with hardly any film clips. Recollections of Althen’s articles and quotations are more than enough to put images in motion in the mind’s eye.

The 2015 *Forum* Special Screenings:

*Cinema: A Public Affair* by Tatiana Brandrup, Germany - WP  
*Cuatro contra el mundo (Four Against the World)* by Alejandro Galindo, Mexico  
*Strange Victory* by Leo Hurwitz, USA  
*Was heißt hier Ende? Der Filmkritiker Michael Althen (Then is It the End? The Film Critic Michael Althen)* by Dominik Graf, Germany - WP

*Ha’makah ha’shmonim ve’ahat (The 81st Blow)* by David Bergman, Haim Gouri, Jacques Ehrlich, Miriam Novitch, Zvi Shner, Israel  
*Me’kivun ha’yaar (Out of the Forest)* by Limor Pinhasov Ben Yosef, Yaron Kaftori Ben Yosef, Israel

*Joe Bullet* by Louis de Witt, South Africa  
*Umbango (The Feud)* by Tonie van der Merwe, South Africa

*Enjo (Conflagration)* by Kon Ichikawa, Japan  
*Ototo (Her Brother)* by Kon Ichikawa, Japan  
*Yukinojo henge (An Actor’s Revenge)* by Kon Ichikawa, Japan

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