

**Modern Matinees: Le Grandi Donne**

December 1, 2016 – January 27, 2017

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

Early Italian cinema's tradition of venerated screen goddesses (*le dive*) brought actresses such as Lydia Borelli, Pina Menichelli, and Francesca Bertini, with their theatrical stylings and dramatic postures, to national prominence. Yet melodramatic methods of acting soon shifted to a more realistic mode, spurred, perhaps, by the 1916 Futurist Cinema manifesto, which stated that "cinema is an autonomous art. The cinema must therefore never copy the stage." Add to this the pragmatic directorial techniques of Italian filmmakers working during the Fascist regime of 1922–43 and a new cinematic language that often used nonprofessional actors and location shooting.

However, a new class of *le dive* arose in the wake of Fascism, with professional actresses portraying characters imbued with strength, determination, passion, moral outrage, self-possession, and proto-feminist leanings in a male- and church-dominated society. Not to mention their great beauty and grace in even the most unyielding situations. These strong women, *le grandi donne*, are often taciturn members of family clans in which powerful men rule. But don't underestimate their nascent strength, growing as a formidable force in the quiet realms of home, bedroom, and church.

This series is an expansive survey of this generation of actresses—a prodigious lineup of talent including Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren, Silvana Mangano, Gina Lollobrigida, Giulietta Masina, and Monica Vitti—and the characters they developed, mirroring a rapidly changing Italian society. Drawn primarily from MoMA's collection, these films offer a close-up look at how a select group of redoubtable actresses contributed to a modern language of screen performance. All films are from Italy and in Italian with English subtitles, unless otherwise noted.

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