

# The Museum of Modern Art

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

216  
NO. 74  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## HOMAGE TO ERICH VON STROHEIM COINCIDES WITH NEW PUBLICATION, PRESENTS SEVERAL PERFORMANCES OF "GREED"

Homage to Erich von Stroheim at The Museum of Modern Art will begin with the legendary film masterpiece "Greed" to coincide with the publication of a new book by Arno Press, called "The Complete Greed." The book, consisting of over 400 photographs, with a foreword by Herman G. Weinberg, who compiled and annotated it, is the only record of the entire film, originally made in 42 reels, nine and one-half hours long. The version that was eventually released, circa two-and-a-half hours, now comes from the Museum archives, and will have five performances, starting Thursday, June 8 at 2:00 p. m. and at 7:00 p. m., when Mr. Weinberg, the author, who is a professor of cinema and a lecturer, will show slides from the missing portions of the picture and discuss the saga of the making of "Greed."

Of unique interest to film scholars, historians, and filmmakers, "Greed" will also be shown Friday, June 9, at 2:00 p. m., Saturday, June 10, at 3:00 p. m., and Sunday, June 11, at 5:30 p. m. In addition, the Museum will present two other famous films by the director: "Blind Husbands" (1919), which Stroheim wrote and directed, and in which he played a role, and "Foolish Wives" (1922), again written and directed by Stroheim, who also designed the sets. "Foolish Wives" will be shown in a newly restored, slightly longer version; like "Blind Husbands," it preceded the making of "Greed," considered to be Stroheim's epic and a film far in advance of its day. It was proclaimed by an international jury at the Brussels Exposition of 1958 as one of the twelve greatest films of all time.

"We were all influenced by 'Greed'," said the renowned director Josef von Sternberg. Sergei Eisenstein is reported to have singled out only Charles Chaplin and Stroheim above all other directors working in Hollywood. Later, it was said by a French critic that while the French New Wave dictated that the camera should be used like a pen, and films should be as personal as a book, Stroheim had been doing just that four decades earlier, although he encountered severe criticism and opposition.

The tribulations of "Greed" are recalled in a foreword to his book by Mr. Weinberg, who

(more)

has been dubbed by Dwight MacDonald "the Boswell of movie history, recording it with accuracy and affection." The picture began as an adaptation of the novel "McTeague," written in 1895 by Frank Norris, who ranked with Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and other social realist writers of the time. The title was changed to "Greed" by June Mathis, the scenarist who had worked on the original script with Stroheim, and who is responsible for the editing of the final version, after Stroheim could reduce it only to six hours. Rex Ingram, the famous director of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," also had worked on the film, succeeding only in editing it into a five hour version. Miss Mathis, who knew the work better than anyone except the director, prepared the version that went into release.

The picture, by now disclaimed by the director, who had worked on it for two years, had its world premiere in December of 1924 at William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theatre on Columbus Circle, on the site of the present New York Cultural Center, where it ran twice a day for six weeks. Mr. Weinberg reports that the otherwise black-and-white print had all the "gold scenes" hand-tinted gold, frame by frame, to drive home the idea of the characters' obsession with money. It had been Stroheim's intention to hand-tint the entire forty-two reels, which presumably was shown only to an elite circle, although rumors have it that Mussolini had an original copy of Stroheim's original film, now said to be stored in M-G-M's salt mine in Utah. It was Samuel Goldwyn who was initially persuaded to make the Norris novel into a film by Stroheim, but with the acquisition of the Goldwyn company by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer the latter inherited this cinema colossus.

Set in San Francisco, the story of "Greed," based on a newspaper report of an actual crime, tells of the disintegration of ordinary people who are mostly first and second generation immigrants of a lower middle-class economic level. A work of unparalleled ferocity, according to Mr. Weinberg, it also makes a social and psychological comment accounting, perhaps, for its lingering power which is not surprising since Norris is the author, and has been referred to as an American Zola, while Stroheim has been called the cinema's Balzac. But Stroheim, implies Weinberg, went beyond the writer's intent "into the darkest recesses of the human psyche -- the disintegration of spirit, beyond even the grace of humiliation..." Small wonder that, as Francois Brody comments, the film "became a provocation, a challenge

(more)

not only to the American film industry, but also to the American dream."

ZaSu Pitts, whose talent Stroheim recognized, becomes a Greek tragedienne, while Jean Hersholt, Gibson Gowland and Chester Conklin, and other members of the cast, literally incarnate the characters into images comparable in integrity to the drawings of Daumier, the paintings of Goya and the caricatures of George Grosz' bourgeoisie in his native Berlin.

As for the unwieldy length of this recognized film masterpiece, Mr. Weinberg refers to the excesses of Beethoven, to O'Neill's "Strange Interlude," to Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past," to Tolstoy's "War and Peace," to the uncut "Parsifal" of Wagner, and he raises the question of how long a work of art should be.

Among filmmakers, Stroheim remains to this day the master, who led Jean Renoir to abandon painting for filming; who inspired Rene Clair to state, on being asked how many people in history can fit the definition of genius, that Erich von Stroheim heads the list: "He owes nothing to anyone and we are all in his debt... the work of von Stroheim, mutilated as it is, still shines with its original luster."

The schedule of the Stroheim series follows:

GREED. 1924. With Gibson Gowland, Jean Hersholt, ZaSu Pitts. ca. 145 min.  
 Thursday, June 8, 2:00 p. m. and 7:00 p. m. Herman Weinberg will introduce both showings.  
 Friday, June 9, 2:00 p. m.  
 Saturday, June 10, 3:00 p. m.  
 Sunday, June 11, 5:30 p. m.

BLIND HUSBANDS. 1919. With Francellia Billington, Erich von Stroheim. ca. 90 min.  
 Monday, June 12, 2:00 p. m.  
 Thursday, June 15, 5:30 p. m.

FOOLISH WIVES. 1922. With Mae Busch, Erich von Stroheim. ca. 112 min.  
 Monday, June 12, 5:30 p. m.  
 Wednesday, June 14, 2:00 p. m.

\*\*\*\*\*

Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7296.