DIRECTED BY Giuseppe De Santis
WRITING story by Giuseppe De Santis, Carlo Lizzani, and Gianni Puccini; screenplay by Corrado Alvaro, Giuseppe De Santis, Carlo Lizzani, Carlo Musso, Ivo Perilli, and Gianni Puccini; dialogue by Franco Monicelli
PRODUCED BY Dino De Laurentiis
MUSIC Goffredo Petrassi
CINEMATOGRAPHY Otello Martelli
FILM EDITING Gabriele Varriale
PRODUCTION DESIGN Carlo Egidi
COSTUME DESIGN Anna Gobbi

CAST
Vittorio Gassman...Walter (as Vittorio Gassmann)
Doris Dowling...Francesca
Silvana Mangano...Silvana
Raf Vallone...Marco
Checco Rissone...Aristide
Nico Pepe...Beppe
Adriana Sivieri...Celeste
Lia Corelli...Amelia
Maria Grazia Francia...Gabriella
Dedi Ristori...Anna
Anna Maestri...Irene
Mariemma Bardi...Gianna
Maria Capuzzo...Giulia
Isabella Marincola...Rosa (as Isabella Zennaro)
Carlo Mazzarella...Gianetto
Ermanno Randi...Paolo
Antonio Nediani...Erminio
Mariano Englen...Cesare

GIUSEPPE DE SANTIS (b. February 11, 1917, Fondi, Lazio, Italy—d. May 16, 1997 (age 80) in Rome, Lazio, Italy) studied literature, philosophy and cinema during the 1930's, then began work as a film critic during the early years of World War II. Before directing his own films, he assisted Luchino Visconti on Ossessione (1942). He was the coordinating director for the documentary Days of Glory (1945). After five years as an assistant director and screenwriter, he began writing and directing his own features, starting with Caccia Tragica (Tragic Pursuit) in 1947, followed by Riso Amaro (Bitter Rice) in 1949.

These films are notable for examining the socio/economic plight of ordinary people in post-war Italy. He was nominated for an Academy Award as a co-writer with Carlo Lizzani for Best Writing, Motion Picture Story for Riso Amaro in 1951.


*Indicates films for which De Santis wrote or co-wrote the screenplay

OTELLO MARTELLI (b. May 19, 1902, Rome, Lazio, Italy—d. February 20, 2000 (age 97), Rome, Lazio, Italy) did cinematography for 82 films, some of which are: Liberazione (1920), La donna, il diavolo, il tempo (1921), The Erratic Mrs. Delamere (1922), and Consuelita (1925); Old Guard and Il
cardinale Lambertini in 1934; Marcella and Hands Off Me! in 1937; The Duchess of Parma and The Ancestor in 1938; Lucrezia Borgia (1940) and The Hero of Venice (1941); Tragic Night, Loves of Don Juan, and The Gorgon in 1942; Paisan (1946); Ultimo amore and Tragic Hunt in 1947; The Golden Madonna and Bitter Rice in 1949; Stromboli (photography) and The Flowers of St. Francis in 1950; Anna (1951) and Rome 11:00 (1952); A Husband for Anna and I Vitelloni in 1953; La Strada (director of photography), Days of Love, and The River Girl in 1954; What a Woman! (1956); The Sea Wall and Holiday Island in 1957; The Law (1959); La Dolce Vita (director of photography) and Stories of the Revolution in 1960; Woman in the Window (1961); Boccaccio '70 (segments "La rifa", "Le tentazioni del dottor Antonio") and Redhead in 1962; Cyano et d'Artagnan (1964), Menage Italian Style (1965), and 3 pistole contro Cesare (1967).


SILVANA MANGANO (b. April 21, 1930, Rome, Lazio, Italy—d. December 16, 1989 (age 59), Madrid, Madrid, Spain) acted in 130 films, some of which are: The Last Judgment (1945), Elixir of Love (1947), Mad About Opera (1948), Bitter Rice (1949), Outlaw Girl (1950), and Anna (1951); Mambo and Ulysses in 1954; Tempest (1958), The Great War (1959), and 5 Branded Women (1960); The Last Judgment and Barabbas in 1961; My Wife (1964), Oedipus Rex (1967), and Teorema (1968); Death in Venice, The Decameron, and Scipio the African in 1971; Ludwig (1973), Dune (1984), and Slugs (1988).

RAF VALLONE (b. February 17, 1916, Tropea, Calabria, Italy—d. October 31, 2002 (age 86), Rome, Lazio, Italy) acted in 95 films, some of which are: We the Living (1942) and Bitter Rice (1949); Under the Olive Tree, The White Line, and The Path of Hope in 1950; Anna (1951); Rome 11:00 and Don Juan's Night of Love in 1952; Perdonami! and The Adultrress in 1953; Storm and Obsession in 1954; Andrea Chenier (1955), Love (1956), The Sins of Rose Bernd (1957), No Escape (1958), Two Women (1960), and El Cid (1961); A View from the Bridge and Phaedra in 1962; The Cardinal (1963), Harlow (1965), Nevada Smith (1966), 1001 Nights (1968), The Italian Job (1969), Cannon for Cordoba (1970), and A Gunfight (1971); Rosebud and That Lucky Touch in 1975; The Other Side of Midnight and The Devil's Advocate in 1977; The Greek Tycoon (1978) and An Almost Perfect Affair (1979); Return to Marseilles and Lion of the Desert in 1980; A Time to Die (1980), The Godfather: Part III (1990), Toni (1999), and Vino santo (2000, TV Movie).


Italian director, scenarist, and critic, was born in Fondi, an ancient town between Rome and Naples. He studied literature and philosophy at university, and then entered the Italian film school, the Centro Sperimentale in Rome. De Santis first made his name as a film critic—as a prominent and rigorously severe contributor to Cinema.

The magazine, under the nominal editorship of Vittorio Mussolini, the Duce’s son, and Luciano De Feo provided a rallying point for a group of leftist young critics who prepared the way for the coming of neorealism—among them Visconti, Lizzani, and Antonioni. In 1941 De Santis wrote: “We are fighting for the dawn of an awareness that will lead toward realism. We have learned to scan the horizons of an imagination.
that is forever opposed to the miserable conditions of man, his solitude his difficulty in escaping, and which finds, even in escapism, the imposing strength of reciprocal human communication. Our sympathies are joined always with a cinema that breathes the intimate essence of reality through historical education. The level of civilization cannot be separated from the land that gave birth to it.”

The Italian neorealists, influenced by French cinema could find no worthy models in their own contemporary culture and instead looked back to the novels of the great nineteenth century Sicilian realist Giovanni Verga, who had already inspired a brief flowering of verismo in the early days of the Italian cinema, around the beginning of World War I. De Santis’ short stories were modeled on Verga’s, and his criticism was permeated with his admiration for a writer who offered “the strongest and most human, the most marvelously virgin and authentic ambiance that can inspire the imagination of a cinema seeking things and facts in a time and space dominated by reality so as to detach itself from facile suggestions and decadent bourgeois taste.”

Luchino Visconti shared this enthusiasm for Verga, and De Santis became his assistant director and one of the scenarists on Ossessione (Obsession, 1942), based on James M. Cain’s brutally naturalistic thriller The Postman Always Rings Twice. Transposing this story of passion and murder to a bleakly authentic Italian landscape, the film provided a brilliant introduction to many of the preoccupations of the neorealists. De Santis also worked on the script of Rossellini’s Desiderio (completed by Pagliero) and collaborated with Mario Sergi, Paglione, and Visconti on Giorni de Gloria (Days of Glory, 1945), a documentary compiled from newsreels about the contribution of the Italian Resistance to the Liberation. The following year De Santis was scenarist and assistant director of Aldo Vergano’s Il sole sorge ancora (1946), a feature about the political education of a young partisan.

Il sole sorge ancora was one of two postwar films financed by the ANPI, the left-wing organization of former partisans; the other was De Santis’s own first film, Caccia tragica (Tragic Hunt, 1947). This examination of the postwar fate of the partisan spirit is set in the Romagna just after the Liberation and—like many of De Santis’s films is based on a newspaper story. Putting his theories into practice, the director shot the picture entirely on location, indoors and out, and—with a professional cast that included Silvana Pampanini, Amedo Nazzari, and Massimo Girotti—used local peasants and bit-players.

The film opens with the newly married Michele and Giovanna, former partisans, on their way to join in the creation of a collective farm; traveling in the same truck is an official carrying the government subsidy on which the farm depends. They are ambushed by bandits (including Alberto, a former comrade) who murder the farm official, steal the money, kidnap Giovanna. The rest of the film deals with the pursuit of the bandits by Michele and members of the collective. Cutting from one group to the other, the picture explores the motive of both—the social idealism of the peasants; the tragic passion that binds Alberto to the woman gang-leader Daniela, and Giovanna (and the money) are recovered.

Some contemporary reviewers found Caccia tragica vulgar, sensational, and confused, but for others the director’s passionate sincerity was “more compelling than the novelletish detail,” and there was praise for his fluid camerawork (with a striking and at that time uncommon use of crane shots) and his attractive composition within the frame. Roy Armes in Patterns of Realism (1971) called it “a remarkable first work which, despite it unevenness, strikingly emphasizes the vitality of the director….The many crowd scenes…are handled by De Santis with a sincerity and force which recall…the early Soviet film. In a very real sense the enemies of the peasants are not the bandits themselves but the rich, whose agents are explicitly presented as being in league with the gang…. The specific political issues treated in Caccia tragica have lost some of their relevance…but the film retains its power because…the human beings never cease to come alive. As an example of this one might cite the complicity that springs up between the two women despite their roles of kidnapper and victim and the genuine and in no way contrived sensuality with which they are endowed.”

Riso amaro (Bitter Rice, 1949) was scripted by De Santis with two other Cinema critics, Carlo Lizzani and Gianni Puccini, and was based on careful research among workers in the Po valley, where every year thousands of city girls went to the flooded fields to harvest rice under appalling conditions. From this documentary base, however, there somehow emerged a melodramatic tale about the relationship that develops between Silvana (Silvana Mangano), whose moral standards have been eroded by a diet of pulp fiction and trashy Hollywood movies, and the small-time crook Walter (Vittorio Gassman). Silvana sees the light, shoots her deceitful lover, and throws herself off the camp watchtower. Whereupon in a scene that many found embarrassedly unconvincing), her fellow workers file past her body, sprinkling it with rice in forgiveness and benediction. Having set out “to express man, woman and society in their…natural primitive integrity,” De Santis wound up with a movie whose worldwide commercial success was clearly attributable to its violent eroticism and a generous display of Mangano’s exceptional physique.”

De Santis set his next film in his own native region of Ciociara: “I made it in Fondi, the village where I was born. I signed on all my childhood friends, not to mention my nurse. I myself tell the story in the commentary.” Non c’è pace tra gli
ulivi (No Peace Under the Olives, 1950) is about Francesco (Raf Vallone) a young peasant who comes home from the war to find that both his flock and his girl (Lucia Ros'e) have been stolen by a local landowner, Bonfiglio (Folco Lulli). When Francesco tries to take the law into his own hands, Bonfiglio has him imprisoned on false charges and rapes his sister, knowing that no one will dare to bring charges against him. But Francesco escapes from jail, rallies the peasants against Bonfiglio’s power and greed, and kills him in a final confrontation.

Charged with melodrama, De Santis explained that he had done no more than “respect local custom. The peasants of the region are proud and distant; they have a natural tendency to pose; they don’t like to look ach other straight in the eye, and that is why in the film they sometimes deliver their dialogue while facing the camera.” Some critics remained unconvinced, but many admired this uneven but uncompromising, visually beautiful and interminently powerful film and applauded. De Santis’s message — that only through solidarity can the workers defeat their exploiters.

De Santis planned another film of peasant life that was to consider the problem of land distribution in Calabria, but nothing came of it, and in his next picture he turned his attention to the city and postwar unemployment. Roma, ore undici (Rome, Eleven O’Clock, 1952), based on a book by Elio Petri, who also worked on the script, shows us two hundred girls lining up on a rickety staircase to apply for a single poorly paid typing job. The staircase collapses, injuring man of the girls and killing one of them. De Santis had interviewed a number of the women involved in the actual tragedy, and the film sketches in the stories of some of them—from a prostitute trying to go straight to a rich girl who had run away from home.

“Sometimes the film lacks restraint,” wrote Mario Gromo, “as in the long sequence in which the radio reporter interviews some of the injured girls in the hospital,” but on the whole the movie seemed to Gromo “more clean cut and incisive” than its predecessors: “alternatively biter and sardonic, the episodes flash by like scenes in a kaleidoscope.” Some critics regard this as the most moving and accomplished of De Santis’s films, thanks mostly to the fine performances he drew from a cast that includes Eva Vanicek, Carla Del Poggio, Massimo Girotti, Lucia Bose, Raf Vallone, and Lea Padovani.

Unfortunately, none of the director’s later films have equaled this standard, though his next movie is of some interest as a feminist document. Un marito per Anna Zaccheo (A Husband for Anna, 1953) enters on a beautiful girl who rejects her arranged marriage and gets herself a job; when an affair with a sailor ends unhappily, she goes off alone. Giorni d’amore (Days of Love, 1954) starring Marcello Mastroianni and Marina Vlady is a story of village life and young love triumphant, picked up an award at San Sebastien, but is dismissed by most critics as "novelettish," and so is Uomini e lupi (Men and Wolves, 1956), in which Yves Montand and Silvana Mangano battle against animals and the elements in the Abruzzi. Una strada lunga un anno (The Road a Year Long, 1958), made in Yugoslavia, was followed by La gaçonnière, (1960), a cautionary tale starring Raf Vallone as a middle-aged man who leaves his wife for a young mistress and winds up abandoned by both women. Italiani brava gente (Attack and Retreat, 1964), a Russian-Italian coproduction about World War II, was called “a film whose high-minded intentions are spoiled by a farfetched and heavy-handed treatment.”

Jean Quéval once described De Santis as “a primitive and vaguely Christian Communist, and perhaps more superstitious than Christian,” while Pierre Leprobon suggests that “the need to sugar his [ideological] pill for general consumption accounts for the uneven quality of almost all De Santis’s films. One is tempted to criticize him also for the exuberance of his style and technique. In his search for effect and mass he is forever jostling his script from one theme to another. He makes his cast act at full stretch, occasionally hitting upon the perfect tone an attitude and crowning his feverish quest with success....” But Georges Sadoul remembers that “as a young critic...he defined the basic tenets of what was to become neorealism” and calls De Santis “the best filmmaker of the second neorealist period, with a forceful baroque style, dedicated and deeply concerned with social and human realities.”

Noel Murray: “The Italian neorealist classic Bitter Rice is still pulp, sexy, and angry (AV Film)

Even in the sociopolitically minded world of Italian neorealism, star quality mattered. That’s why Giuseppe De Santis’ sweaty, grubby 1949 drama Bitter Rice introduces its statuesque star, 18-year-old actress Silvana Mangano, with a flourish worthy of a Marilyn Monroe or a Sophia Loren. In one of the film’s many exquisite long tracking shots, De Santis and cinematographer Otello Martelli move the camera slowly along the side of a passenger train’s sleeping car, catching passengers waking up, getting ready for the day, and looking out their window at a rising commotion. Then the camera continues out into a dusty patch of train yard, where a group of migrant workers have gathered around Mangano’s character (also named Silvana) as she dances the boogie-woogie. Bitter Rice is a story about crime, class conflict, and backbreaking labor. But it’s also about the wonder that is Mangano, as her Silvana chews gum, breathes heavy, and teases men. Even when she’s out in the rice paddies with the other mondinas, she’s a vision, with her torn hose and bare feet.

Silvana’s intro is actually the second extended take in Bitter Rice. The first opens the film: It’s a shot that starts with a radio announcer looking directly into the camera to explain the history and culture of rice pickers, before the camera does a slow 360-degree pan around the train station to show workers singing, families separating, and a pair of cops hunting for the man and woman who just stole a valuable jeweled necklace. Vittorio Gassman and Doris Dowling play the couple—Walter and
Francesca—who in those opening minutes separate to elude capture, with the latter hiding among the women shipping out to the paddies. Francesca gets help from Silvana, who figures out the fugitive’s secret immediately, and at times uses it against her.

The first 10 minutes of Bitter Rice more or less establishes what the movie’s going to be: sexy and noir-inflected, with more docu-realistic footage of rice cultivating than the average pulpy crime picture. In an interview included on Criterion’s new Bitter Rice Blu-ray, screenwriter Carlo Lizzani says that “no neorealist film belongs to any one genre,” and this film is a clear case in point. It has the grim fatalism of other neorealist-noir hybrids like Luchino visconti’s Ossessione (which De Santis co-wrote), but at times it also recalls female-focused Hollywood melodramas in the way it explores the complicated relationships among women. Francesca and Silvana live, work, laugh, and cry together, but they also find themselves on opposite sides of a labor dispute (which, in one memorable scene, they argue by singing their complaints back and forth to each other in the field), and they compete for the attention of a soldier named Marco (Raf Vallone) and for the returning Walter.

De Santis and his producer Dino De Laurentiis had a dual purpose in making a film noir with two femmes fatale. Their intention was partly noble: to record the lives of these hardworking women, who form a sisterhood and a society even while being exploited by bosses and unions. But it’s pointless to deny that Bitter Rice is also meant to be heart-stoppingly sexy. De Santis loads up on scenes of the workers lounging around their barracks in low-cut negligees, and he includes lots of footage of women bending over to plant rice. Mangano’s physical splendor is front-and-center throughout the film, whether she’s hiking up her skirt while dancing or nuzzling up against one of her hunky men, whose hands always seem to brush against her chest on their way up to her face and hair. This was the actress’ first major role, and it justifiably made her a star. (It also landed her a husband. De Laurentiis was married to Mangano from 1949 to 1988. One of their grandchildren is Food Network star Giada De Laurentiis.)

The sex appeal of Bitter Rice probably had a lot to do with the movie getting enough attention in America to land an Oscar nomination for what was then called “Best Story.” (Today it would be “Best Original Screenplay.”) In truth, Bitter Rice’s story is its weakest element. It’s a little one-dimensional, dealing with the fairly predictable machinations among Francesca, Silvana, Marco, and Walter as the latter plans a rice heist.

But the affect of the potboiler plot and all the exposed flesh is that Bitter Rice holds the audience’s attention even as De Santis is passing along valuable information about labor contracts and agriculture. Criterion’s disc adds an hour of documentary about the director, who’s an often overlooked figure from the era of Visconti, Roberto Rossellini, and Vittorio De Sica. In it, his collaborators point out how skillfully the director wove social issues into what were essentially mainstream entertainments. And yet, watching Bitter Rice, at times it feels like the situation was exactly the opposite. De Santis used a real social issue as an opportunity to glide his camera along strikingly lit piles of grain, and to photograph some of the most beautiful faces and bodies he could find.

Pasquale Iannone: “Bitter Rice: A Field in Italy” (Criterion Notes)

Born in 1917, Giuseppe De Santis belonged to the younger generation of Italian neorealist filmmakers, who injected new vigor into the movement by engaging more fully with the tropes of established genres like the melodrama, the western, and the crime thriller. This approach—while to a degree already evidenced in earlier neorealist film—comes to the fore in such pictures as Alberto Lattuada’s The Bandit (1946) and Pietro Germi’s Lost Youth (1948). But it is perhaps best, and most famously, exemplified by De Santis’s masterpiece Bitter Rice (1949), a story of thievery and treachery set in the rice fields of northwest Italy.

Before he started making his own films, De Santis studied at Rome’s state-owned film school, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. He also had short stories published in respected journals. But it was his time as a critic for the film magazine Cinema that shaped his career, if not his entire outlook on life. The contributors to Cinema—all fervently anti-Fascist—included future filmmakers Gianni Puccini, Carlo Lizzani, Antonio Pietrangeli, Luchino Visconti, and Michelangelo Antonioni. In his articles for the magazine, De Santis revealed an admiration for American culture and elements of Hollywood cinema, but he was also convinced that Italian filmmakers should follow the example of poetic-realist directors such as Jean Renoir, especially in relation to the filmic depiction of landscape, a thesis he laid out in a famous 1941 article, “For an Italian Landscape.” In another piece, “More on Verga and Italian Cinema,” written with Mario Alicata that same year, De Santis echoes the work of the preeminent theorist of neorealism, Cesare Zavattini: “We too are convinced that one day we will make our most beautiful film following the slow and tired steps of a worker returning home. We will narrate the vital poetry of a life that’s new and pure, that carries within it the secret of its aristocratic beauty.” During his time with Cinema, De Santis was waiting for the opportunity to start making his own films and, after several unrealized projects, Visconti provided him with his first important filmmaking experience. He hired De Santis, together with Alicata and Puccini, to write the screenplay for Ossessione (1943), the Milanese aristocrat’s debut feature, which was an Italian reworking of novelist James M. Cain’s 1934 thriller The Postman Always Rings Twice.
While coming from an American source, *Ossessione* was infused with the sensuous sights and sounds of life in the Po Valley—a prototype, in retrospect, for the kinds of films De Santis would go on to make. And that filmmaking career finally began—after collaborations with such other directors as Roberto Rossellini and Aldo Vergano—with *Tragic Hunt* (1947). Based on a real incident, *Tragic Hunt* tells the story of a former partisan, Alberto (Andrea Checchi), who, unable to find work, is reduced to stealing precious funds from a farming cooperative. The film has much to say about the social problems of postwar Italy but does so in the guise of a tense crime thriller. It proved to be a powerful calling card for De Santis, receiving a warm reception at the Venice Film Festival, where it was entered into competition with the likes of Carol Reed’s *Odd Man Out*, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*, and Orson Welles’s *The Stranger*.

Making his way back to Rome from a Paris screening of *Tragic Hunt*, De Santis stopped off at the Milano Centrale train station. As he waited there, he was struck by the sight of train carriages packed with *mondine* (female rice workers). These were women of all ages and from different parts of Italy who were heading home after several weeks of backbreaking work in the nearby fields. Despite their fatigue, they were boisterous, sang songs, and joked among themselves. De Santis made the decision then and there that his second film would take place in the world of the *mondine*.

*Bitter Rice* tells of the petty thief Walter (Vittorio Gassman) and his accomplice, Francesca (Doris Dowling), who are on the run from the police after stealing a necklace from a luxury hotel. They seek refuge among the bustle of departing *mondine* at the Turin train station but are spotted by the authorities. Walter hands Francesca the necklace before making his escape, and she manages to evade capture by joining the mass of female workers heading for the rice fields. On the train journey, she meets Silvana (Silvana Mangano), a boogie-woogie by night. Italo Calvino compared her to Botticelli’s Venus, with an added aura of “sweet pride,” while critic Giovanni Cimmino and Stefano Masi described her photogenicness as being like “a punch in the face,” adding that “she reigns supreme in every shot of the film, with the sleepy indolence of the strong.”

With critics and the public alike bowled over by Mangano, the work of the three other main players in *Bitter Rice*—Dowling, Gassman, and Raf Vallone—has tended to get short shrift. Cimmino and Masi rather unfairly described Dowling as “a rag doll... with an air of dejection” compared to her female costar, but the Detroit-born actress, fresh from eye-catching performances in Billy Wilder’s Oscar-winning *The Lost Weekend* (1945) and George Marshall’s underrated film noir *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), more than holds her own. Her longing glances at the soldier Marco (Vallone) when the pair first meet are the work of a technically brilliant actress, and overall her performance contrasts very effectively with that of Mangano. *Bitter Rice* provided Vallone, a former professional soccer player, with his first substantial film role. His character is a...
disaffected, ruggedly handsome veteran. His shirt unfailingly open, he is sexualized almost as much as Silvana, and he tries to court her with little success. (“I have to want it,” she says. “I’ll let you know when the moment is right.”) Like Vallone, Gassman also had a background in sports (in his case, basketball). He had made his debut in the theater in the early 1940s and, under the guidance of Visconti, developed into one of Italy’s most powerful actors. That being said, his character in Bitter Rice is the least interesting of the four leads. Early on in the film, a single gesture from Walter tells you all you need to know about him: cornered by armed police at the train station, he thinks nothing of using Francesca as a human shield.

Bitter Rice’s foregrounding of the world of work, the struggle to make a living, links it to Visconti’s La terra trema (1948) and Vittorio De Sica’s Bicycle Thieves (1948) and The Roof (1956), but De Santis’s film stands out for its focus on the world of women. The director emphasizes the playful camaraderie among the mondine, and you feel that he finds this is just as important as the central intrigue between the four protagonists. When we catch small pieces of conversation among the other workers, it’s clear from their many different accents that they come from all over Italy. Toward the end of the picture, a party is thrown for the mondine, and we see them enjoy time out from their hard work. By this point, Walter has arrived at the fields, and after being rejected by Francesca, he starts manipulating Silvana. He tries to persuade her to flood the fields, thereby creating a diversion for him and his accomplices to escape with a truckload of rice. Reluctantly, Silvana agrees. She joins in the festivities (and is even crowned “Miss Mondina 1948”) but, once she realizes what she has done, is overcome with guilt. De Santis uses a striking crane shot for this moment of realization. The camera looks down on Silvana as she makes her way back from the small, decorated boardwalk that is now completely deserted. We close in on her as an anxiety-ridden cue from composer Goffredo Petrassi emerges on the soundtrack. Camera movement, mise-en-scène, music, and performance combine powerfully to evoke Silvana’s intense regret, and the sequence dispels any notion that Mangano’s performance is based solely on heightened sexuality. This moment must have left an impression on De Sica, as he had Mangano take on a similarly challenging sequence in his anthology film The Gold of Naples (1954), where she plays a newly married prostitute who finds out her respectable bourgeois husband has only married her to assuage his guilt.

The film’s final showdown between the couples (Silvana and Walter versus Francesca and Marco) takes place in a small slaughterhouse adjacent to the fields, where Walter ends up fatally shot, with his arm caught on a meat hook, his body dangling like the surrounding carcasses. The symbolism of this sequence is particularly bold; crucially, it is the female characters who take control.

Bitter Rice was a considerable success upon its release, stirring up discussion among critics across the political spectrum. For some on the left, the film’s focus on romantic and sexual intrigue obfuscated, even nullified, its social message, a criticism that the director rejected. De Santis’s engagement with American iconography was also questioned, but he had never made a secret of his appreciation for American culture; indeed, it was something he shared with many artists of his generation, including Fellini. (And despite the criticism leveled at him, De Santis could count on the support of many other progressive observers, including none other than the secretary-general of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti.)

After Bitter Rice, De Santis made a further nine features, most of which (especially those after 1955) are notoriously difficult to see. In 1952, he turned once again to the subject of women and work for Rome 11:00. The film was based on a piece of reportage by the then twenty-two-year-old journalist, critic, and future Oscar-winning filmmaker Elio Petri on a recent tragedy in which a young woman was killed, and several others injured, when a desperate mass scramble for one meagerly paid job led to the collapse of a staircase. Revisiting and expanding on the themes of De Santis’s first two films, especially Bitter Rice, Rome 11:00 was very much ahead of its time, anticipating by almost a decade the kind of “cinem-investigation” that Francesco Rosi made famous in the 1960s and ’70s.

Italian neorealism (Wikipedia)

Italian neorealism (Italian: Neorealismo), also known as the Golden Age, is a national film movement characterized by stories set amongst the poor and the working class, filmed on location, frequently using non-professional actors. Italian neorealism films mostly contend with the difficult economic and moral conditions of post-World War II Italy, representing changes in the Italian psyche and conditions of everyday life, including poverty, oppression, injustice, and desperation.

History

Italian neorealism came about as World War II ended and Benito Mussolini’s government fell, causing the Italian film industry to lose its centre. Neorealism was a sign of cultural change and social progress in Italy. Its films presented contemporary stories and ideas and were often shot in streets as the Cinecittà film studios had been damaged significantly during the war.

The neorealist style was developed by a circle of film critics that revolved around the magazine Cinema, including Luchino Visconti, Gianni Puccini, Cesare Zavattini, Giuseppe De Santis and Pietro Ingrao. Largely prevented from writing about politics (the editor-in-chief of the magazine was Vittorio
Mussolini, son of Benito Mussolini), the critics attacked the Telefoni Bianchi films that dominated the industry at the time. As a counter to the popular mainstream films, some critics felt that Italian cinema should turn to the realist writers from the turn of the 20th century.

Both Antonioni and Visconti had worked closely with Jean Renoir. In addition, many of the filmmakers involved in neorealism developed their skills working on calligraphist films (though the short-lived movement was markedly different from neorealism). Elements of neorealism are also found in the films of Alessandro Blasetti and the documentary-style films of Francesco De Robertis. Two of the most significant precursors of neorealism are Jean Renoir's Toni (1935) and Alessandro Blasetti's 1960 (1934). In the spring of 1945, Mussolini was executed and Italy was liberated from German occupation. This period, known as the "Italian Spring," was a break from old ways and an entrance to a more realistic approach when making films. Italian cinema went from utilizing elaborate studio sets to shooting on location in the countryside and city streets in the realist style.

Although the true beginning of neorealism has been widely contested by theorists and filmmakers, the first neorealist film is generally thought to be Ossessione by Luchino Visconti (1943). Neorealism became famous globally in 1946 with Roberto Rossellini's Rome, Open City, when it won the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival as the first major film produced in Italy after the war.

Italian neorealism rapidly declined in the early 1950s. Liberal and socialist parties were having difficulties presenting their message. The vision of the existing poverty and despair, presented by neorealist cinema, was demoralizing a nation anxious for prosperity and change. Additionally, the first positive effects of the Italian economic miracle period – such as gradual rises in income levels – caused the themes of neorealism to lose their relevance. As a consequence, most Italians favored the optimism shown in many American movies of the time. The views of the post-war Italian government of the time were also far from positive, and the remark of Giulio Andreotti, who was then a vice-minister in the De Gasperi cabinet, characterized the official view of the movement: Neorealism is "dirty laundry that shouldn't be washed and hung to dry in the open".

Italy's move from individual concern with neorealism to the tragic frailty of the human condition can be seen through Federico Fellini's films. His early works La Strada (1954) and Il bidone (1955) are transitional movies. The larger social concerns of humanity, treated by neorealists, gave way to the exploration of individuals. Their needs, their alienation from society and their tragic failure to communicate became the main focal point in the Italian films to follow in the 1960s. Similarly, Antonioni's Red Desert (1964) and Blow-up (1966) take the neorealist trappings and internalise them in the suffering and search for knowledge brought out by Italy's post-war economic and political climate.

Characteristics
Neorealist films were generally filmed with nonprofessional actors, although in a number of cases, well-known actors were cast in leading roles, playing strongly against their normal character types in front of a background populated by local people rather than extras brought in for the film.

They were shot almost exclusively on location, mostly in rundown cities as well as rural areas due to its forming during the post-war era.

Neorealist films typically explore the conditions of the poor and the lower working class. Characters oftentimes exist within simple social order where survival is the primary objective. Performances are mostly constructed from scenes of people performing fairly mundane and quotidian activities, devoid of the self-consciousness that amateur acting usually entails.

Neorealist films often feature children in major roles, though their characters are frequently more observational than participatory.

Open City established several of the principles of neorealism, depicting clearly the struggle of normal Italian people to live from day to day under the extraordinary difficulties of the German occupation of Rome, consciously doing what they can to resist the occupation. The children play a key role in this, and their presence at the end of the film is indicative of their role in neorealism as a whole: as observers of the difficulties of today who hold the key to the future. Vittorio De Sica's 1948 film The Bicycle Thief is also representative of the genre, with non-professional actors, and a story that details the hardships of working-class life after the war.

In the period from 1944–1948, many neorealist filmmakers drifted away from pure neorealism. Some directors explored allegorical fantasy, such as de Sica's Miracle in Milan, and historical spectacle, like Senso by Visconti. It was also the time period when a more upbeat neorealism emerged, which produced films that melded working-class characters with 1930s-style populist comedy, as seen in de Sica's Umberto D.

At the height of neorealism, in 1948, Visconti adapted I Malavoglia, a novel by Giovanni Verga, written at the height of the 19th century realist verismo movement (in many ways the basis for neorealism, which is therefore sometimes referred to as neoerismo), bringing the story to a modern setting, which resulted in remarkably little change in either the plot or the tone. The resulting film, The Earth Trembles, starred only nonprofessional actors and was filmed in the same village (Aci Trezza) as the novel was set in.

More contemporary theorists of Italian neorealism characterize it less as a consistent set of stylistic characteristics and more as the relationship between film practice and the social reality of post-war Italy. Millicent Marcus delineates the lack of consistent film styles of neorealist film. Peter Brunette and
Marcia Landy both deconstruct the use of reworked cinematic forms in Rossellini's *Open City*. Using psychoanalysis, Vincent Rocchio characterizes neorealist film as consistently engendering the structure of anxiety into the structure of the plot itself.

**Impact**

The period between 1943 and 1950 in the history of Italian cinema is dominated by the impact of neorealism, which is properly defined as a moment or a trend in Italian film rather than an actual school or group of theoretically motivated and like-minded directors and scriptwriters. Its impact nevertheless has been enormous not only on Italian film but also on French New Wave cinema, the Polish Film School and ultimately on films all over the world. It also influenced film directors of India's Parallel Cinema movement, including Satyajit Ray (who directed the award-winning *Apu Trilogy*) and Bimal Roy (who made *Do Bigha Zameen* [1953]), both heavily influenced by Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948).

Furthermore, as some critics have argued, the abandoning of the classical way of doing cinema and so the starting point of the Nouvelle Vague and the Modern Cinema can be found in the post-war Italian cinema and in the neorealism experiences. In particular, this cinema seems to be constituted as a new subject of knowledge, which it self builds and develops. It produces a new world in which the main elements have not so many narrative functions as they have their own aesthetic value, related with the eye that is watching them and not with the action they are coming from.

The Neorealist period is often simply referred to as "The Golden Age" of Italian cinema by critics, filmmakers and scholars.
**Mexican Cinema & Culture**

**Bending Borders**

**October 10-12, 2018**

Burchfield Penney Art Center
1300 Elmwood Avenue Buffalo, New York

- Free admission made possible this year by riverrun, the Burchfield Penney Art Center and M&T Bank
- Mexican-inspired cuisine available at the Burchfield Café

**ABOUT THE RIVERRUN GLOBAL FILM SERIES:** The riverrun Global Film Series aspires to create a dialogue between local community and institutions of higher education in Buffalo through a selection of films that provide a better understanding of our present existence in the globalized networked world. The riverrun Global Film Series is produced by riverrun, Patrick Martin Director; with support from the Burchfield Penney Art Center, the UB Department of English, the UB Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and James Agee Professor of American Culture, SUNY Distinguished Professor Bruce Jackson.

Further information about the riverrun Global Film Series at: riverrunbuffalo.org | globalfilmseries.wordpress.com

---

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10**

4 PM - 5:50 PM **Poetic Mode: Border Experimentations: El Mar La Mar (2017)**, Joshua Bonnetta & J.P. Sniadecki. 1 hr 35 min. Introduced by: Ekrem Serdar. Squelish Wheel Film & Media Art Center

6 PM - 7:50 PM **Restored Classics Night I: Time to Die (Tiempo De Morir, 1966)**, Arturo Ripstein. Screenplay by Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes. Restoration Company: Alameda Films. 1 hr 30 min. Introduced by: Bruce Jackson, Buffalo Film Seminars/SUNY Distinguished Professor & James Agee Professor of American Culture, English, UB

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11**

4 PM - 5:45 PM **Observational Mode: Mexico and Minors** (dedicated to the children separated from their parents on the US-Mexico border): *The Inheritors (Los Herederos, 2008)*, Eugenio Polgovsky. 1 hr 30 mins. In memory of of Eugenio Polgovsky. Introduced by: Meg Knowles, Television and Film Arts, SUNY Buffalo State

6:30 PM - 7:30 PM **Keynote Lecture:** “Mexico’s Contemporary Bi-national Cinema: from Migrations to Co-productions,” Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Washington University, St. Louis

7:45 PM - 9:30 PM **Restored Classics Night II: Two Monks (Dos Monjes, 1934)**, Juan Bustillo Oro. 1 hr 25 min. Restored by Martin Scorsese’s World Cinema Foundation. Introduced by: Margarita Vargas, Romance Languages and Literatures, UB

---

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12**

October M&T Bank Second Friday at the Burchfield Penney Art Center


4 PM - 5:30 PM **Risky Territories: Devil’s Freedom (La Libertad Del Diablo, 2017)**, Ernesto Gonzales. 1 hr 15 mins. Introduced by: Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Washington University, St. Louis

5:30 PM - 7:00 PM **Happy Hour:** Music by *La Marimba*


9 PM - 10 PM **Borders and Immigration Panel:** Facilitator: Richard Reitsma, Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, Canisius College. Participants: Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Washington University, St. Louis; Abigail Cooke, Department of Geography, University at Buffalo; Irene Rehliavashvili, Journey’s End Refugee Services; Jennifer Connor, Justice for Migrant Families; Alyssa Erazo, ECBA Volunteer Lawyers, New York; Ignacio Sánchez Prado, Washington University, St. Louis; Abigail Cooke, Department of Geography, University at Buffalo; Irene Rehliavashvili, Journey’s End Refugee Services; Jennifer Connor, Justice for Migrant Families; Alyssa Erazo, ECBA Volunteer Lawyers, New York; migrants and community organizations. 

---

**ABOUT THE RIVERRUN GLOBAL FILM SERIES:** The riverrun Global Film Series aspires to create a dialogue between local community and institutions of higher education in Buffalo through a selection of films that provide a better understanding of our present existence in the globalized networked world. The riverrun Global Film Series is produced by riverrun, Patrick Martin Director; with support from the Burchfield Penney Art Center, the UB Department of English, the UB Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and James Agee Professor of American Culture, SUNY Distinguished Professor Bruce Jackson.

Further information about the riverrun Global Film Series at: riverrunbuffalo.org | globalfilmseries.wordpress.com