

desire and illusion, Eros and Thanatos, into dark and beguiling new forms, and although they're a hell of a lot rougher than the early films, held together with spit, spunk and a hyperactive zoom lens, they're among the most potent drafts in Franco's cine-apothecary.

Dedicated fans adore the impetuous, punkish spontaneity of his work, but for the same reason sceptics find him hard to take seriously. Even Howard Vernon expressed reservations when interviewed in 1977: "It's like a woman who brings a child into the world, and then, in the middle of the birth, she takes a knife and says 'I'm bored' – so she cuts out whatever comes first and only has half a baby!" Yet while perfect craft may have fallen by the wayside, Franco's speed unleashed a blizzard of extraordinary images. Ultimately there's something truly otherworldly about his films; they give us precious glimpses of a stranger, more delirious reality. Jess Franco was the anti-Kubrick – wayward, impulsive, impatient – but he shared with the master procrastinator one special quality: a cinematic vision as personal and unique as a retinal photograph. ♦

### Coming soon to Acropolis:

- *GIFT: A Film* by Ryūsuke Hamaguchi X Live Score by Eiko Ishibashi—two performances, September 28 at 2220 Arts + Archives
- Eiko Ishibashi Plays the Music of *Drive My Car*—September 29 at 2220 Arts + Archives
- *Matt and Mara* (Dir. Kazik Radwanski, 2024)—October 10 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with director Kazik Radwanski and actress Deragh Campbell in person
- *Time of the Seasons: Two Films* by Vadim Kostrov (*Summer* and *Fall*, dir. Vadim Kostrov, 2021/2022)—October 16 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with director Vadim Kostrov in person
- *Directors' Fortnight 2024: Los Angeles*—November 1-3 at the Culver Theater, featuring seven films from this year's Quinzaine des cinéastes in Cannes

# Acropolis Cinema and the Oscarbate Film Collective present:



September 20, 2024 - 2220 Arts + Archives

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

*Venus in Furs* (Dir. Jess Franco, 1969, 86 min)

Violated and left for dead, a young woman's vengeful spirit traverses space and time to seek retribution against her cold-blooded killers, a sinister group of libertines led by Klaus Kinski. Attempting to discover the truth behind her resurrection, a young jazz player begins to fall for this revenge-seeking specter, with the hope he doesn't befall a similar fate as her and her murderers.

Rising from the psychedelic shadows of the late 60's, *Venus in Furs* appeared to fit right alongside certain dosed AIP titles like *The Trip* and *Psych-Out*; however, the filmmaker's mad vision stretched beyond the groovy bounds of those films, and emerged as a definitive statement for exploitation cinema at large. Utilizing an array of kaleidoscopic visuals and a blistering score, *Venus in Furs* provides the perfect gateway into the world of Jess Franco.

*The Other Side of the Mirror* (Dir. Jess Franco, 1973, 100 min)

Melissa, a young woman living in a large seaside mansion with her father and aunt, decides one day to marry. She rushes home to tell her father the good news, yet after telling him, she returns home later on to discover (through the reflection of a large ominous mirror) that her father has hung himself. Distraught and heartbroken, she breaks off the marriage and decides to join a touring group of musicians to escape her tragic home. However, as time creeps on, she begins to notice ghostly happenings anytime she stares directly into a mirror, plunging her further into nightmarish conflict with forces from the other side of reality.

A crowning achievement of Franco's astonishing mid-70's run, *The Other Side of the Mirror* remains a fairly classically constructed affair for the director, albeit infused with the sort of cinematic somnambulism that remained signature throughout his entire career. Anticipating moments and scenes that would later appear in the films of David Lynch (*Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, in particular), *The Other Side of the Mirror* points to the rarely acknowledged but undeniable influence Franco had over many of today's greatest and most forward-thinking filmmakers.

TRT: 186 min

In person: Will Morris and John Dickson (Oscarbate Film Collective)

## Obituary: Jesús Franco by Stephen Thrower

*The following is an article originally published by The Guardian, April 4, 2013*

When the grand dames and gentlemen at Spain's 2009 Goya Film Awards sat drinking their champagne, I doubt many of them expected to see, before the night was through, a naked man and woman tied up and whipped in a circle of knives, two scimitar-wielding lesbians duking it out on a hilltop, a sadomasochistic orgy in a brothel or a coven of elderly witches massaging their nipples with a crucifix. Such, though, was the explosion of licentiousness in a montage of images from the career of Spanish filmmaker Jesús Franco Manera, aka Jess Franco, who received that night a lifetime achievement award.

Franco died in Málaga this week at the age of 82, but he leaves behind a vast and complex body of work – more than 180 movies in 54 years. Casual readers may fail to recognise a single title (shame on you!), but to those who treasure the outer limits of horror and eroticism he was one of the cinema's great individualists. A dedicated exponent of weird sex, shocking sadism and surreal horror, he found fame around the world for a torrent of maverick works, in which, despite woefully small budgets, it was frequently possible to discern the hand of an aesthete and a cinéaste.

Franco's output beckons the curious with its sheer cumulative density; it's not unusual for fans to say things like: "I've only seen 30 so far," or, "I've seen a hundred but it's not enough." American critic Tim Lucas aced the trend with the mind-boggling statement: "You can't see one Franco film until you've seen them all," at which point most of you will probably back off and call the sanatorium. But he had a point. Franco's work is best seen as a giant mosaic, a rippling borderless continuum, with individual films less important than the wider trends and currents passing through. Watching a single Franco film is like sipping a glass of water from a brimming lake; to really enjoy what he has to offer you have to throw yourself in. A cautious place to start would be a sober and elegant early work like *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (1962), a Gothic tale of illicit surgery starring the debonair Howard Vernon. More adventurous souls might prefer another medical-themed offering, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965), an exuberant pulp horror flick co-written with Buñuel's regular scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière. If you're in the mood for something further out, there's *Necronomicon* (1967), a hallucinatory infusion of art cinema head-games and reality-warping sadomasochism: at an early screening, the esteemed director Fritz Lang declared that it was, "the first erotic film I've seen all the way through because it's a beautiful piece of cinema".

A tendency towards sexual provocation brought Franco into conflict with the Spanish censors, and he was forced to look further afield for financing. Enter Harry Alan Towers, a dynamic British producer with a shady reputation (he was arrested in New York in 1961 for running a call-girl racket with connections to President Kennedy and the Profumo affair). Franco shot nine films for Towers, including *Marquis De Sade's Justine*, with Klaus Kinski, and *Count Dracula* starring Christopher Lee. Franco and Lee made seven films together, but they fell out over *Eugenie ... the story of her journey into perversion* (1969): Lee was outraged to discover that Franco had shot sexually explicit material without telling him, leading to embarrassment when one of the star's theatre cronies noticed that the great thespian was "now playing" in Soho's sleazier cinemas.

In the 1970s, a demon seemed to possess Franco. He completed six films in 1971, seven in 1972, and 11 films in 1973. Shooting schedules blurred into the equivalent of Bob Dylan's Never Ending Tour: actors frequently lost track of which film they were making; when one performer grew suspicious and demanded to know why he'd been called upon to play two different death scenes in the same afternoon, Franco told him that the film was meant to be dreamlike, so naturally it didn't make sense. In truth he would pilfer scenes for one project while ostensibly shooting another, yet thanks to his puckish personal charm the actors remained loyal and producers were more inclined to roll their eyes than fire him.

The Swiss mogul Erwin Dietrich, who discovered that Franco had used money and actors from one of his productions to shoot a similar tale for someone else 15 miles down the coast, remarked: "Well, at least he gave me the good one!" Wild, capricious works such as *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), *Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971), *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), *La Comtesse Noire* (1973), *Lorna ... the Exorcist* (1974) and *Shining Sex* (1975) twist reality and fantasy,