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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## POST-WAR POLISH FILMS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library will present a series of Ten Post-War Polish Films, May 18 - June 11. Ashes and the Diamond (1958), directed by Andrzej Wajda, will be given its American premiere in the Museum's auditorium, 11 West 53 Street, Thursday, May 26, at 8:30 p.m. Admission will be \$2 for Museum members and \$3 for non-members. The other nine programs will be shown in the auditorium during regular Museum hours, daily at 3 and 5:30.

Arranged in cooperation with the Polish Embassy to the United States, the series will include four feature films never before shown in this country. In addition to Ashes and the Diamond, these are Kanal (1956), Partings (1958), and Answer to Violence (1958). Of the remaining six, Eroica (1957), Eve Wants to Sleep (1957), and The Last Day of Summer (1958) have not yet been shown here theatrically. The last named will be released by Edward Harrison shortly. Other films scheduled for exhibition are The Last Stop (1948), Young Chopin (1952), and Five from Barska Street (1953).

Though little known in the United States, the Polish films in the series have been prize winners at film festivals throughout the world: Ashes and the Diamond, International Film Critics Prize, Venice, 1959; chosen best foreign film of the year by Britain's Film Critics' Guild, 1959; Kanal, Silver Palm, Cannes, 1957; selected as Poland's best post-war film in a Warsaw newspaper poll (Zycie Warszawy), 1959; The Last Day of Summer, Grand Prix, Venice, 1958; The Last Stop, First prize, International Film Festival at Marianske Lazne, Czechoslovakia, 1948; Eve Wants to Sleep, Grand Prix, San Sebastian, 1958; Young Chopin, Polish State Prize for direction and photography, 1952; Answer to Violence, International Film Critics' prize, San Sebastian, 1959; prize for scenario, Mar del Plata, 1959; Eroica, Polish Film Critics' prize as best Polish film of 1958; Five from Barska Street, International prize and Special prize for direction, Cannes, 1954; Partings, Honorable mention, International Critics Federation, Locarno, 1959.

Richard Griffith, Curator of the Film Library, says of the exhibition:

"Like everything else in Poland, the country's small film industry was almost totally destroyed in World War II. Rebuilding it under the conditions left by the Nazis was a long and arduous process. Most of the few films which made their way to the West often seemed, necessarily, tentative and derivative. But something must have been working under the surface. The films assembled here, all but three

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of them made since 1956, are at once a passionate outburst of smoldering emotions and 'a leap into a new quality'.

"Five of them concern events now fifteen and more years behind us - the War, the Occupation, the Rising of 1944 and its consequences. But if these events seem to obsess Polish film-makers it is no wonder. For this was the central experience of modern Polish life, the focus in which everything of national and individual concern is seen. To render it the film-makers have invented their own pictorial style. The Polish films have been compared to Italian neo-realism of the early post-war period and the parallel is apposite in that in both the Italian and the Polish films you feel that every man, woman and child connected with the picture, before and behind the camera, had themselves lived through the experiences they now depicted. But the pictorial style seen here is new. These directors and photographers have taken camera traditions and bent them to their own uses.

"Let me give an example of that style, from the war films. The people in them are not covered with rags. The war has been on only four or five years, many people have kept their things, and we see them walk through the ruins of Warsaw as the smartly-dressed citizens of a European capital. The shocking sight of these modern Europeans held fast in events like 'the doings of a thousand or even two thousand years ago' tells all the story in little. There is no comment. The camera simply reports the contrast as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Or had become the most natural thing.

"Politics is not the subject of these films. Politics is their backdrop, the atmosphere in which they move. The foreground, the subject, is human survival of the worst that human beings can invent. The people we see are terribly alone. Friends and family have been swept away, scattered like leaves. Who knows where they are - London, Moscow, Auschwitz, or dead. Their survivors live from day to day. They know how to keep alive and they know how to kill expertly, and that is enough, for now. Life itself, now so cheap, is in itself enough. We see this on their naked faces. Il faut tenter vivre might be the rubric of this series. That is the diamond in their ashes, a fate hard and brilliant.

"The three films in the cycle which deal with post-war Poland are Five From Barska Street, an optimistic study of juvenile delinquency, The Last Day of Summer, an elegy to love in the atom age, and Eve Wants To Sleep, a pert satire on municipal bureaucracy. These in their various ways reach for new styles in keeping with their subject. So do the shorter films, reflecting as they do a universal foreboding coupled with a sense of play suggestive of surrealism. For the present, the dominating effect is made by the war films, tragic, beautiful, and so incontrovertibly the truth of life and death in our time."

Note: The film series, Recent Acquisitions, which was superceded by this exhibition will resume on June 12 with Lo Sceicco Bianco.

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For stills and further information contact Herbert Bronstein, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, CI 5-8900.