

Antonio Pietrangeli: A Retrospective

S. P. (December 01, 2015)



Antonio Pietrangeli's accidental death at the age of 49, as he was preparing a shot for the film 'Come, quando, perché?' robbed the Italian cinema of a major talent in his prime.

Combining the moral urgency of Neorealism with the satirical eye of *commedia all'italiana*, Pietrangeli's work is centered on the evolving role of women in Italian society, as ancient traditions began to crumble after the collapse of fascism.



From the provincial woman (Irene Galter) working as a maid in Rome in his first film, *Empty Eyes* (1953), to the bedazzled starlet (a magnificent Stefania Sandrelli), suddenly elevated from the working class, in his last completed feature, *I Knew Her Well* (1965), Pietrangeli's protagonists experience the promises and perils of a new, ambiguous freedom.

The old institutions have been weakened, but no new communities of support have risen to take their place. Progress may demand that the brothels of Rome be closed, but as the four out-of-work prostitutes of *Adua and Her Friends* (led by Simone Signoret) discover, society is still unwilling to allow them to live on their own terms.

Trained as a physician, Pietrangeli began in film as an assistant on Luchino Visconti's 1943 *Ossessione*, and went on to contribute to the screenplays of Visconti's *La Terra trema* (1948) and Roberto Rossellini's *Europa '51* (in which he also appears as a psychiatrist).

But as a director, Pietrangeli quickly departed from the strict standards of Neorealism, plunging into the social satire of *The Bachelor* (1955), and flirting with the postcard romanticism of *It Happened in Rome* (1957) and the supernatural whimsy of *Ghosts of Rome* (1961). But it was with *The Visit*, in 1963, that Pietrangeli found his signature style, combining a relaxed pace, anecdotal structure, and an open visual field to create a sense of freedom and possibility, even as that freedom eludes his characters. Had Pietrangeli continued his work, he would doubtlessly have made a crucial contribution to the redefinition of cinema in the late 1960s, but his completed films are more than enough to earn him a prominent position in the history of Italian film.

Presented by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with Luce Cinecittà, Rome. Organized by Dave Kehr, Adjunct Curator, Department of Film, MoMA, and Camilla Cormanni and Paola Ruggiero, Luce Cinecittà.

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