

The Museum of Modern Art

Black Wave to White Ray: Yugoslav Film of the 1960s

September 7, 2023 – September 21, 2023

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

When the critic Vladimir Jovičić coined the term “Black Wave” in 1969, he meant it as a dismissive nickname for a Yugoslavian national cinema that had become, in his opinion, unhealthily fixated on the dark side of human experience. Filmmakers such as Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, and Živojin Pavlović dealt with once-taboo topics like sex, war, and social alienation with a distinctive dark humor and brilliant formal invention. Although many of these films were banned or censored by the country’s socialist government, they attracted enough international attention to achieve a measure of freedom unthinkable in the other Eastern Bloc countries. Unfortunately, many of these films disappeared from distribution when the national government collapsed amid the civil wars of the 1990s. This 15-film program is a preliminary attempt to reclaim some of that lost work, as selected by film historian Mina Radovic with the gracious cooperation of the Yugoslav Cinematheque and Delta Video of Belgrade, the Croatian Film Archive, the Slovenian Film Centre, and the Cinematheque of North Macedonia.

Organized by Mina Radovic, independent curator, and Dave Kehr, Curator, Department of Film. Thanks to the Yugoslav Cinematheque and Delta Video of Belgrade, the Croatian Film Archive, the Slovenian Film Centre, and the Cinematheque of North Macedonia.

SCREENING SCHEDULE

Tri (Three). 1965. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Aleksandar Petrović. Story by Antonije Isaković. With Bata Živojinović, Kole Angelovski, Stole Arandelović, Dragomir Bojanić. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 80 min. Classical master and breathtaking innovator Aleksandar Petrović is a Yugoslav household name—and the auteur who brought Yugoslav cinema to international acclaim. A man of great character and perceptive feeling, Petrović creates work that is distinct in its portrayals of people’s inner lives; the poetic treatment of characters, drama, and music; and an unabated concern for communities rarely portrayed on screen. *Three* is a powerful film that takes the form of a triptych with stories set before, during, and after the Second World War. In the first, a student observes the murder of an innocent man; in the second, a cat-and-mouse game sees two partisans hunted in the mountains by German military; and in the third, an officer meets eyes with a woman sentenced for execution. The stories in this masterful study of human conscience, agency, and action in the face of death are connected by three characters played by the legendary actor Velimir Bata Živojinović, and feature marvelous cinematography by Tomislav Pinter. *Three* took the top prize at Karlovy Vary, attracted praise at the New York Film Festival in 1966, and was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards. It’s the perfect introduction to Yugoslav cinema, and a strong contender for one of the best films ever made.

Thu, Sep 7, 7:00 p.m., T2

Sun, Sep 17, 4:00 p.m., T2

Ponedjeljak ili utorak (Monday or Tuesday). 1966. Yugoslavia. Directed by Vatroslav Mimica. Written by Mimica, Fedor Vidas. With Slobodan Dimitrijević, Pavle Vuisić, Gizela Huml, Jagoda Kaloper. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 84 min. Animation veteran, genre pioneer, and master of psychology Vatroslav Mimica’s *Monday or Tuesday* takes us though one day in the life of Marko Požgaj (Dimitrijević), a divorced Zagreb journalist and

MoMA

11 West 53 Street
New York, NY 10019

modern intellectual, as he goes about his daily business. Flashbacks to his childhood; unusual details of the everyday present; and powerful images redolent of the immediate historical past and premonitions of the future combine into a stream-of-consciousness portrait of Požgaj's inner world and the urban fabric of Zagreb. Shot in a deep-blue color grade and strung together with perception-altering montage, the film—winner of the Golden Arena Award for Best Film at Yugoslavia's prestigious Pula Film Festival—also features a rarely seen manifestation of the Shoah in contemporary memorial spaces. *Monday or Tuesday* is surely among Mimica's finest contributions to the seventh art.

Fri, Sep 8, 4:30 p.m., T2

Tue, Sep 19, 6:30 p.m., T2

Ljubavni slučaj ili tragedija službenice P.T.T. (Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator). 1967. Yugoslavia. Directed by Dušan Makavejev. Written by Makavejev, Branko Vučićević. With Eva Ras, Slobodan Aligrudić. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 79 min. An internationally renowned director of the Yugoslav Black Wave, Dušan Makavejev is also one of the most celebrated radicals in world cinema, having changed the landscape of the 1960s and 1970s with his freeform, taboo-breaking, anti-narrative films. Exploring the dialectics between sex and politics, art and history, with plenty of surrealist, archival, and documentary motifs, Makavejev is a fine artist, unashamed cultural critic, and offbeat teacher who spent his fair share of time giving lectures in the United States. *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* is the director's second feature (and one of the best films of the 1960s), in which his trademark characteristics coalesce. Switchboard operator Izabela (Eva Ras) and sanitation expert Ahmed (Slobodan Aligrudić) fall for one another, and a blossoming romance quickly becomes the center point of a collage shifting between interviews with a sexologist, forensic investigations of the murder of a young woman, and explorations of the cultural and political landscape of Belgrade. Restored in 2K by the Yugoslav Cinematheque, *Love Affair* is a stunning, thought-provoking, comical, and altogether exhilarating experience.

Fri, Sep 8, 7:00 p.m., T2

Sun, Sep 17, 1:30 p.m., T2

Ples v dežju (Dancing in the Rain). 1961. Yugoslavia. Directed by Boštjan Hladnik. Written by Hladnik and Dominik Smole, adapted from his novel *Black Days and a White Day*. With Miha Baloh, Rado Nakrst, Duša Počkaj. In Slovene with English subtitles. 100 min. Boštjan Hladnik is the enfant terrible of the 1960s generation that brought sex, film noir, and the nouvelle vague with a twist to Yugoslavia. Hladnik made his debut film after returning from Paris, where he worked with Claude Chabrol and was a regular at the Cinémathèque Française. Voted the greatest Slovenian film, *Dancing in the Rain* is a slow-burning, twisted, and sublime portrait of love between young painter Peter (Miha Baloh) and the ideal woman he finds in the bourgeois Lady Maruša (Duša Počkaj, with all the leading-lady charm and heartache of Gloria Swanson). Hladnik's wondrous visuals bring to life the rainy streets of Ljubljana to life, and the film shows a relationship unfold—and eventually spiral out of control—just as a young couple in the background performs the dance of “ideal” lovers throughout the film. Adapted from the novel *Black Days and a White Day* by the existentialist writer Dominik Smole, Hladnik's film injects a high dose of modernism into classical cinema style and—along with the work of Aleksandar Petrović—announces the spectacular arrival of the New Yugoslav Film.

Sat, Sep 9, 1:30 p.m., T2

Mon, Sep 18, 6:30 p.m., T1

Podne (Noon). 1968. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Mladomir Puriša Đorđević. With Ljubisa Samardzic, Neda Arneric, Faruk Begoli. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 85 min. Mladomir Puriša Đorđević, the maverick artist whose career spanned eight decades of cinema until his death in 2022, created some of the most challenging, experimental, and satirical films of the 1960s. *Noon* is a lyrical mosaic of people's lives during the spring of 1948. A shoe-shiner on Belgrade's Slavija Square is the chorus, a group of actors on the border between Serbia and Bulgaria introduce themselves, and, as manifestations in the Soviet Cultural Centre unfold, the young girl Neda (Neda Arnerić) marries the Russian Mishko (Faruk Begolli). Unbeknownst to all of them, the Tito-Stalin split looms on the horizon. The film's mix of monochrome and color photography, socialist iconography, star actors, archival footage, re-enactments, and fourth-wall breaks are regular features of Puriša's signature style. Winner of the Silver Arena Award for Best Film at Yugoslavia's prestigious Pula Film Festival, and nominated for the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, *Noon* portrays a society out of time and place, and the hopes for a future that never was. The film is a great tribute to the acting profession and an inspirational reminder that all things are possible.

Sat, Sep 9, 4:00 p.m., T2

Wed, Sep 13, 4:00 p.m., T2

Kad budem mrtav i beo (When I Am Dead and Pale). 1967. 1967. Directed by Živojin Pavlović. Written by Ljubiša Kozomara and Gordan Mihić. With Dragan Nikolić, Ružica Sokić, Neda Spasojević. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 79 min. Dušan Makavejev once said that the Black Wave received its name thanks to the films of Živojin Pavlović, in which the most critically outspoken and aesthetically innovative tendencies were to be found. Restoring compassion to political cinema and bringing a political conscience to poetic cinema, Pavlović's films focus on characters on the margins of society. *When I Am Dead and Pale* follows the life of Jimmy the Dingy, a young, charismatic, chain-smoking vagabond who spends his time as a seasonal worker, but whose real dream is to become a singer. Starring Dragan Nikolić in the role that shot him to fame and made him one of the most recognizable faces in Yugoslav cinema, the film is a stark portrait of human experience and Jimmy's descent amid a troupe of characters—including his companion and fellow singer Duška (played by the stunning Ružica Sokić). Winner of the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlinale and the film that inspired John Schlesinger to make *Midnight Cowboy* after seeing it at the New York Film Festival, *When I Am Dead and Pale* is one of cinema's most magnificent achievements.

Sat, Sep 9, 6:30 p.m., T2

Sat, Sep 16, 1:30 p.m., T2

Praznik (The Feast). 1967. Yugoslavia. Directed by Đorđe Kadijević. Written by Kadijević, Aleksandar Petkovic. With Jovan Janicijevic-Burdus, Anka Zupanc, Dusan Janicijevic. In Serbo-Croatian and German with English subtitles. 83 min. On Christmas Day 1943, a Chetnik (royalist Yugoslav army) garrison in a small village offers succor to a pair of downed American pilots. Events take an unexpected turn when the pilots begin to believe they are among the partisans, and their hosts, unable to speak English, change their attitude when the Germans come looking for the pilots. Dealing with the influence of war on the lives of small communities, *The Feast* is both a work of pure poetry and a radical rethinking of human power, responsibility, and faith during dark times. The film was directed by Đorđe Kadijević, a remarkable filmmaker whose career spans the most critical and poetic human dramas, unconventional genre films, and one of the greatest historical series on Yugoslav television (which was even recognized by UNESCO). *The Feast* is a good introduction to the

director and, like the violinist who appears in cinema's most splendid closing sequences, is sure to touch your soul.

Sun, Sep 10, 1:30 p.m., T2

Wed, Sep 20, 6:30 p.m., T2

Skupljači perja (I Even Met Happy Gypsies). 1967. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Aleksandar Petrović. With Bekim Fehmiu, Olivera Vučo, Bata Živojinović, Gordana Jovanović, Mija Aleksić. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 82 min. Aleksandar Petrović's work betrays a genuine concern for people, places, and communities rarely seen on screen, and there is no better exemplar than his swan song, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*. Set in a village on the Pannonian plain in northern Serbia, the film follows the dynamic, explosive life of the charismatic and self-destructive feather-gatherer Beli Bora Perjar. Petrović shows all the qualities of a great painter, bringing the texture and color of people's inner lives onto the screen. Featuring an iconic performance by Bekim Fehmiu, and the definitive rendition of the song "Đelem, Đelem" by Olivera Katarina, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* is a landmark in the cinematic portrayal of the Roma, the example to which all others refer, exceeding even the films of Slavko Vorkapich, Emir Kusturica, and Goran Paskaljević in its sheer authenticity. An international sensation, winner of the Grand Prix and FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes and an Oscar nominee, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* is the most renowned work of the Yugoslav Black Wave. Now presented in a glorious restoration, it can be experienced for what it is: a true feast for the senses, heart, and mind.

Sun, Sep 10, 4:00 p.m., T2

Thu, Sep 14, 4:00 p.m., T2

Memento. 1967. Directed by Dimitrie Osmanli. Written by Osmanli, Jovan Boskovski, Tasko Georgievski. With Renata Freiskorn, Stevo Zigon, Dragi Kostovski. In Macedonian and Russian with English subtitles. 85 min. Set in Skopje in the aftermath of the 1963 earthquake that destroyed most of the city and ushered in unprecedented international aid, *Memento* follows a German conductor (Stevo Žigon) on his way back from Greece who meets the young student Yana (Renata Freiskorn) and drives her home. They grow close as they explore the city, retracing Yana's steps to find something she lost only to discover a landscape which, even in the midst of destitution, bustles with life. Along the way they encounter irreverent youth, cabaret singers, pop bands, and the American military, and a simple love story gives way to an extraordinary cinematic diary about memory and what it means to reconstruct one's life and begin anew. Directed by Macedonian pioneer Dimitrie Osmanli, the film speaks to conscience and contains some of the best montage committed to celluloid. Strongly reminiscent of the work of Alain Resnais—and taking the earthquake as a backdrop for critical reflections on issues as varied as the Holocaust, nuclear catastrophe, and the Vietnam war—*Memento* is a kaleidoscope of the 20th century, and a person's quest to find peace in a tumultuous world.

Mon, Sep 11, 4:30 p.m., T1

Sat, Sep 16, 4:00 p.m., T2

Roj (The Swarm). 1966. Yugoslavia. Directed by Miodrag Popović. Written by Popović, Srboljub Stankovic, Borislav Mihajlovic-Mihiz. With Mira Stupica, Rade Markovic, Svetolik Nikacevic. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 90 min. Set in 1804 during the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Empire, painter, writer, and filmmaker Miodrag Mića Popović's *The Swarm* follows the trial of a woman accused of betraying her husband to the Turks. Family matriarch Stojanka (Mira Stupica) is silent as the court, observed by the local population, brings forth a series of witnesses to make sense of the events that culminated in the murder of her husband, the rebel Nikola (Danilo Stojković), at the hands of a Turkish

vassal (Bekim Fehmiu). As Stojanka's relationship with her daughter-in-law, the young and beautiful Ljubica (Olivera Katarina), comes to light, the film reveals the power of female agency in a patriarchal society. Told through a nonlinear narrative and bolstered by an aesthetic sensibility reminiscent of Ingmar Bergman and František Vlácil, *The Swarm* is a courtroom drama like no other, offering rare and compelling insight into a key chapter in modern European history. A tale of intrigue, deception, and sacrifice—and a testament to the role of women in the rebirth of a nation—*The Swarm* is a landmark film of the Yugoslav Black Wave.

Mon, Sep 11, 6:30 p.m., T1

Fri, Sep 15, 4:30 p.m., T2

Mali vojnici (Playing Soldiers). 1967. Directed by Bahrudin Čengić . Written by Mirko Kovač. With Stole Arandelović, Marika Tucanovska, Zaim Muzaferija. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 92 min. Bahrudin Čengić is an aesthete of revolution, a filmmaker of conscience who brings matters of political ideology to the foreground, particularly as they affect the most vulnerable, and specifically children. Simultaneously a breathtaking critique, a masterful slow-burner, and a pure psychological drama, *Playing Soldiers*, produced by Sarajevo's Bosna Film, follows a young boy who arrives at an orphanage for children of partisans and those killed in the war. Knowing the boy's parents to be Nazis, the headmaster conceals this past from the rest of the boys—but things take a significant turn when they find out and decide to put the boy on trial. Slated for Palme d'Or consideration at Cannes in 1968, when the festival was cancelled, *Playing Soldiers* puts memories of fascism and the legacy of communism in an entirely new light, and looks at what happens when normally innocent members of society decide to "play war." Push *Lord of the Flies* to its existential limit and Čengić's film is the haunting result.

Tue, Sep 12, 4:00 p.m., T2

Sat, Sep 16, 6:30 p.m., T2

Čudna devojka (Strange Girl). 1962. Yugoslavia. Directed by Jovan Živanović. Written by Jug Grizelj and Grozdana Olujic. With Spela Rozin, Vojislav Miric, Zoran Radmilovic. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 103 min. Jovan Živanović is a quintessential chronicler of modern life, a perceptive auteur who reconsiders tradition through a contemporary lens. Taking people as the starting point for all drama, Živanović gives us an up-close perspective on the origins, motivations, and sensibilities behind human relationships, while using a calm hand to bring out the very best in his actors. Arguably his greatest work, *Strange Girl* focuses on Minja, a young woman who moves to the capital to build a new life. While navigating the advances of several suitors and the attitudes of her new community, she gradually matures into a person who takes life fully into her own hands. Featuring the beautiful and magnetic Špela Rozin, a cultural icon and international diva of Italian sword-and-sandal films, *Strange Girl* is both a portrait of a woman and a first-hand look at a society in flux amid the swinging '60s.

Tue, Sep 12, 6:30 p.m., T2

Thu, Sep 21, 4:00 p.m., T2

Grad (The City). 1963. Yugoslavia. Directed by Marko Babac, Živojin Pavlović and Vojislav 'Kokan' Rakonjac. Written by Babac, Pavlović, Rakonjac. With Branka Jovanovic, Mihajlo Kostic-Pljaka, Ljiljana Sljapic. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 80 min. *The City* is an outstanding three-part omnibus film directed by a trio of the era's leading directors: Vojislav "Kokan" Rakonjac, Marko Babac, and Živojin Pavlović. The first chapter, "Love," sets up a nightmarish vision of the big city, with a volatile romantic relationship at its center; the second chapter, "Heart," revolves around an unexpected encounter in which death

looms just around the corner; and the third, “The Hoop,” focuses on a person on the fringes of society who plunges into an underworld from which he finds it increasingly difficult to escape. The three directors plumb urban landscapes to “forge their own Bauhaus,” chasing shadows down the hidden avenues of thought and the suspended moments of everyday life in a socialist society. Surreal, visceral, and ultimately liberating, combining an unchained camera with brilliant chiaroscuro and a haunting modernist soundscape (including masterful use of the pipe organ), *The City* is a unique treatment of the urban metropolis as both a reflection of the unconscious and the very real site of personal and social struggle. Unavailable for decades and the only film officially banned by the courts in Yugoslavia returns in a new digital preservation, ripe for rediscovery.

Wed, Sep 13, 6:30 p.m., T2

Tue, Sep 19, 4:00 p.m., T2

Po isti poti se ne vračaj (Don't Come Back the Same Way). 1965. Yugoslavia. Jože Babič. Written by Branko Plesa and Giorgio Sestan. With Davor Antolic, Ljubisa Samardzic, Joze Zupan. In Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 90 min. Seasonal workers from the south of Yugoslavia come to Slovenia looking for jobs and prosperity, but instead they encounter a harsh reality, rejected by the locals, fending off poverty, and struggling to survive. At the film's heart is the shy but charismatic Abdul, played by the beloved Serbian actor Ljubiša Samardžić, who meets a girl and attempts to make a new beginning, despite the odds. The film invites us into a community of outsiders who clash, make up, and grow with one another—and when all the chips are down, their struggle makes us understand the true meaning of hard work. Directed by gifted dramatist Jože Babič, *Don't Come Back the Same Way* is a powerful exposé of a specific time and place, and casts a bright light on the significance of labor in a culture increasingly dominated by self-interest.

Thu, Sep 14, 6:30 p.m., T2

Wed, Sep 20, 4:00 p.m., T2

Sveti pesak (Holy Sand). 1968. Yugoslavia. Written and directed by Miroslav Antić. With Cedomir Mihajlovic, Zelimira Zujovic, Tihomir Pleskonjic. In Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. 83 min. When a political commissar, now cast out from society, visits an old monument in honor of his fallen comrades, it awakens suppressed memories of his imprisonment in a hard labor camp and he begins to question his own existence. *Holy Sand* takes as its theme Yugoslavia's Informbiro period, which saw the persecution of political opponents after the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, including the sentencing of more than 10,000 people to hard labor in the brutal Goli Otok prison camp off the coast of Croatia, where many were also killed. Though this period is very much a taboo subject, Miroslav Mika Antić said he made the film to speak about the revolutionary postwar era that “ate its children” and whose heroes would lose everything if they were unwilling to conform. *Holy Sand* was unsurprisingly ‘bunkered’ on its release, a fate it shared with many critical Black Wave films that were shelved and remained unavailable for decades. While Antić, who was only able to direct one more feature film, remained much better known to the public as a poet and painter, watching *Holy Sand* in a pristine new restoration means rediscovering one of the major cinematic figures of the era.

Fri, Sep 15, 7:00 p.m., T2

Mon, Sep 18, 4:00 p.m., T1

SPONSORSHIP:

CHANEL

Film at MoMA is made possible by [CHANEL](#).

Additional support is provided by the Annual Film Fund. Leadership support for the Annual Film Fund is provided by Debra and Leon D. Black, with major contributions from the Triad Foundation, Inc., The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP), The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art, and by Karen and Gary Winnick.