



**THE PROVOCATIVE MASTERPIECE *EROTIKON* TO BE SCREENED AT THE
PORDENONE SILENT FILM FESTIVAL ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6TH**

**ALSO SCREENING THE “BLACKFACE” COMEDY *HAM AND EGGS AT THE FRONT*,
REDISCOVERED AT THE CINETECA ITALIANA AND *LA BATTAGLIA DALL’ASTICO AL
PIAVE*, RESTORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF UDINE**

Press Release

It seems impossible to fathom that the viewing of *Erotikon* today could cause any scandals. But that is precisely what happened when it was released in 1929, inciting a revolution that to this day is considered to be fundamental in the link between eroticism and cinema. *Erotikon* is penned by the *enfant terrible* of Czech cinema **Gustav Machatý**, with an uncredited screenwriting collaboration with poet Vítězslav Nezval, and will be screened Wednesday, October 6th at 9PM at the Teatro Verdi in the **40th edition of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival**. The film perfectly marries an avant garde style with traditional storytelling, thus offering a blend of European artistic trends in the late 20s, from modernism to art déco to surrealism. Positive reviews (the audience’s approval derived from the film’s willingness to discuss taboo subjects) came mostly thanks to Václav Vich’s wonderful cinematography: the drops of rain fusing into a single stream gliding down the window pane has become a staple image of film history. The choice of casting was also pivotal, beginning with the film’s leading lady **Ita Rina**, Slovenia’s first ever film star. Born in the small town of Divaccia near Trieste, then still a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Rina moved with her family to Ljubljana shortly after World War I. Despite her mother’s admonitions, Rina moved to Berlin to pursue her passion for theatre and cinema, quickly landing small acting parts before her fateful encounter with Machatý. Following the film’s success, Rina received many offers from Hollywood, which she declined in part because of her husband’s lack of enthusiasm (she married in 1931 and converted from catholicism to serbian-orthodox Christianity). A different fate was reserved for the lead actress in Machatý’s second feature, *Ecstasy* (1932), who flew to America and changed her name from Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler to Hedy Lamarr, never looking back. Ita Rina’s luck waned after the success of *Erotikon* until 1940, when she officially retired from film. She attempted re-entry in the post-War period, but the Socialist Republic of Slovenia had no use for her. In a letter sent to Tito, Rina complains about her exile and avenges her artistic merits, garnering little sympathy in doing so. Her final appearance on screen takes place in 1960 in *The War*, a Yugoslavian film written by Cesare Zavattini.

Back to *Erotikon*, it is important to note Italian actor **Luigi Serventi** in the role of Andrea’s (Ita Rina) husband. Originally theatre trained, Serventi had reached peak popularity in his homeland by playing the romantic lead to the biggest stars of the times. He moved to Germany in 1923 and was able to replicate the same levels of success he achieved in Italy.

An honorable mention goes to the anonymous actress who briefly appears in her birthday suit in the role of Andrea’s lover, stealing the title from Hedy Kiesler /Lamarr as the first nude in cinema.

Erotikon will be shown with a live musical performance by **Slovenska Kinoteka** and **Andrej Goričar** who directs the **Orchestra of the Imaginary** of Ljubljana.

Wednesday morning at 10:30AM opens with two films that are part of the **women screenwriters retrospective**: **Maie B. Havey** with the short film *A Sea Mystery* (1916), and **Clara S. Beranger**, William C. De Mille’s partner and wife, whom he met on the set of *Miss Lulu Bett* (1921), which is also featured in the programme.

In the afternoon at 2PM, following a screening of a recently rediscovered episode of the series **Who’s Guilty?**, we are showing ***Ham and Eggs at the Front***, an interesting find dating from 1927 from the

Italian Cinematheque of Milan, where it was found and restored as the only known copy of the film. It is a striking example of 'blackface', where the black characters are played by heavily made up white actors. The film itself is quite ambivalent, one side flaunting racist prejudices, the other side championing the heroic feats of the film's titular soldiers, nicknamed "Ham" and "Eggs". The film is a delirious comedy seen through today's lens, with **Myrna Loy** playing a Senegalese seductress. The comedic scenes between the characters played by Tom Wilson e Heinie Conklin go hand in hand with death omens, as shown in the exhilarating final sequence set on a hot air balloon paired with scenes of them being chased by skeletons.

The afternoon ends with an important document on World War I, ***La battaglia dall'Astico al Piave***, an Italian Military production showcasing images of the decisive events of the battle on the Piave between June 14th and 30th, 1918. Footage of the flight over Vienna led by Gabriele D'Annunzio, the Austro-Hungarian defeat and General Armando Diaz's victory announcement are all shown in the film. This new restoration is curated by the **University of Udine**, with the collaboration of the Cineteca del Friuli, Istituto Luce, Kinoatelje, Cineteca Italiana, Museo Nazionale del Cinema and Lobster Films and is the result of a year's worth of work focused on the philological reconstruction and restoration of the collected materials. Following the Giornate del Cinema Muto premiere, the film will tour in the cities of Udine, Rome, Turin and other Italian cities in celebration of the centenary of the Unknown Soldier.

The **online programme** for Wednesday, October 6th, offers the Korean film *A Public Prosecutor and a Teacher* (1948), available on MYmovies from 9PM (Italian time). The film is peculiar as Korean cinema reverted to silent films in the aftermath of World War II when they lacked means, and it is narrated with a voice over by an authentic *byeonsa*, the Korean equivalent of Japanese *benshi* narrators. Starting at 5PM, the meetings with the author are dedicated to two big French and global silent film era personalities: **Max Linder**, with *The Rise and Fall of Max Linder: The First Cinema Celebrity* by Lisa Stein Haven and Catherine Cormon; and director **Abel Gance**, whose correspondence with Charles Pathé is collected in *A. Gance, Ch. Pathé Correspondance 1918-1955*, curated by Elodie Tamayo.

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