

The Museum of Modern Art

Modern Matinees: Directed by John Cassavetes

September 1–October 27, 2017

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

The name John Cassavetes is usually at the top of any list of American independent filmmakers. He raised his own production funds and wrote, directed, and often starred in the features he made, alongside a stalwart group of loyal actors. Steadfastly working outside the Hollywood studio system, Cassavetes (1929–1989) endeavored to bring truly authentic narratives to the screen, regularly focusing on stories about marriage, male friendship, family dynamics, and reconciliation. The subject matter was raw, deeply affecting audiences who saw much of their own lives reflected onscreen.

Cassavetes began his career as an actor in the nascent days of television. By the time he began work on his first feature film, *Shadows*, in 1959, he had already helmed episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Philco-Goodyear Playhouse*, and *Playhouse 90*. This immersion in television production as both a director and actor provided both the money needed to finance his own films and valuable experience working nimbly with a small budget, limited equipment, and a like-minded cast. According to *Shadows* producer Seymour Cassel, the film was shot so economically that the 16mm camera equipment was borrowed from fellow New York filmmaker Shirley Clarke. While some of *Shadows* was improvisational, much was fully scripted by the time the film was shot—including scenes filmed right here in The Museum of Modern Art.

Though each film was an uphill battle, Cassavetes persevered while remaining truly independent. His outsider films were commended by critics, embraced by audiences, and even managed to garner major industry awards. Cassavetes was nominated for two Oscars—for Best Director and Best Original Screenplay—and received awards from the Venice Film Festival and the National Society of Film Critics.

John Cassavetes Directs includes 10 feature films and a short, all drawn from MoMA's collection.

Organized by Anne Morra, Associate Curator, Department of Film.

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