

The Museum of Modern Art

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NO. 10
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From:
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JORIS IVENS TWELVE HOUR STUDY ON CHINA TODAY
TO HAVE DUAL AMERICAN PREMIERE AT MUSEUM AND DONNELL LIBRARY
TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY ON SEVEN CONSECUTIVE TUESDAYS

PRESS SCREENINGS

Monday,	January 30	2:30 pm
Wednesday,	February 1	5:00 pm
Thursday,	February 2	4:00 pm
Friday,	February 3	5:00 pm
Monday,	February 6	5:45 pm

4th Floor Museum Projection Room

The donor of one portable 35 millimeter camera and 2,000 meters of film to the Chinese leader Chou En-lai, thirty-five years later, was given the opportunity to shoot a twelve hour color film which is the most complete reportage since the Cultural Revolution on everyday life in China today.

In 1938 the distinguished Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens, already acclaimed for his brilliant documentary "The Spanish Earth," made during the Civil War in Spain, then went to China where he began to film "The Four Hundred Million" in the height of the Sino-Japanese conflict. There he met Chou En-lai who told him he had many cameramen, but no camera, so Ivens before departing left him with the only camera the Chinese revolutionaries had. It enabled them to film the historic events around Mao Tse-tung in the next four years and to start up China's new cinema. The camera today occupies a proud place in Peking's Revolutionary Museum, where Ivens, who had forgotten about this gift, recently saw it again.

The gratitude of the Chinese enabled Ivens, who returned to China in the '50s, '60s and '70s, to have unusual freedom in the making of his latest, monu-

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mental and most important work, which required three years from 1972 to 1975 to complete. It is a twelve hour documentary, titled "How Yukong Moved the Mountains." The title refers to an ancient Chinese fable retold by Mao, about an old man who finds access to his house obstructed by two huge mountains so he decides to remove them by himself. When his neighbor learns of it he is skeptical; but the old man tells him that his sons and their sons will finish the job, indicating that future generations will have to continue the task.

"How Yukong Moved the Mountains" comprises seven features, each of which will premiere on seven consecutive Tuesdays, starting Chinese New Year's Day, February 7th at both the Museum of Modern Art and the Donnell Library as part of their jointly sponsored "What's Happening?" series, dealing with contemporary political and social themes. Each Tuesday the same picture will be shown at noon at the library and at the museum at six in the evening.

Originally Ivens and Marceline Loridan planned to spend only four months in China and make a three hour film. Instead, they remained a year and a half and shot 120 hours of film which required another year and a half to edit. Using only one-tenth of the material, they have shaped the film into twelve hours.

Ivens has chosen not to emphasize the political perplexities and complexities of this gigantic country with 25% of the world's population. Instead he has concentrated on various aspects of everyday life, ranging from a rehearsal of a Peking opera to a discussion in a generator factory or a typical scene in a neighborhood pharmacy. The film was shot in Nanking, Peking, Tating, Shanghai and Da Yu Dao, a small fishing village where women go out to the high seas to catch fish.

In each situation, Ivens lived with the people for several weeks at a time, in order to elicit confidence and trust. He also had an all Chinese crew, as he always prefers to work with the people of a country wherever he goes. It encourages people to cooperate, and especially in China where, he says, you do not impose your views as you might in other countries, and you have to have a

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great deal of patience.

"You can't be too discreet in a foreign land, nor too sure of yourself," says Ivens, who recently had the satisfaction of knowing that his forty year old film "The Spanish Earth" was revived after Franco's death around the world, proving to Ivens that it was "fundamental" and "had a solid form." He thinks the filmmaker has no right to be negligent about form. "The subject demands the highest artistic qualities."

Having dedicated himself to documentary for over a half century, Ivens defines the genre. "It must be cinematic; a dramatization of daily life. It must make people think. It must provoke them. In an extreme militant sense, it can agitate. It has a great scale; in form it can go from newsreel to fiction. Authenticity after all isn't necessarily truth - fiction can be true."

The world famous documentary filmmaker admits his works reflect political and social views to the point where he has been called doctrinaire, which in his opinion is an unfair evaluation. Unlike Robert Flaherty, who introduced him to Irish whiskey, and whom he called "our great father," he had a different philosophy. While Flaherty was against mechanization and sought human values in nature, it was Ivens' conviction that "in certain conditions man must create the social situation to renew himself."

Ivens, who has made films in his native Holland, France, Italy, Eastern Europe, Viet Nam, Cuba, the United States and Canada, is described as a "neat, fast moving, strikingly handsome man." He was born in 1898 in Nimegen and was raised knowing about cameras. His grandfather made portraits with a Daguerre, and his father, also a photographer, owned several camera shops. In one of them there was a big wooden box containing a Pathe camera no one had the courage to buy, which led the 13-year-old Joris to experiment with it using his family as the cast. He was then influenced by Melies and Westerns from America.

After learning economics and chemistry as it applied to photography and

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then studying in a Dresden factory to learn about camera construction, Ivens started to make films; became a founder of the Dutch Filmliga, a pioneer film society; met such avant gardists as Vigo, Clair and Bunuel, and later was invited by Pudovkin to make a film in Russia. When he came to America, which had greatly influenced his work, he was welcomed by John Ford and King Vidor, who already knew of his early work, "Rain," "The Bridge" and "Borinage," dealing with a coal strike in Belgium. In America he filmed "The Power and the Land" from a story by Stephen Vincent Benet; on his earlier project "The Spanish Earth" he was associated with Marc Blitzstein and Virgil Thomson who composed the musical score, and Ernest Hemingway who wrote and narrated the film.

Ivens as he approaches 80 considers history to be his scenarist for it has determined his choice of subjects. His present film grew out of his dialogue with the Chinese people, with whom he has some familiarity having taught film technique at Peking University in 1956 and in 1958 and again in 1965 and having made documentaries in China. His new picture could be "a cultural shock to Westerners," Variety has said. Nonetheless he is willing to let audiences come to their own conclusions.

"We don't pretend to know everything about China," comments Ivens, who with his associate Marceline Loidan, has attempted to give us some revealing insights not ordinarily accessible to Westerners. His style, points out Ted Perry, Director of the Department of Film of the Museum, is "relaxed and compassionate and for the most part invisible." Mr. Perry with William Sloan of the N.Y. Public Library, programmer for the "What's Happening?" series, arranged the presentation of this film for the first time in this country. Cinema Arts Associated Corp. is the distributor in the U.S.A.

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