

The Museum of Modern Art

Curatorial Statement

Jean- Claude Carrière

May 9 – June 16, 2019

He has taken on Flaubert and Shakespeare and the lives of Danton and Van Gogh, an ancient epic Sanskrit poem and the Biblical word of God. Over more than 65 years—and counting—Jean-Claude Carrière has written nearly 150 screenplays in collaboration with some of postwar cinema's most iconoclastic filmmakers, among them Luis Buñuel (six late-period masterworks, including *Belle de Jour*), Louis Malle (*The Thief of Paris* and *May Fools*), Milos Forman (*The Nail Clippers*, *Taking Off*, and *Valmont*), Jean-Luc Godard (*Every Man for Himself*), Andrzej Wajda (*Danton*), Nagisa Oshima (*Max Mon Amour*), Peter Brook (*The Mahabharata* and *La tragédie de Carmen*), and Jonathan Glazer (*Birth*). He is also a novelist, librettist, and cultural thinker, and the only non-US screenwriter to receive lifetime achievement awards from the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Writers Guild.

Carrière makes a rare New York appearance during the opening weekend of this unprecedented 37-film retrospective, taking part in conversations with Julian Schnabel (*At Eternity's Gate*) and Volker Schlöndorff (*Circle of Deceit* and *The Tin Drum*). The series also features a preview screening of his latest screenwriting effort, Louis Garrel's *A Faithful Man*, as well as the New York premieres of new 4K digital restorations of Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Rarities include Carrière's own directorial efforts, along with several underappreciated French television movies he wrote in the 1970s and '80s, starring Delphine Seyrig, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Bulle Ogier, and even the filmmaker himself.

Carrière writes in a supple style, whether drawing upon his own experiences, observations, and imagination or those of another artist. His dialogue is bell-clear and alive to interpretation and performance, allowing, as Peter Brook has marveled, “the actors’ presence [to] shine.” From Jacques Tati, his first mentor, Carrière learned how to observe everyday life, picking up conversations and gestures and quirks of behavior in streets, cafés, and metros. Out of this came Carrière's collaborations with Tati's assistant Pierre Étaix, including *Yoyo* and their Academy Award-winning short *Happy Anniversary*. From Luis Buñuel, by contrast, Carrière learned how first to invent from within, “to look down deep inside ourselves in any given situation and take it as far as possible.” Carrière's legendarily intimate working relationship with Buñuel produced six masterworks comprising the summa of Buñuel's late-period French career: *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, *Belle de Jour*, *The Milky Way*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, and *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Thousands of private meals and writing sessions over many years also culminated in Buñuel's 1982 autobiography, *My Last Sigh*, which Carrière largely ghost wrote. Both inclined toward the surreal and the absurdist, they would privilege spontaneity over rational calculation, spitballing ideas for which “the other had three seconds—no more—to respond yes or no.” In shaping characters and setting scenes, whether through this kind of improvisational dream-work, through historical research, or through close reading of original texts, Carrière has worked best with filmmakers who see eye to eye on pacing, tone, and arrangement of space, yet who cast aside any slavish loyalty to the written word once the camera starts rolling. “Writing for film is filming,” he often admonishes his students. “You have to know that what you write is not written to be published. It is written to be forgotten and to be transformed into something else. Into another kind of matter. [That is] absolutely essential.”

-- Joshua Siegel, Curator, Department of Film