

# The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release  
February 1989

## CARL TH. DREYER

February 17 - March 5, 1989

. . . his major films can be experienced simply as universal works of art that communicate human experiences, exploring the human soul as it is reflected in the face.

Ib Monty\*

The first complete American retrospective of the films of Carl Th. Dreyer, widely regarded as one of the masters of cinema, opens on February 17 at The Museum of Modern Art. Celebrating the centennial of the Danish filmmaker's birth (1889-1968), CARL TH. DREYER provides an opportunity to view Dreyer's entire body of work, including lesser-known films as well as his late masterpieces. In addition to the fourteen feature films made by the artist between 1918 and 1964, the program presents a 1966 documentary about and with him and a series of short subjects commissioned from the Danish government.

CARL TH. DREYER was organized by Jytte Jensen, curatorial assistant, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition was made possible through a generous donation by Celeste Bartos. Ib Monty, director of the Danish Film Museum, will open the series on Friday, February 17, at 6:00 p.m., with an introduction to the screening of Vampire/The Strange Adventures of David Grey (Vampyr) (1931-32). The retrospective continues through March 5, 1989.

Characterized in style and content by a universal expression of the human experience, Dreyer's approach to film is unique in both a Danish and international context. His formidable reputation in this country rests on four films: The Passion of Joan of Arc (1927-8), Day of Wrath (1943), Ordet

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(1954-55), and Gertrud (1964). In a distilled expression of the filmmaker's art, the silent film The Passion of Joan of Arc compresses into one long trial the twenty-nine interrogations of the heroine. Using close-up shots to raise the film above time and place, Dreyer abstracts from historical reality to effect a sense of timelessness.

Day of Wrath, a dramatic love triangle set in a merciless seventeenth-century Christian community, recounts the story of an elderly vicar's young wife who is burned as a witch. The film is notable for its quiet, intense acting and slow camera movements, signatures of Dreyer's style. In his most popular film, Ordet, about a young woman who dies in childbirth and is brought back to life by an act of faith, Dreyer simplified his style and set design. Gertrud, his last film, made at age seventy-five, is a severely stylized portrait of another woman--this time one who is intellectual and strong-willed rather than suffering or submissive.

Dreyer strove to create authenticity in his settings in order to achieve a classically simplified realism. He maintained that the spiritual and psychological content of his films was strengthened by simplification and abstraction of physical detail. Concerned with every aspect of the filmmaking process, he wrote his own scripts, and occasionally acted as set designer and editor. He encountered difficulty in finding financial support for his productions throughout his career. He made films wherever he was allowed the greatest control, working in Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, and his native Denmark.

Dreyer's slow, deliberate camera movements, careful framing, and interest in the themes of human intolerance and suffering can be traced to his first film, The President (1918). In his second, Leaves From Satan's Book (1919-21),

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he first explores the power of evil over the human mind, a theme which intrigued him throughout his career.

While Dreyer repeatedly reflected upon the consequences of evil, he also made films of a lighter tone. The Parson's Widow (1920), his third film, is a humorous account of a young clergyman who marries a parson's widow in order to secure employment. Inspired by Swedish directors Sjöström and Stiller, Dreyer shot The Parson's Widow in Sweden and, later, The Bride of Glomdale (1925) in Norway, creating lyrical moods in rural atmospheres.

Films in this retrospective include Love One Another (1921), a portrait of the Russian mass destruction of Jews in 1905, and Michael (1924), a story based on a novel by Herman Bang about a master artist and his pupil. Made in Germany, both of these films are distinguished by the authentic depiction of their settings. The Master of the House (1925), a typical Danish play, is transformed by Dreyer into a drama about narrow-minded petit-bourgeois society. Other films include Vampire/The Strange Adventures of David Grey (1930), often listed as both an experimental film and a horror film, and the rarely-shown Two People (1944).

Born in Copenhagen on February 3, 1889, Carl Th. Dreyer was the illegitimate son of Josefina Nilsson, a Swedish maidservant, and Jens Christian Torp, a Danish landowner. He was adopted by Carl Th. Dreyer, a typographer, and his wife, Marie. In 1891 Dreyer's natural mother died from a self-induced abortion; he never met his father. Never very happy at home, Dreyer left his adoptive parents at seventeen, but it was not until a year later that he learned of the circumstances of his own mother's death. He became a journalist in 1909 and in 1912 wrote his first film scripts. After three years, he became a full-time script consultant and writer for the Danish production company,

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Nordisk Films Kompagni. In 1918, at age twenty-nine, Dreyer directed his first film, The President.

After its New York showing, CARL TH. DREYER travels to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (March 1989); the Pacific Film Archive, University Art Museum, UC Berkeley (April 1989); the Cleveland Cinematheque (June 1989); the American Film Institute, Washington D.C. (July 1989); the UCLA Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles (July - August 1989); The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (August 1989); the Cinémathèque Québécoise (September 1989); and Film in the Cities, Minneapolis (October 1989).

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**\*PUBLICATION** Carl Th. Dreyer. Edited by Jytte Jensen. Introduction by Ib Monty, Director, Danish Film Museum. Essays by Jytte Jensen, Carren Kaston, and James Schamus. Includes an English translation of Dreyer's film script, Medea; a filmography; and a selected bibliography. 96 pages. 60 black-and-white film and production stills. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, softcover (\$9.95).

**CONCURRENT EXHIBITION** In conjunction with CARL TH. DREYER, The American Scandinavian Foundation presents an exhibition of forty photographs of the filmmaker at work and stills from seven of his films. CARL THEODOR DREYER IN FOCUS has been sponsored by the Danish Film Museum and remains on view through March 17. Free admission; 127 East 73 Street.

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For further information or film stills, contact Sarah Eaton, film press representative, Department of Public Information, 212/708-9752.

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CARL TH. DREYER

February 17 - March 5, 1989

Directed by Carl Th. Dreyer, the films are in Danish with English subtitles or English voice-over, except where otherwise noted.

## Friday, February 17

- 3:00 p.m. Carl Th. Dreyer. 1966.  
Jørgen Roos. Documentary about and with the Danish filmmaker. 50 minutes.  
They Caught The Ferry (De Naaede Faergen). 1948. 12 minutes.  
A Castle in a Castle (Et Slot I Et Slot). 1954. 9 minutes.
- 6:00 p.m. Vampire/The Strange Adventures of David Grey (Vampyr). 1931-32.  
In German. 70 minutes.  
 Introduction by Ib Monty, director, Danish Film Museum.

## Saturday, February 18

- 2:00 p.m. The President (Praesidenten). 1918-19.  
75 minutes.
- 5:00 p.m. Carl Th. Dreyer; They Caught The Ferry (De Naaede Faergen);  
A Castle in a Castle (Et Slot I et Slot)  
 see Friday, February 17

## Sunday, February 19

- 2:00 p.m. Leaves from Satan's Book (Blade af Satans Bog). 1919-21.  
114 minutes.
- 5:00 p.m. The Parson's Widow (Prästänkan). 1920.  
In Swedish, English voice-over. 83 minutes.

## Monday, February 20

- 2:00 p.m. Love One Another (Die Gezeichneten). 1921-22.  
84 minutes.
- 5:00 p.m. Once Upon a Time (Der Var Engang). 1922.  
incomplete print. 47 minutes.  
Bride of Glomdale (Glomdalsbruden). 1925-26.  
incomplete print. 61 minutes.

Tuesday, February 21

- 3:00 p.m. Michael. 1924.  
In German, English voice-over. 89 minutes.
- 6:00 p.m. Master of the House (Du Skal Aere Din Hustru). 1925.  
97 minutes.

Thursday, February 23

- 3:00 p.m. Vampire/The Strange Adventures of David Grey (Vampyr). 1931-32.  
see Friday, February 17
- 6:00 p.m. The Passion of Joan of Arc (La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc). 1927-28.  
98 minutes.

Friday, February 24

- 3:00 p.m. Two People (Tvaa Människor). 1944-45.  
In Swedish. 78 minutes.
- 6:00 p.m. Danish government shorts written and directed by Carl Th. Dreyer.  
Good Mothers (Mødrehjaelpen). 1942. 12 minutes.  
The Danish Village Church (Landsbykirken). 1947. 14 minutes.  
The Struggle Against Cancer (Kampen mod Kraeften). 1947. 12 minutes.  
Thorvaldsen. 1949. 10 minutes.  
Storstrom Bridge (Storstrømsbroen). 1950. 7 minutes.

Saturday, February 25

- 2:00 p.m. Ordet (The Word). 1954-55.  
126 minutes.
- 5:00 p.m. Day of Wrath (Vredens Dag). 1943.  
100 minutes.

Sunday, February 26

- 2:00 p.m. Gertrud. 1964.  
115 minutes.
- 5:00 p.m. Michael. 1924.  
see Tuesday, February 21

Monday, February 27

- 2:00 p.m. The Passion of Joan of Arc (La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc). 1927-28.  
see Thursday, February 23
- 5:00 p.m. The Word (Ordet). 1954-55.  
see Saturday, February 25

Tuesday, February 28

3:00 p.m. The Parson's Widow (Prästänkan). 1920.  
see Sunday, February 19

6:00 p.m. The President (Praesidenten). 1918-19.  
see Saturday, February 18

Thursday, March 2

3:00 p.m. Danish Government shorts written and directed by Dreyer.  
see Friday, February 24

6:00 p.m. Gertrud. 1964.  
see Sunday, February 26

Friday, March 3

2:00 p.m. Love One Another (Die Gezeichneten). 1921-22.  
see Monday, February 20

6:00 p.m. Two People (Tvaa Manniskor). 1944-45.  
see Friday, February 24

Saturday, March 4

2:00 p.m. Day of Wrath (Vreden's Dag). 1943.  
see Saturday, February 25

5:00 p.m. Once Upon a Time (Der Var Engang). 1922.  
Bride of Glomdale (Glomdalsbruden). 1925-26.  
see Monday, February 20

Sunday, March 5

2:00 p.m. Master of the House (Du Skal Aere Din Hustru). 1925.  
see Tuesday, February 21

5:00 p.m. Leaves from Satan's Book (Blade af Satans Bog). 1919-21.  
see Sunday, February 19

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