



WERNER SCHROETER/ELFI MIKESCH:
A VOICE THAT LINGERS

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6:00 PM

presented by

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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

Sat Oct 15 | 6:00 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*

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double bill!

Elfi Mikesch: *Mondo Lux – Die Bilderwelten Des Werner Schroeter* (2011)

followed by:

Werner Schroeter: *Deux* (2002)

PROGRAM

Elfi Mikesch: *Mondo Lux – Die Bilderwelten Des Werner Schroeter* (*Mondo Lux – The Visual Worlds of Werner Schroeter*, 2011, HDCAM, 97 min.)

With Werner Schroeter, Anne Ratte-Polle, Almut Zilcher, Pascale Schiller, Doerte Lysewski, Isabelle Huppert, Rosa von Praunheim, Wim Wenders, Peter Kern, Ingrid Caven, Monika Keppeler.

At the time of his death, Werner Schroeter, who had been diagnosed with cancer in 2006, was working for the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf gallery on a musical piece entitled *Schönheit der Schatten* (*The Beauty of Shadows*) based on the works of Robert Schumann and Heinrich Heine. In *Mondo Lux*, experimental filmmaker and award-winning cinematographer Elfi Mikesch, who had started to work with Schroeter as a make-up artist and costume designer on *Salome* (1971) and went on to shoot four of his movies – *Der Rosenkönig* (*The Rose King*, 1986), *Malina* (1991), *Poussières d'amour* (*Love Debris*, 1996) and *Deux* (2002) – provides us with an intimate insight into Schroeter's artistic output during the remaining four years of his life. We observe him at rehearsals for *Antigone/Elektra*; preparing the photographic exhibition 'Autrefois & Toujours' and working intensively on the dubbed version of his last film, *Tonight* (*Diese Nacht*), shot in Portugal in 2008.

Copious excerpts from Schroeter's films, from *Eika Katappa* (1969) to *Tonight* (2009), reflect the colorful spectrum of his oeuvre, inscribed into a retrospective view that is pervaded by music. The film also foregrounds the passionate bond that Schroeter felt towards film, opera and theatre, as well as towards his friends and artistic collaborators. *Mondo Lux* constitutes an intimate space – in which, in view of the time the protagonist has left to live, every day becomes quite unlike any other. Werner Schroeter died on April 12, 2010.

Werner Schroeter: *Deux*

(2002, 35mm, 121 min)

Screenplay: Cédric Anger, Werner Schroeter; camera: Elfi Mikesch; editing: Juliane Lorenz; sound: Philippe Morel; with: Isabelle Huppert, Manuel Blanc, Arielle Dombasle, Annika Kuhl, Bulle Ogier, Jean-François Stévenin, Robinson Stévenin, Philippe Reuter

Deux revolves around a superb performance by Isabelle Huppert, in the double role of twin sisters. With a great feeling for decorum, Schroeter lays out a powerful and almost schizophrenic drama. (Rotterdam Film Festival)

"*Deux* is a sort of impossible autobiography, deconstructed into two female personas (both played by Isabelle Huppert). The anxiety that predominates in the film comes from a specific relationship to time. Here, time devours itself, and *Deux* moves forward by eradicating its own traces, by casting a doubt on every image, by constructing a floating, uncertain present." – Philippe Azoury

"In every human mythology, the protagonists spend their time looking for their double, and cannot bear not to find it. It is the basis of every love story: you look for yourself in the other. In romantic German legends, you find yourself, and then you die. You cannot resist yourself. I then thought that Isabelle Huppert had to play herself and her double, be a lesbian, and come close to catastrophe..." – Werner Schroeter

The daughter of a projectionist, **Elfi Mikesch** studied photographic and started to work as a painter. She met Rosa von Praunheim and moved in 1965 to West Berlin where she worked for the publisher V. Magdalinski. In 1969 she published with Rosa von Praunheim *Muvie Oh*, an "anarchist history of photography." She directed *Passion*, her first film, in 1971. She has worked as a documentary filmmaker for ZDF and as a noted cinematographer for Rosa von Praunheim, Werner Schroeter, Peter Lilienthal, and Monika Treut. She has also directed a number of experimental films, including *Execution: A Story of Mary* (1979), *Macumba* (1982), *The Blue Distance (Die blaue Distanz)*, 1983), *The Breakfast of the Hyena (Das Frühstück der Hyäne)*, 1983) and *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985, co-directed with Monika Treut). Since 1991, she has been teaching at the Berlin Academy of Arts

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.

Eika Katappa (1969), his 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. *Willow Springs* (1973), shot in the eponymous resort in California, 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) – constructed as a working-class family chronicle – and *Palermo or Wolfsburg* (1980) –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. Then began a six-year gap in film-making during which Schroeter became known as a controversial theatre and opera director. He 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), stars Huppert as contrasting twin sisters, and is 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.

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

(From the obituary published in *The Guardian*)

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud

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UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT FALL 2011

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Janie Geiser: "Nervous Films," Secret Stories

Mon Oct 24

Proto-Ethnographic Works

Presented as part of Pacific Standard Time.

Tue Nov 1

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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

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Naomi Uman

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