



73rd IFFMH: “Bodies in Film” – The 2024 Retrospective

Press release – Mannheim, 01 August 2024

The retrospective at the 73rd International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg, which will be held this year from 07 to 17 November, is dedicated to the complex theme of “Bodies in Film”. Festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz and curator Hannes Brühwiler have selected 12 works that illustrate how the depiction of bodies in cinema has changed over time: from Buster Keaton’s early slapstick films in the silent era, which draw much of their comedy from hair-raising stunts, to present-day science-fiction films, which feature bodies created through digital means. The subject is our own and others’ perceptions of the body as well as questions of identity, sexuality, race and disability, political resistance and the balance or imbalance of power between the sexes.

Curator Hannes Brühwiler: “This year, we’ve chosen a theme for our retrospective which could hardly be more immediate to us: the human body. It also plays a special role in the history of film. In cinema, the bodies of the actors and actresses are a means of seducing us, of immersing us in this wonderful medium and indeed of touching us. The story is told around and through their bodies. But questions of identity, prejudice and racism are also linked to the body. Given the complexity of this topic, we are delighted to be able to present a selection of films that is wonderfully diverse in terms of both content and genre. It includes some classics as well as great rediscoveries.”

As part of the retrospective, a panel discussion will be held in the Festival Lounge at Karlstorbahnhof Heidelberg on 16 November. The panellists will be the artist, curator and author Moshtari Hilal (“Hässlichkeit”) and the actor and author Samuel Koch from Mannheim. As always, admission to this discussion is free of charge.

Body and sex

In films, bodies reflect and catalyse the plot. As in life, they express the way the characters relate to themselves and to others. But they are also subject to society’s judgement. This is a central theme in the work of French director and author Catherine Breillat, who challenges our stereotypical body images. What is beauty? Who is desirable? Her film ›**Fat Girl**‹ (2001), a poignant but also disturbing coming-of-age story about an overweight 12-year-old girl (Anaïs Reboux), is an example of this. ›**Fat Girl**‹ deals not only with exploring and questioning one’s own body, but also with observing others and having violent fantasies. Not least, it is also about manipulation and violence by men. Jane Campion’s ›**In the Cut**‹ (2003) also deals with female desire as it paints a complex picture that alternates between sheer lust, romantic reverie and brutal reality. A New York literature professor meets a police officer who is investigating

a woman's murder; she feels physically attracted to him although she also suspects him of being connected to the murder. In this role, Meg Ryan achieved a radical break from her image as a sweetheart. Takashi Miike, on the other hand, plays with the conventional power imbalance between the sexes in ›**Audition**‹ (1999) — and radically reverses it. In his search for a wife, a lonely widower resorts to a dubious scheme. But what begins as a fake audition turns into a genuine nightmare for him, in which the winner of the audition takes over his body. A key work of body horror.

Bodies as political realities

To the extent that the body is regarded as an unchanging given, this retrospective also focuses on pressing social issues regarding race, physical disability and political resistance. In this sense, the queer cult film ›**The Watermelon Woman**‹ (1996) by Cheryl Dunye is a discovery of the retrospective. In an introspective and surprising way, Dunye counters the invisibility and absence of Black and queer people in American film history. The director slips into the role of a young lesbian who works in a video rental shop and comes across the many nameless Black actors and actresses in early Hollywood cinema. She is particularly fascinated by an actress who was given the racially derogatory epithet "The Watermelon Woman". Dunye sets out in search of her in order to tell her story. Ousmane Sembène's legendary debut film ›**Black Girl**‹ (1966) is a classic of African cinema. In it, Sembène, one of Africa's foremost filmmakers and writers, tells of colonialism in a supposedly post-colonial world — and of a radical act of resistance by a young woman who resolves never to be a slave again.



›Black Girl‹ © trigon-film

Michael Fassbender's body becomes a genuine symbol of political resistance in his role as IRA member Bobby Sands. Kept under inhumane conditions in Northern Ireland's notorious Maze maximum-security prison, Sands goes on a



hunger strike. With his debut film ›**Hunger**‹ (2008), Steve McQueen, previously known as a video artist, succeeded in taking an unsparing look at a dark chapter of recent history. In addition to McQueen's inimitable depiction of the horror, Michael Fassbender's acting performance and the staging of his body stand out in particular. Fassbender lost 20 kg so that he could give a realistic portrayal of the hunger strike. In contrast, ›**Freaks**‹ (1932) by Tod Browning is set in the world of sideshows, a form of fairground entertainment in which people with physical deformities were often put on display. Played by actual sideshow performers, the film focuses on a community of marginalised people who cultivate a radical acceptance of one another. A scandal at its premiere, the humane quality of the film later came to the fore and the work was celebrated as an avant-garde masterpiece from the 1960s onwards.

Transformative bodily representations

This retrospective will nonetheless also be presenting works that reflect on the possible extension and alteration of bodies. The digital special effect of morphing, the fluid transformation of a body, made James Cameron's ›**Terminator 2: Judgment Day**‹ (1991) an absolute sensation at the time of its release. David Cronenberg, the founder of the body horror genre, also depicts physical transformations in a revolutionary and fascinating way in his masterpiece ›**Videodrome**‹ (1983). In an obsessive search for the source of a television show, the main character (James Woods) is caught up in a hallucinatory vortex in which even his own body seems to change.

Choreographed bodies: slapstick, dance and martial arts

Cinema derives its unique seductive power from the presentation of bodies. Its choreographies are able to draw upon centuries-old traditions of dance, acrobatics and martial arts. In this context, the retrospective will highlight three selected works from different genres and periods, beginning with a frenzied competition to be the fastest steamer on the Mississippi in ›**Steamboat Bill, Jr.**‹ (1928), one of the most influential films directed by and starring Buster Keaton, who showcases his athletic and comedic skills to perfection here. Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell also staged a beguiling whirlwind of movement in ›**The Red Shoes**‹ (1948), one of the most spectacular dance films in history. And attesting to no less choreographic mastery is ›**The Raid**‹ (2011), a film by Gareth Evans with action scenes that are second to none: on the trail of a drug baron, a SWAT team has to battle its way up, floor by floor, inside a high-rise building. Everything here revolves around perfectly staged martial arts sequences in which the fighting bodies of the actors create a veritable cinematic frenzy. We are screening the new remaster of the film, made last year under the supervision of the director.



›The Red Shoes‹ © ITV Global Entertainment / Park Circus

This year's IFFMH retrospective thus presents a rich variety of different bodily representations in cinema and familiarises viewers with the relevant genres and issues relating to content as it revisits different eras. It can already be said that these historical works will once again provide intriguing links to the current films in the programme.

The films in chronological order:

- ›**Steamboat Bill, Jr.**‹ (dir.: Charles Reisner, Buster Keaton, USA, 1928)
- ›**Freaks**‹ (dir.: Tod Browning, USA, 1932)
- ›**The Red Shoes**‹ (dir.: Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1948)
- ›**Black Girl**‹ (dir.: Ousmane Sembène, Senegal, France, 1966)
- ›**Videodrome**‹ (dir.: David Cronenberg, Canada, 1983)
- ›**Terminator 2: Judgment Day**‹ (dir.: James Cameron, USA, 1991)
- ›**The Watermelon Woman**‹ (dir.: Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1996)
- ›**Audition**‹ (dir.: Takashi Miike, Japan, South Korea, 1999)
- ›**Fat Girl**‹ (dir.: Catherine Breillat, France, 2001)
- ›**In the Cut**‹ (dir.: Jane Campion, UK, Australia, France, 2003)
- ›**Hunger**‹ (dir.: Steve McQueen, UK, Ireland, 2008)
- ›**The Raid**‹ (dir.: Gareth Evans, Indonesia, France, 2011)



About the IFFMH

With “New Film Experience” as its credo, the IFFMH has been venturing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on and through the art of film since 1952. This makes it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale, and it continues to be a major platform for cultural, social and political dialogue. With each subsequent edition, the IFFMH, as a festival for the public in cinemas, invites festivalgoers to discover the rising stars of the international film scene as well as to follow the careers of established filmmakers and to become more familiar with film in the context of other art forms. The 73rd IFFMH will be held from 07 to 17 November 2024.

Images

You can download images from our press area by using this link:

https://www.iffmh.de/partners-and-press/press-material/index_eng.html

Media inquiries

Regional media

Rebecca Raab

Media and public relations

e-mail: rebecca.raab@iffmh.de

Tel. +49 621 489262 22

German and international media

Carola Schaffrath

e-mail: c.schaffrath@filmpresse-meuser.de

Tel. +49 69 405 804 0

Anne Schütz

e-mail: a.schuetz@filmpresse-meuser.de

Tel. +49 69 405 804 19

The festival would like to thank its sponsors and partners.