

The Museum of Modern Art

No. 86

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

WHAT'S HAPPENING? NEW POLICY LAUNCHED AT MODERN

Because of the rapid changes on the American and international scene, The Museum of Modern Art has decided to embark on a new policy that it hopes will make a contribution to public understanding of critical issues affecting our daily lives.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?, the program it plans to launch, was conceived by Willard Van Dyke, Director of the Department of Film. It will bring documented coverage of the political and social scene on every conceivable subject: pollution, inflation, campus unrest, the war, racism, politics, the sexual revolution and women's liberation.

The program is scheduled for every Thursday at noon starting August 20, 1970. The initial film, BLACK ROOTS, by Lionel Rogosin, has never before had a public showing. It concerns black culture in music, art, history, poetry and humor, and includes all types of blacks--urban intellectuals, industrial workers, sharecroppers from the Mississippi Delta and revolutionaries. Some political consciousness and militancy exist but are not dominant in the film, according to Mr. Rogosin, who describes the picture as "a panorama of American history from 1900 to today as seen through the eyes of the black community." Mr. Rogosin considers "black culture a very needed infusion of humanism into our highly industrialized and mechanistic society."

Rogosin, well-known for ON THE BOWERY, offers his own interpretation of black culture just as succeeding films of the program will contain the political and social ideas of the film-makers. The films will not be scheduled too far ahead of time so that the program can remain current and flexible. Both film-makers in the United States and from around the world will be asked to participate, with the understanding that aesthetic values are not to be stressed but that meaningful content will be primary.

The idea, according to Mr. Van Dyke, is to stimulate public reaction through what is considered by sociologists, historians, and psychologists the most potent medium--the film. The visual image, being as direct as it is, can only help to il-

(more)

illuminate many issues confronting the public. That image is unencumbered and carries its own message; each individual is free to come to his own conclusions.

The genesis of WHAT'S HAPPENING? dates back to the early documentary times. In the 30s film-makers used the camera to tell of the actual conditions that prevailed. Today again, film-makers have returned to this concept and feel compelled to employ both techniques of the past and newly acquired ones to the immediate exigencies that call for the type of coverage film makes possible.

Until now, new film-makers were inclined to explore their personal lives, take creative license, turn away from the past, and move forward into formal, experimental areas. Lately, it appears, a whole new group, as well as some seasoned film-makers, has awakened to the growing need for film to play the same significant role it had when documentaries began in the depression and during the war years.

These film-makers will continue to apply their creative imaginations but, recognizing an area of priority that demands their attention, they will render in filmic terms actual problems confronting Americans today.

WHAT'S HAPPENING? will not only provide relevant information for the public that normally would not have access to it, it will also give a forum to film-makers whose films are not shown theatrically, films that may be too editorial for a large television network, but which may nonetheless be of interest to audiences that want to keep informed. The revival of documentary reportage was encouraging, said Mr. Van Dyke, himself a documentary film-maker, who was cameraman on THE RIVER, and who filmed THE CITY and VALLEY TOWN and other films of social importance. More than ever, he believes, people want to know about things that matter and the Museum will attempt to serve the community in this area of film information.

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Telephone: (212) 956-7296 (7501).