

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP presents

CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO

SUMMER 2007 PROGRAMME GUIDE June 1 - August 18 • Volume 17 Number 4

All screenings take place at the Art Gallery of Ontario's Jackman Hall, 317 Dundas St. West. (Please use McCaul St. entrance.)

PIERROT LE FOU

Guy Maddin's Cabinet of Wonders
Pedro Costa
Almodóvar & Hollywood's Golden Age
50 Years of Janus Films
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ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

Pedro Almodóvar is the most maddening of contemporary auteurs. He has made some of the most pleasurable art cinema of the past few decades – *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER* and *WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN* are enormously compelling by just about any standard – and some real dreck. (The films from *TIE ME UP! TIE ME DOWN!* through *KIKA* make for an almost unforgivable career lapse.) When things go well in an Almodóvar creation, the recipe most often involves a clear and deft gesture of cinematic bricolage, wrapped in layers of luminous, inspired performances from his troupe of extraordinary Spanish actresses.

This programme of playful double bills celebrates how some of these fine concoctions spring forth from an inspired and unapologetic repurposing of Hollywood's Golden Age and, especially, its legendary divas. All of these pairs were suggested by Almodóvar himself, as part of a recent retrospective and exhibition at La Cinémathèque française. He was asked to suggest several films inspired by or complementary to each film in his career. The result was a sprawling, frequently naughty, and utterly unique survey of cinema history. This programme culls that list down to six pairs that encapsulate his un-ironic, clear-eyed affection for Joan Crawford, George Cukor, Douglas Sirk, Joseph Mankiewicz, Bette Davis, Nicholas Ray, and the extraordinary worlds, aesthetic and narrative, they created.

To focus the programme on American classics was a decision taken with some anxiety; even the casual cineaste can identify Almodóvar as an astute student and reassembler of cinema history; name-checking his influences is practically film nerd sport. He liberally draws from all of cinema's masters – Bergman and Hitchcock are his principal suppli-

ers of visual language, Buñuel a cultural touchstone – but Almodóvar's creative spirit and the passionate emotive core of his cinema is so clearly inspired by Hollywood that he can, in breathtaking fashion, quote an entire monologue from *JOHNNY GUITAR* towards the end of *WOMEN ON THE VERGE*, and it feels completely right.

Almodóvar's symbiotic relationship with American cinema functions largely through his appropriation of great female performance. He has molded many of this generation's boldest international stars: Carmen Maura, Marisa Paredes, Cecilia Roth, Penélope Cruz, Rossy de Palma, Chus Lampreave . . . the list goes on. They have become some of cinema's greatest divas by channeling and making contemporary the pain, suffering, and will to overcome heartbreak that first animated the very idea of cinematic melodrama. (I also include Antonio Banderas on that list above, despite his gender. In their two key films together, *LAW OF DESIRE* and *MATADOR*, Almodóvar deploys the stunning young man as a kind of kooky femme fatale. The performances don't actually make sense if Claudette Colbert doesn't come to mind from time to time.)

However, it would be a mistake to imagine Almodóvar single-handedly resurrecting Joan Crawford out of whole cloth every few years. He insists that the women in his films contend with modernity, usually through amusing transgressions involving sexual difference, gender realignment, technology, and Spanish (often specifically Castilian) cultural cliché. But his divas also find themselves in murkier contemporary waters, making peace with more recherché subjects like organ transplantation. Of late, they overcome classical bondage through other cultural forms, such as dance, literature, and music.

BRICOLAGE AND THE DIVAS: ALMODÓVAR MEETS HOLLYWOOD'S GOLDEN AGE

"This teasing melodramatist-modernist may be something unprecedented in movie history."

— David Denby, *The New Yorker*

"All of the influences on me and all of the film references in my films are very spontaneous and visual. I don't make any tributes. I'm a very naïve spectator. I can't learn from the movies that I love."

— Pedro Almodóvar

"You are more and more authentic the more you look like someone you dreamed of being." — La Agrado in *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER*

Nor is Almodóvar a purveyor of camp. Although some critics think otherwise, I believe he (like those who influenced him, and particularly Sirk) embraces melodrama without an iota of irony. Almodóvar honestly believes that the ability to deliver heightened emotions is one of cinema's great gifts; that cinema can actually make you feel the world more strongly. It is true that his films are often very funny, but the situational humour he employs is never at the expense of his heroines; their difficulties are deadly serious, no matter their origin. His own response to cinema seems to confirm an un-ironic gaze: "Movies changed my life," he has said. "Why wouldn't they have a similar impact on others?"

If we seek a key to what motivates Almodóvar's playful aesthetic, we might find it in a more personal impulse. Consider his famously deadpan and telling aphorism when asked about his influences: "Everything that isn't autobiographical is plagiarism." It follows that there is something of himself, a gay man, a former punk rock gender illusionist, a country boy awed by the big city, central to all his work as well.

This autobiographical tendency is strongest in the early films, up to *WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN*, and the programme focuses mostly on this difficult-to-see work. These films are raw, low-budget bundles of energy, splashing their giddy transgressions onto the screen. He is not interested in seamless appropriation at this time, instead haphazardly plunking bits of classic Hollywood into a newly radicalized Spain, then deep into the cultural *movido* that followed Franco's death. The push and pull of cocaine-addled whores, slammed up against Nick and Nora Charles dialogue remains head-spinning today. We have included the justly celebrated

trio of *LAW OF DESIRE*, *MATADOR*, and *WOMEN*, plus the very early *LABYRINTH OF PASSION*, a kind of compulsive sketchbook for the work to come. Watching these films, one can delight in seeing a young artist hitting his early high points, translating the influences he feels deeply in his heart into raucous cinema that never fails to entertain.

We have avoided Almodóvar's problematic middle period, shuttling through to the two films that best embody his current identity as a director, *FLOWER OF MY SECRET* and *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER*. As Almodóvar became less interested in trespass for its own sake — think *KIKA* — he turned back to the cinemas that inspired him, most notably the "women's pictures" and, specifically, the great George Cukor. Both of these films share the Hollywood master's casual classiness, facility with language, and narratives of stealth complexity, and a belief in the exhilarating capacity of cinema to transform how we see the world.

— Noah Cowan

Footnote: William Klein's decidedly *après le déluge* *POLLY MAGGOO* is here mostly for sentimental reasons, although Grayson Hall clearly hails from the same stratosphere as Rosalind Russell et al.

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JOHNNY GUITAR

JOHNNY GUITAR

Director: Nicholas Ray
USA 1954 110 minutes
Cast: Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden

"Ray's most bizarre film, and probably his most personal" (Andrew Sarris) is a Tricolor feast for the eyes, a camp classic, and a delirious melodrama that has spawned innumerable interpretations, but is often pegged as a metaphor of the McCarthy era. Joan Crawford plays the leather-wearing, gun-toting Vienna, a saloon owner with plans to modernize the town, at war with Mercedes McCambridge over the men they love. Almodóvar has said that Nicholas Ray is always original, regardless of the genre he tackles; watching the audacious and electric JOHNNY GUITAR wreak havoc with the western, it seems impossible to disagree. "The whole thing is weird, hysterical, and quite unlike anything else in the history of the cowboy film: where else can one find a long-expected shootout between two fast and easy killers averted by a woman's insistence that they help her prepare breakfast?" (Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*).

Friday, June 15 6:30 p.m. **Rated PG**

WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

(MUJERES AL BORDE DE UN ATAQUE DE NERVIOS)

Director: Pedro Almodóvar
Spain 1988 90 minutes
Cast: Antonio Banderas, Carmen Maura

"Gorging on the bad, bad world of TV soap operas, tabloid news and those Roy Lichtenstein cartoons where anguished women lament their lives with 'Brad' . . . Almodóvar gets a wonderful rise out of life's lows in WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN" (Desson Howe, *The Washington Post*). A wildly brilliant, raucous film, WOMEN sketches the travails of the eponymous, emotionally overwrought women: voice-dubbing actress Pepa, shunned by her married lover; Lucia, the gun-wielding cheated wife; and Candela, dodging police after having fallen for a terrorist. Although WOMEN's visual language is inspired by early Hitchcock, Almodóvar uses Nicholas Ray's JOHNNY GUITAR as the film's unforgettable framing device, twice deploying Joan Crawford's Grand Guignol monologue as an act of revolution. Almodóvar claims his intention was not to pay homage to Ray's one-of-a-kind western, which he considers to be a masterpiece, but to appropriate "one of the most romantic dialogues ever written for the cinema." "WOMEN slinks devilishly (and expertly) between farce, absurdism and tragedy. . . a perfectly realized work by a man of demonic wit and tender sensibility" (Howe).

Friday, June 15 8:45 p.m. **Rated 14A**

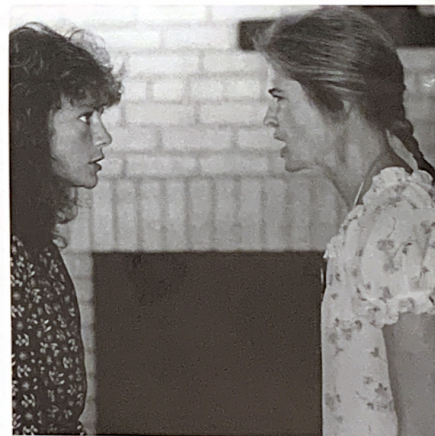


WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

RICH AND FAMOUS

Director: George Cukor
USA 1981 117 minutes
Cast: Jacqueline Bisset, Candice Bergen

"Feelings of great depth and poignancy surface unpredictably in this film by George Cukor. . . Yet [it] stays in the mind for its dark asides on aging, loneliness, and the troubling survival of sexual needs" (Dave Kehr, *Chicago Reader*). Cukor's last film is a bold and marvelously unselfconscious concoction, with a maverick script and the dueling duet of Bergen/Bisset reveling in their roles for the great "woman's director." RICH AND FAMOUS follows two college friends as they each become very different kinds of writers, one a serious New York auteur (Bisset) given to random sexual trysts, the other a naïve housewife (Bergen) who writes a tell-all about her Malibu neighbours. Cukor cultivates a nuanced relationship between these two women on the verge, employing crackling funny dialogue in this quite Almodóvarian and unpredictable portrait of female friendship across the years.



Monday, June 18 6:30 p.m.

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THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET

(LA FLOR DE MI SECRETO)

Director: Pedro Almodóvar • Spain/France 1995 103 minutes • Cast: Marisa Paredes, Juan Echanove

"Almodóvar's most open, unadorned, emotive and maybe even courageous film to date, an intimate portrait of pain and regeneration that strikes the heart without trickery" (Trevor Johnston, *Time Out Film Guide*). A welcome return to form for Almodóvar, *THE FLOWER OF MY SECRET* features one of his most sympathetic heroines, fiery but vulnerable romance writer Leo (Marisa Paredes), who blindly clings to her doomed marriage to a military man. *FLOWER*'s gorgeous, lush colour palettes ingeniously complement Leo's extreme emotional highs and lows; she suffers as magnificently as any Golden Age heroine ever did, while Almodóvar regulars Rossy De Palma and Chus Lampreave almost steal the show with their hilarious, catty dust-ups. Almodóvar has said that he finds the convergence of three elements – friends, women, and novelists – extremely interesting, and one feels the strong connection to Cukor's film about female writers in *FLOWER*, whose fireside reconciliation scene echoes that of the Hollywood master's in *RICH AND FAMOUS*. "An intimate, beautifully wrought work, it reflects a new maturity in Almodóvar's work and is one of his best pictures" (Kevin Thomas, *Los Angeles Times*).

Monday, June 18 8:45 p.m.

DUEL IN THE SUN

Director: King Vidor • USA 1947 138 minutes • Cast: Gregory Peck, Lillian Gish

"Luridly beautiful, with stunning passages . . . it has rare power and a great supporting cast" (Tom Milne). A legendary Technicolor western, as florid as any silent melodrama, *DUEL IN THE SUN* stars Gregory Peck and Joseph Cotten as two brothers battling over a half-breed vixen played by Jennifer Jones. Lionel Barrymore is the patriarch whose empire is collapsing around him, and Gish plays his wife, ostensibly a model of propriety. (At least, she's the only character not rending her garments in fits of passion in every other scene.) The fiercely operatic conclusion was extremely influential, its echoes showing up in the most unlikely places. Producer David O. Selznick was apparently determined to one-up *GONE WITH THE WIND* and went through several directors and cinematographers. Gish, whom Almodóvar has said is the only actor in *DUEL* that can be partly excused for overacting given her silent film background, earned her first and only Oscar nomination for this performance.

Tuesday, June 19 6:30 p.m. **Rated PG**

MATADOR

Director: Pedro Almodóvar • Spain 1986 110 minutes • Cast: Assumpta Serna, Nacho Martínez

"Almodóvar . . . isn't interested in normalcy; instead he aims for exaggeration, unreality, obsession. And where other directors would turn back, he pushes on, all the way to the lunatic edge" (Hal Hinson, *The Washington Post*). Wonderful, deliciously dark fun, this fearless black comedy about sex and violence (in *MATADOR* the two often go hand in hand) contains one sharp twist after another, charting the lurid destinies of former bullfighter Diego, his troubled acolyte Angel (Antonio Banderas), and Angel's defense lawyer Maria. In many ways this is Almodóvar at his best, toying with audience expectations and genre clichés, creating a complex play of allusions and irony that probes the relationship between artifice and reality. Almodóvar employs the final scenes of *DUEL IN THE SUN*, which Diego and Maria watch in a theatre near the end of *MATADOR*, to "illustrate my theory that cinema is about the future of he who creates it, not the past," but also as a means of foreshadowing the fate of his own characters, illuminating the twisted symbiotic relationship that bonds these two.

Tuesday, June 19 9:00 p.m.

ALL ABOUT EVE

Director: Joseph L. Mankiewicz • USA 1950 138 minutes • Cast: Bette Davis, Ann Baxter

Winner of six Oscars, including Best Picture, *ALL ABOUT EVE* "may be the most biting example of hard-boiled wit ever to come out of Hollywood, and it is breathlessly performed at a breakneck pace by a cast that attacks their lines like starved carnivores at a barbecue" (James Monaco). In this essential, tantalizingly bitter slice of classic Hollywood, Bette Davis plays an ageing actress who takes seemingly innocent Eve (Ann Baxter) under her wing, oblivious to her ruthless ambition and secret scheming. *ALL ABOUT EVE* has much to recommend it, in particular the lightning-quick, acerbic drollness of Mankiewicz's screenplay, and a string of faultless supporting actors (not to mention an early appearance by Marilyn Monroe). Almodóvar has written that he loves every word and image of this brilliant tale of bitchery in the back-stabbing world of backstage theatre.

Thursday, June 21 6:30 p.m. **Rated PG**





ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

(TODO SOBRE MI MADRE)
 Director: Pedro Almodóvar
 Spain/France 1999 101 minutes
 Cast: Cecilia Roth, Penélope Cruz

"A whole new order of Almodóvar extravaganza... it weaves life and art into a rich tapestry of love, loss and compassion" (Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*). ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER is indeed a milestone in Almodóvar's career, touching on many of his important themes: love and obsession, loss and desire, artifice and identity. The film follows Manuela as she recovers from the tragic death of her son, embarking on a quest for his long-lost transvestite father. This foray into her past leads to a job as assistant to the theatre diva her son idolized and a relationship with a young idealistic nun (Penélope Cruz). Moving, dazzling, and endlessly surprising, MOTHER is a virtuosic demonstration of Almodóvar's deft facility with tone, easily shifting from melodrama to dark comedy to sophisticated narrative. A vibrant postmodern patchwork of Sirk, Lorca, and Tennessee Williams, bursting with characteristically eye-popping colour schemes, and memorable characters, MOTHER is unified by Almodóvar's singular vision, and by some of the best performances in his cinema. Almodóvar places both MOTHER and ALL ABOUT EVE in what he considers to be a cinema sub-genre that features actresses as protagonists, relishing their deceptions and confessions in the "sanctum sanctorum of the feminine world," the dressing room.

Thursday, June 21 9:15 p.m.
 Rated 14A (mature theme)



IN A LONELY PLACE

IN A LONELY PLACE

Director: Nicholas Ray
 USA 1950 94 minutes
 Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame

"Ray's classic thriller remains as fresh and resonant as the day it was released" (Geoff Andrew, *Time Out Film Guide*). IN A LONELY PLACE is a stunning film, at once poetic and terrifying – a touching love story with daringly complex characters. Humphrey Bogart plays a frustrated screenwriter with a volatile temper who is accused of murdering a hat-check girl, and Gloria Grahame is the girl next door who ends up providing him with a fake alibi, while becoming increasingly uncertain about his innocence. Almodóvar deems this Nicholas Ray classic to be a masterful *film noir* that delved into original subject matter: the vulnerability and innocence that lies hidden behind the actions of violent men. "Few films, regardless of their dubious ties to film noir, are as expertly executed, concise and profound as Nicholas Ray's IN A LONELY PLACE" (Ed Gonzalez, *Slant Magazine*).

Friday, June 22 6:30 p.m. Rated PG

LAW OF DESIRE

(LA LEY DEL DESEO)
 Director: Pedro Almodóvar
 Spain 1987 102 minutes
 Cast: Eusebio Poncela, Carmen Maura

"Wit, sex, drugs, and topsy-turvy clichés abound; Almodóvar's sensuous style carries all before him. A life-affirming joy" (Tim Clark, *Time Out Film Guide*). The heady, hilarious LAW OF DESIRE is important Eighties Almodóvar, one of his most inspired studies of love and sexual politics in a Madrid freed from the repression of Franco's Spain. Art-porn director Pablo is in love with Juan, who is unable to reciprocate on the same level. When Juan leaves the city, dangerously obsessed Antonio (Antonio Banderas) seizes the opportunity to pursue Pablo, who nonchalantly seduces him though he finds him far too controlling. Almodóvar juggles romantic intrigue, explosive jealousy, tragedy, and a transsexual lesbian sister in this hyped-up murder comedy, which according to him is like Ray's LONELY PLACE in that they are both about writers who make a mistake, only belatedly realizing that they've destroyed that which they love the most. "Almodóvar's best picture" (Charles Taylor, *Salon Magazine*).

Friday, June 22 8:45 p.m.



LAW OF DESIRE

LABYRINTH OF PASSION

(LABERINTO DE PASIONES)
 Director: Pedro Almodóvar
 Spain 1982 100 minutes
 Cast: Cecilia Roth, Imanol Arias

"An early and rather choice effort from Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar... Cheerfully slapdash and high-spirited in the farcical John Waters manner" (J. Hoberman, *Chicago Reader*). A rarely-seen Almodóvar fireball with a dizzying script and as potent a cocktail of characters as has ever graced his cinema, LABYRINTH OF PASSION revels in the sordid, steamy underground of Madrid's nightlife, and is worth watching alone for the director's mascara-caked cameo as a transvestite punk singer. Somehow true love prevails in Almodóvar's transgressive labyrinth, which includes a nymphomaniacal rock star named Sexi, the bisexual son of a deposed Shah, and an Arab terrorist (Antonio Banderas, again). For Almodóvar, LABYRINTH has its roots in the Sixties British New Wave movement and the films of Richard Lester, but he regards WHO ARE YOU, POLLY MAGGOO? to be the self-conscious essence of this pop movement. "Shows off the bright, gaudy visual style, the breezy manner and the exuberant energy that are Mr. Almodóvar's particular virtues" (Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*).

Monday, June 25 6:30 p.m.

WHO ARE YOU, POLLY MAGGOO?

(QUI ÊTES-VOUS, POLLY MAGGOO?)
 Director: William Klein
 France 1966 102 minutes
 Cast: Dorothy McGowan, Jean Rochefort

"The slashing satire and high comic style of POLLY MAGGOO make [Klein] at once the Barnum, Boswell and Mencken of the fashion world" (Saul Kahan, *Films and Filmmaking*). Klein bid adieu to haute couture with this audacious satire – remarkable not only for its deliciously demented design but for its caustic wit. Klein lampoons everything from vapid models to fading royalty, baby boomer infantilism and desperately pretentious television producers. The film is both ferociously nasty and eerily sympathetic to its title character (fond of observations like, "Everything is fashion. Love, ideas, even war. Even Politics!"), who introduces Klein's ongoing obsession with masks and representation. The satire of fashion was prescient. The first consciously absurdist sequence features metal clothing so sharp it cuts one of the models; by the time the film was completed, metal clothes were already being featured in Parisian shops. "Fuelled by a kind of giddy venom" (Jonathan Rosenbaum), POLLY MAGGOO is one of the few films from the period that exposes the underbelly of youth-oriented Sixties popular culture. It was also one of the first films Almodóvar ever saw in its original, non-Spanish-dubbed version.

Monday, June 25 9:00 p.m.