

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legends to the contrary notwithstanding, the negative of Erich von Stroheim's much-discussed film, Greed, has been preserved in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's vaults and it has therefore been possible to include this celebrated "masterpiece of realism" in the Museum of Modern Art Film Library's current Series IV, The Swedish Film and Post-War American Films. Greed will be shown to Museum members on Wednesday, February 23rd, at 8:45 P.M. in the auditorium of the American Museum of Natural History, 77th Street and Central Park West. Thereafter it will be available to students of the film in colleges and museums throughout the country.

Greed, a faithful transcription into pictorial terms of Frank Norris' novel, "McTeague," was created under unusual circumstances and met with a curious fate. It was not made in a studio, but on location in San Francisco. Whole blocks and houses were purchased as settings, walls knocked out to make the photography of real interiors practicable. Every detail of the novel was reproduced at considerable expense of time and money, with a passionate and uncompromising care for veracity. Eventually von Stroheim offered his producers his finished work, a final cut print twenty reels long which he proposed they should issue in two parts, and which bore no perceptible trace of those elements usually reckoned as "box office." The film was taken from him, cut down to the present ten reel version and so released. Probably no film has ever appealed less to the general public. Nevertheless it profoundly interested many film critics, especially in Europe, was written and theorized about at length and has become almost as famous as The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Von Stroheim had entered films as an extra and assistant-director under D. W. Griffith. He gained considerable fame by his highly unsympathetic portrayals of German officers in war-time films. The first two pictures he directed, Blind Husbands (1919) and Foolish Wives (1921) attracted considerable notice by their

original and realistic handling of melodrama. Von Stroheim was also admired as much as criticized for being an excessively extravagant director. For enacting the chief or villainous role in both films he was widely publicized as "the man you love to hate."

In Greed, von Stroheim attempted to express to its fullest the moralizing intent of the original novel. His approach to this story of mean circumstances, of avarice and envy and spite, was as factual and unromantic as that of a newsreel. His cameras (one of them in the hands of Ernest Schoedsack of Chang fame) relentlessly pursued the unhappy dentist and his miserly wife from the sordid to the squalid towards ultimate tragedy. The characters, far from being softened, are exposed in a bleak glare which sometimes becomes embarrassing, and the cumulative effect of the film is so oppressive that it is small wonder if audiences of 1924 in search of distraction found it little to their taste.

Gibson Gowland as McTeague, Jean Hersholt as the friend who becomes his bitter enemy, give remarkably convincing performances. Even the small parts are rendered with that scrupulous and almost grotesque realism which the director imposed on the whole work. The most important role, that of McTeague's wife, was entrusted to the comedienne, Zasu Pitts, who gives an unusually serious and consistent study of a woman gradually overcome by miserly instincts. Her performance has been regarded as one of the finest in film history.