

BFI PRESS RELEASE

Sexploitation Part One



Before **Russ Meyer's** *The Immoral Mr Teas* (1959), cinematic nakedness came laced with heavy doses of moralising or – even worse – endless games of volleyball ‘au naturel’. But Russ Meyer stripped away the cant and celebrated the male gaze with a cocktail of gals and gags for the Playboy generation. For the next few weeks BFI Southbank will play host to a tantalising season of screen erotica when we question whether it is time to develop a critical framework for sex-rated cinema.

From *Mr Teas*... to Twentieth Century-Fox in just ten years, Russ Meyer took dirty movies to the mainstream, from his cult classic *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1965) - a favourite of **John Waters** and even feminist critics – to *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970), for which he was provided a million-dollar budget. His demented universe overflows with outrageously abundant vixens and square-jawed saps, but striking compositions and visceral cutting reveal a meticulous craftsman behind the madness.

Of the scores of subsequent imitators, most were merely pretexts for pin-up parades. But in the mid-60s, with the advent of narrative-driven ‘roughie’ dramas, more ambitious, maverick filmmakers seized the opportunity to go where Hollywood dared not, titillating and transgressing in equal measures. As film styles of ‘sex-exploitation’ mutated and matured, sub-genres, stars, studios and even ‘auteurs’ would emerge. The dark and driven psychodramas *The Bed and How to Make It!* (1966) and *Come Ride the Wild Pink Horse* (1967) by **Joseph W Sarno** rework themes of sex, power and money in a style likened to Sirk and Fassbinder. (Sarno will appear on-stage at BFI Southbank next month.) By contrast, master of elegant eroticism **Radley Metger's** films *Therese and Isabelle* (1968) and *Camille 2000* (1969) combine the sophistication of classic Hollywood with the controversial themes of international arthouse cinema. Despite being a New York native, this discerning cinéaste shot many of his features – frequently based on literary sources – in Europe.

We will conclude the first part of this season with the UK premiere of *Schlock! The Secret History of American Movies* (2001), featuring **Roger Corman's** teen and monster quickies alongside the skin shows produced by **David**

Friedman. The director **Ray Greene** will introduce both screenings and take questions from the audiences. The season will conclude in October when we move into strange tales for Time Square and a survey of soft-core cinema in the early 70s.

September Programme:

Sexploitation: An Illustrated Introduction

For much of its first 50 years, sexploitation cinema has been treated with everything from confusion to contempt. At best, it is considered a cultural curio, at worst, vehemently condemned as a social evil. Only one thing is certain: 'dirty movies' have effectively been excluded from the cinematic canon. But the genre has its own coherent tradition, stretching back to before Hollywood itself became respectable. So, asks season curator Julian Marsh III, is it time to embrace the erotic and to develop a critical framework for sex-rated cinema?

Wed 2 Sept 18:30 NFT2 Tickets £5

The Immoral Mr Teas

USA 1959. Dir Russ Meyer. With Bill Teas, Ann Peters, Marilyn Wesley. 63min

+ The Incredibly Strange Film Show: Russ Meyer

Channel X for Channel 4 1988. Dir Andy Harries. With Jonathan Ross, Russ Meyer, Tura Satana. 34min

In ...*Mr Teas*' look-but-never-touch perambulations, some critics discerned the erotic alienation of a mid-20th century Everyman while others saw it as topless Tati – M. Hulot with mammaries. Either way, Russ Meyer's highly influential ode to ogling offers no excuses for its middle-aged denture delivery boy's voyeuristic fantasies beyond the opinion that some men just like to lust after unattainable women. Plus Jonathan Ross's legendary encounter with 'King Leer'. Extravagantly cantilevered superstars Tura Satana and Kitten Natividad and renowned film critic Roger Ebert, author of several Meyer screenplays, provide personal insights into the director's idiosyncratic working methods. There is also tantalisingly rare footage from his epic career summation, *The Breast Of Russ Meyer*, which dominated the last quarter century of his life but which, sadly, he never completed.

Wed 2 Sept 20:40 NFT2, Tue 8 Sept 20:50 NFT1

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!

USA 1965. Dir Russ Meyer. With Tura Satana, Haji, Lori Williams. 83min

This torrid tale of three go-go dancers on a kidnapping and killing spree remains a favourite of cult movie fans and feminist critics alike. Never before or since has the battle of the sexes been fought with such ferocity. A *tour de force* of two-fisted film-making which bludgeons its audience with archetypal images and montage as visceral as a volley of karate blows. 'Beyond a doubt, the best movie ever made,' raved John Waters.

Sat 5 Sept 20:45 NFT1, Fri 18 Sept 20:45 NFT1, Sun 20 Sept 20:45 NFT1

Beyond the Valley of the Dolls

USA 1970. Dir Russ Meyer. With Dolly Read, Cynthia Myers, Marcia McBroom. 109min

When Hollywood royalty Richard Zanuck gave 'King of the Nudies' Russ Meyer a million dollars to make a film for Fox, the middle-aged director did not let his ignorance of late-60s Tinseltown excess prevent him from creating a transcendently tongue-in-cheek, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll fable about an all-girl band in LaLa Land. Every other line is quote-worthy, and the groovy tunes keep on coming. This is the happening that freaks everyone out!

Sat 19 Sept 18:30 NFT1, Tue 22 Sept 18:00 NFT3 + Illustrated introduction by Julian Marsh

Therese and Isabelle

USA-West Germany 1968. Dir Radley Metzger. With Essy Persson, Anna Gaël, Barbara Laage. 118min

French author Violette Leduc granted Radley Metzger permission to film her autobiographical novel of love in a girls' boarding school on one condition – that he did not make a 'dirty film'. He repaid her trust magnificently, creating a classic of lesbian cinema which is both erotic and moving but never exploitative. Strikingly shot in monochrome, widescreen Ultrascopes, with an evocative Georges Auric score, it compares admirably with films by directors of the *nouvelle vague*.

Sat 5 Sept 16:10 NFT1, Mon 14 Sept 20:30 NFT1

Camille 2000

USA-Italy 1969. Dir Radley Metzger. With Danièle Gaubert, Nino Castelnuovo, 115min

Radley Metzger transposed Dumas *filis*' tragic tale – of handsome young heir Armand's tempestuous affair with high-class courtesan Marguerite – to the *dolce vita* decadence of late-60s Rome, a world of pop art and ancient palazzi. In a film of surfaces, multiple mirrors reflect the fragmented lovers against featureless white sheets and even the syringe Marguerite uses for her fix is fetishised. But Metzger never neglects the grand passion, building to an emotional climax of operatic intensity.

Tue 15 Sept 20:45 NFT1, Sat 19 Sept 20:30 NFT3

The Bed and How To Make It!

USA 1966. Dir Joseph W Sarno. With Francine Ashley, Judson Todd, Lorraine Claire. 90min

In the films of Joe Sarno, sex is never simply sex. Nubile minx Ellen, sent to stay with motel-owning aunt Connie, swiftly sets about seducing husband Russ – a superbly sleazy performance by Sarno regular Judson Todd – and Vince, a minor hood from the local bar. But the tearaway teen's experiments with her new-found sexual powers soon drag her into a cynical, adult underworld of alcoholism, swinging and blackmail. A luridly twisted (im)morality tale.

Thu 17 Sept 20:30 NFT3, Sun 27 Sept 18:20 NFT2

Come Ride the Wild Pink Horse

USA 1967. Dir Joseph W Sarno. With Mona Marshal (aka Patricia McNair), Peggy Steffans (aka Cleo Nova), Rene Valli (aka Monique Drevon) 86min

The lot of bored women marooned in dormitory suburbs provided the basis for several of Joe Sarno's most memorable films. In this variation on the theme – until recently considered lost – personal liberation, lust, idealism and the almighty dollar clash, as a pair of well-heeled housewives slum it in a free-loving, bohemian commune. Making the most of a small budget, the minimalist style owes more to

the East Village underground than to Times Square sleaze.

Sat 5 Sept 18:40 NFT2, Wed 16 Sept 18:30 NFT2 + Introduction by Julian Marsh

Boin-n-g!

USA 1963. Dir Herschell Gordon Lewis. With William Kerwin, Bill Johnson, Vickie Miles. 70min. Video

The same year, the same film makers, the same topic – the sexploitation business itself – but two markedly different approaches. In *Boin-n-g!* a pair of wannabe skinflick moguls have to cope with contrary starlets, incompetent crew and technical snafus as they strive to make a nudie-cutie. The numerous in-jokes clearly draw on David Friedman and Herschell Gordon Lewis's own experiences filming epidermis epics.

+ Scum of the Earth!

USA 1963. Dir Herschell Gordon Lewis. With William Kerwin, Vickie Miles, Lawrence Wood. 73min

In *Scum of the Earth*, an innocent college girl models for harmless cheesecake photos but soon the head of the vice racket starts demanding that she poses for far harder stuff. The exposé approach harks back to the dreadful warnings of 1940s 'classic exploitation' as well as looking forward to the fully fledged roughies of the 1960s. In both films, Friedman and Lewis's tongues are clearly in their cheeks – though, ironically, the sunny, funny comedy is almost certainly closer to reality than the hysterical – even campy – monochrome melodrama.

Fri 4 Sept 20:15 NFT2, Wed 9 Sept 18:00 NFT2

The Defilers

USA 1965. Dir Lee Frost. With Byron Mabe, Jerome Eden, Mai Jansson. 69min

A pair of rich, spoilt, thrill-seekers kidnap a fresh-off-the-bus blonde, imprison her in a basement and abuse her as their sex slave. David Friedman's first production after relocating to Hollywood is a well-acted study of sociopathic nastiness. Sexploitation stalwart Lee Frost delivers the sadistic spectacle with disturbing detachment. A chillingly effective roughie which, even today, some people may find uncomfortable viewing. Plus exclusive and previously unseen interview footage of Mr Friedman from *Schlock!* director Ray Greene.

Sat 12 Sept 20:40 NFT2*, Wed 16 Sept 20:45 NFT2 *Introduction by Julian Marsh

Schlock! The Secret History of American Movies

USA 2001. Dir Ray Greene. With David F Friedman, Doris Wishman, Harry Novak. 90min. Video

Three years in the making, this tribute to those Hollywood outsiders who seized their chance to make movies by breaching all boundaries of taste is as hilarious as it is informative. From roadshow pioneers, peddling 'clap operas' around the Midwest, through Roger Corman's teen and monster quickies, to the skin shows of David Friedman, Harry Novak and the redoubtable Doris Wishman, Ray Greene's labour of love is filled with affection for these magnificent showmen.

Sun 27 Sept 20:30 NFT3, Wed 30 Sept 18:10 NFT1 Followed by discussion

October Programme:

Scarf of Mist, Thigh of Satin

USA 1967. Dir Joseph W Sarno. With Sheila Britt, Peggy Steffans (aka Cleo Nova), Judson Todd. 80min

Noir was never nastier than in Joe Sarno's long-considered-lost exposé of fashion business venality, where backstabbing and betrayal are commonplace and sex is merely a commodity used to seal the deal. This only known print has a section lasting approximately 15 minutes which is slightly out of focus, but we believe that this imperfection should not detract from a unique opportunity to experience the master of sexploitation morality tales at his most acerbic.

Thu 1 Oct 21:00 NFT1* Wed 7 Oct 18:00 NFT2 * Introduced by Joseph Sarno

Swedish Wildcats

USA-Sweden 1972. Dir Joseph W Sarno. With Cia Löwgren, Solveig Andersson, Diana Dors. 91min

In a Copenhagen brothel where the girls parade in ritualistic 'wild animal' shows, clad in full body make-up and nothing else, the madame (a florid Diana Dors) pimps her two nieces. During the '70s Joe Sarno frequently worked in Europe, shooting in

colour, but while his films became less stylistically stark, the signature themes of sex, power and money remained. Despite a somewhat forced thriller plotline, this is an unsettling film about love and illusion.

Thu 1 Oct 18:15 NFT1* Thu 8 Oct 20:50 NFT1 *Followed by Joseph Sarno in Conversation

Venus In Furs

USA 1967. Dir Joseph Marzano. With Barbara Ellen, Shep Wild, Janet Banzet. 65min

While many sexploitation treatments of sado-masochism were either facile or misogynist – and frequently both – this double bill demonstrates how, in the hands of intelligent, individualistic film makers, transgressive material could provide a quirky commentary on the ‘battle of the sexes’. *Venus In Furs* director Joseph Marzano had been making underground films for almost 20 years when he adapted Sacher- Masoch’s novel of female domination.

+ I, Marquis De Sade

USA 1967. Dir Richard Hilliard. With Babette Bardot, Jennie Lee, Sheldon Pearson. 73min

A strikingly dreamlike work, it retains a distinctive avant-garde feel, with stylised imagery which probably thrilled dedicated fetishists but must have baffled the majority of grindhouse audiences. *I, Marquis De Sade* – until now thought lost – transplants the notorious proponent of extreme licentiousness to contemporary Los Angeles, where a translator of his works attempts to live by a philosophy of untrammelled hedonism. But the realities of contemporary life prove less than conducive to a latter-day de Sade. Both prints have imperfections but this is a rare chance to see these two bizarre films.

Sat 3 Oct 20:10 NFT3, Sun 11 Oct 17:50 NFT3

Score

USA/Yugoslavia 1972. Dir Radley Metzger. With Lynn Lowry, Calvin Culver, Claire Wilbur. 90min. Video

Take two couples – the naïve, newly-weds and the jaded, bi-sexual hedonists out to seduce them – throw in a studly telephone repair man, and imagine the possibilities. Radley Metzger’s chamber piece, based on an off-Broadway play, twists porn clichés into an exquisitely witty take on Seventies swinging and a celebration of polysexual pleasures. With terrific performances from a cast including cult star Lynn Lowry and gay porn icon Cal Culver. Come with an open mind!

Tue 6 Oct 17:40 NFT1* Sat 10 Oct 15:50 NFT1 *Introduced by Julian Marsh III

Cry Uncle aka Super Dick

USA 1971. Dir John G Avildsen. With Allen Garfield, Madeleine Le Roux. 87min. Video

Five years before winning an Oscar for *Rocky*, John G Avildsen helmed this hilarious bad-taste comedy-thriller. The convoluted plot concerns a blackmailed millionaire, but the film really belongs to Allen Garfield (*Nashville*, *The Conversation*) as Jake Masters, a pot-bellied PI in a soiled singlet who even wears his pork-pie hat while making love. Remarkably, Garfield reveals vulnerable humanity in the slobbish anti-hero and ultimately makes him sympathetic. Reputedly one of Oliver Stone’s favourite films!

Mon 5 Oct 21:00 NFT1 Fri 9 Oct 18:30 NFT2

Flesh Gordon

USA 1974. Dir Michael Benveniste & Howard Ziehm. With Jason Williams, Candy Samples. 78min

The 70s trend for kitsch nostalgia simultaneously celebrated and sent-up previous generations’ pop culture and this campy spoof of the classic sci-fi serial is warmly affectionate. While its humour is strictly of the sophomoric stoner variety, the production design and stop-motion effects are impressive and it is hard not to cheer along as Flesh and his allies risk rude and ribald danger from phallic monsters and priapic robots while saving the earth from Emperor Wang’s sex ray.

Mon 12 Oct 18:00 NFT1 Wed 14 Oct 18:00 NFT1

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EVENTS:

Booking information

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £8.60, concs £6.25 Members pay £1 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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