



WERNER SCHROETER/ELFI MIKESCH:
A VOICE THAT LINGERS

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8:30 PM

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California Institute of the Arts

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WERNER SCHROETER/ELFI MIKESCH: A VOICE THAT LINGERS

Jack H. Skirball Series

Fri Oct 14 | 8:30 pm

Werner Schroeter (1945–2010) created one of the most significant oeuvres of the New German Cinema, a legacy of more than 20 visually and aurally stunning features, among them *Willow Springs* (1973), *Palermo oder Wolfsburg* (1980), *Malina* (1991), and *Deux* (2002). His intimate collaborations with divas such as Magdalena Montezuma, Candy Darling, Ingrid Caven, Maria Callas, and Isabelle Huppert go beyond mere camp: Schroeter's protagonists exhaust themselves in music, melodrama, or visual excess to express consuming passions. When love is gone and death has come, he once said, "the expression remains, like a quake, a shivering sensation." Schroeter had shot most of his earlier films, but, beginning with *Der Rosenkönig* (1986), experimental filmmaker Elfi Mikesch became his regular DP, and she went on to accumulate extensive footage on his work and, in particular, the last four years of his life. This two-night program includes the U.S. debut of Mikesch's insightful, affectionate documentary *Mondo Lux – Die Bilderwelten Des Werner Schroeter* (2011, "Mondo Lux – The Visual Worlds of Werner Schroeter") and a selection of Schroeter's work, including *Deux* (2002), starring Isabelle Huppert in a dual role, the double projection experiment *Argila* (1968) and the cult film *Der Tod der Maria Malibran* (1972, "The Death of Maria Malibran"), one of Michel Foucault's favorites.

"Schroeter's flair for lush visuals and heightened emotions introduced an operatic sensibility to the New German Cinema movement." – Dave Kehr, *The New York Times*

Werner Schroeter: *Der Tod der Maria Malibran*

preceded by *Argila* (1968, 34 min)

PROGRAM

Werner Schroeter: *Argila* (1968, 34 min)

With Carla Aulaulu, Magdalena Montezuma, Gisela Trowe, Sigurd Salto. Three women around one man. In this early film, Schroeter is already involved in a sophisticated *mise en abyme* through a double projection of the image – one black and white and silent, the other color and sound, slightly out of phase with each other, as a distant echo to Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*.

Werner Schroeter: *Der Tod der Maria Malibran* (*The Death of Maria Malibran*, 1972, 16mm, 104 min)

Written, photographed and directed by: Werner Schroeter – Cast: Magdalena Montezuma, Christine Kaufmann, Candy Darling, Manuela Riva, Ingrid Caven, Annette Tirier, Einar Hanfstaengl

A faux biopic of Spanish opera singer Maria Malibran, who died in 1836 at the age of 28. Werner Schroeter eschews chronological continuity, plot, dialogue, even logic, creating highly stylized tableaux vivants in order to portray in a profoundly melodramatic manner the death of his leading lady, whom he depicts as singing while dying, or dying while singing. For Schroeter, even in her tragic death, Maria Malibran was as a symbol of hope desperately at odd with the hopelessness of the 20th century. (adapted from the Thessaloniki Film Festival)

"...hermetic, expressionist, oblique, and of a creative perversity that bespeaks the presence of a genius... The lip-sync is off; the singing is off-pitch; mouths are frequently open while no sound issues forth, or closed, with mellifluous arias or cheap popular songs heard on scratchy renditions of old records. Neither burlesque nor slapstick, the film's intent is nevertheless ironical and subversive, though mysteriously so." – Amos Vogel

"Look at the kisses, the faces, the cheeks, the eyebrows, the teeth in Werner Schroeter's *The Death of Maria Malibran*... What Schroeter does with a face, a cheekbone, the lips, an expression of the eyes is a question of the multiplying and burgeoning of the body, an exaltation, in some way autonomous, of its least parts, of the least possibilities of a body fragment. There is an anarchizing of the body, in which hierarchies, localizations, designations, organicity if you like, is being undone... This is no longer a tongue, but something completely different that comes out of the mouth. It's not the organ of a mouth that has been soiled and meant for somebody else's pleasure. It's an "unnamable," "unusual" thing, outside of all programs of desire. It's a body made entirely malleable by pleasure: something that opens itself, tightens, palpitates, beats, gapes. In *The Death of Maria Malibran*, the way in which the two women kiss each other, what is it? Sand dunes, a desert caravan, a voracious flower that advances, insect mandibles, a grassy crevice. All of this is antisadism. The cruel science of desire has nothing to do with these unformed pseudopods, which are the slow movements of pleasure-pain."

– Michel Foucault

What separated **Werner Schroeter** (1945–2010) from most of the other "New German Cinema" filmmakers, such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog, was his almost complete rejection of realism, social and political, and his espousal of high camp. His mixture of flamboyant, gender-bending minimalism and stylized melodrama, inspired by 19th-century Italian bel canto opera and the music of German romanticism, often juxtaposed with popular song, blurred the distinction between art and kitsch. Born in the German state of Thuringia, Schroeter enrolled at the University of Mannheim to study psychology, and, a few years later, began to make short, experimental 8mm films. A meeting with another German experimental film-maker, Rosa von Praunheim, later a gay rights activist, resulted in their co-directing *Grotesk – Burlesk – Pittoresk* (1968), which featured Magdalena Montezuma, who was to become Schroeter's favorite star, appearing in almost all his feature films until her death in 1986.

Eika Katappa (1969), Schroeter's first feature, is a 144-minute, black-and-white film that anticipates some of his archetypal themes; asequential and dissociated vignettes, asynchronous music and sounds, characters striking campy poses, literary citations and an operatic approach to passionate love, painful beauty and death. *The Death of Maria Malibran* (1971) gained him the reputation as the mad genius of German cinema, and the only director Fassbinder considered an artistic equal. This hypnotically perverse biopic has no discernible plot and no direct dialogue, no diegetic singing, with the music on the soundtrack ranging from Mozart to anachronistic melodies such as *St Louis Blues*. In contrast, *Willow Springs* (1973), shot in the eponymous resort in California, has a unity of place, time and plot, but is just as visually dense and formalistic. There followed two features in which he temporarily aimed to move away from theatrical melodrama towards naturalism: *The Kingdom of Naples* (1978) and *Palermo or Wolfsburg* (1980). The former is constructed as a working-class family chronicle and the latter, about the travails of a young Sicilian worker in Germany.

In 1986, Schroeter made his most explicitly gay film, *The Rose King*. A young man who is obsessed with cultivating the perfect rose, lovingly feeds and tends a boy, whom he keeps as a prisoner in his barn, carefully grafting roses on to his body, all under the watchful and disapproving eye of his mother (Montezuma, then dying of cancer). Then began a six-year gap in film-making during which Schroeter became known as a controversial theatre and opera director. Among his most celebrated productions were Schiller's *Don Carlos* in Hamburg, *Tosca* in Paris and *Don Giovanni* in Leipzig.

Schroeter returned to cinema in 1991 with *Malina*, based on a novel by the feminist Austrian author Ingeborg Bachmann and adapted for the screen by Elfriede Jelinek. Starring Isabelle Huppert, it

is set in Vienna and tells of a writer torn between her lover and husband. His next picture, *Deux* (2002), had an original screenplay. And original it was. Starring Huppert as contrasting twin sisters, it was composed of a series of seemingly unconnected, opaque vignettes, punctuated by arias. Schroeter's fascination with operatic divas was given voice in *Love's Debris* (1996), an alluring documentary in which he gathered many of his favorite opera singers at the Abbey of Royaumont in France to talk about their lives and vocation.

His last film, *Tonight* (2009), was shot in Portugal.

(From the obituary published in *The Guardian*)

**Sat Oct 15 | 6:00 pm
double bill!**

Elfi Mikesch: *Mondo Lux – Die Bilderwelten Des Werner Schroeter*

(*Mondo Lux – The Visual Worlds of Werner Schroeter*, 2011, HDCAM, 97 min.)

followed by:

Werner Schroeter: *Deux*

(2002, 35mm, 121 min)

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

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UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT FALL 2011

Mon Oct 17: Janie Geiser: "Nervous Films," Secret Stories

Mon Oct 24: Proto-Ethnographic Works: Presented as part of Pacific Standard Time.

Tue Nov 1: Suzan Pitt and Jim Trainor: A Conversation in Light and Darkness

Mon-Tue Nov 14-15: Two Nights with Ernie Gehr: Early Films and New Digital Works

Mon Nov 21: Collapse Into Image

Mon Dec 12: Naomi Uman: *The Ukrainian Time Machine* – Fragments from a Diary

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