



## 72nd IFFMH: »Method Acting« – The 2023 Retrospective

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The International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg will be celebrating its 72nd edition from 16 to 26 November. In addition to discovering international talent, the IFFMH has since 2020 been taking a fresh look at the history of cinema each year in its retrospective. This year, the retrospective is dedicated to the technique of method acting and will thus be focusing on the mental and physical accomplishments of such actors and actresses as Marilyn Monroe, Sally Field, Joanne Woodward, Kim Stanley, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Sidney Poitier, Robert De Niro and Al Pacino. Festival director Dr. Sascha Keilholz and curator Hannes Brühwiler have selected twelve films made between 1947 and 1980 that break with the theatricality that had previously prevailed on screen and that embrace a revolutionary new naturalism that came to define the New Hollywood of the late 1960s and 1970s in a major way.

“The retrospective is more than just us taking a look at the past. On the contrary: the things that are currently on our minds, the works that hold a fascination for us this year, are placed in a completely new context by those that preceded them. In this way, the passage of time continually allows us to see these films in a new way. The development of acting – as a profession and an artistic technique – is inextricably linked to the history of film. Method acting has produced some of the finest characters in cinema,” says festival director Dr. Sascha Keilholz about the significance of this year's retrospective within the overall programme of the 72nd IFFMH.

### **Authentic expression conquers the silver screen**

“The method” originated in the United States in the 1930s. Inspired by the ideas of the Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski, a young generation of progressive actors began to rethink the way they embodied their characters on stage and on camera. Their goal: authenticity in emotional and physical expression. Hannes Brühwiler, who has curated the retrospective, says: “Two particularly physical method acting performances frame our retrospective. We begin with the boxing film ›Body and Soul‹ (1947) by Robert Rossen, in which John Garfield, now considered the first method actor in film, plays a Jewish boxer from New York's Lower East Side who, against incredible odds, manages to carve out a fabulous career. This visually innovative motion picture inspired our closing film, Martin Scorsese's ›Raging Bull‹ (1980). Robert De Niro delivers one of the defining acting performances of the 20th century in his portrayal of the Italian-American middleweight boxer Jake LaMotta. To embody LaMotta's downfall, De Niro gained 26 kilograms and took method acting to extremes that had never been seen before.”



## Struggles for self-determination

The energy in method acting derives from the dynamic of struggling while being at the mercy of others. Sally Field and Barbara Loden evoke this downright existential condition in a unique way. Sally Field, who received an Oscar for her performance in ›Norma Rae‹, takes a stand against the adverse working conditions in a factory. In ›Wanda‹, Barbara Loden drifts alone through an impoverished part of Pennsylvania and repeatedly falls for men who only take advantage of her or even involve her in a bank robbery. Trained at the legendary Actors Studio, which was committed to method acting, Loden was one of the most influential actresses of the 1960s and 70s. ›Wanda‹ is her shining legacy and a centrepiece of the retrospective. The question of self-determination is also posed by Joanne Woodward in ›Rachel, Rachel‹. The protagonist must choose whether to spend her life with her mother or with a man from the big city. With this debut, Woodward's husband, Paul Newman, known primarily as an actor and less for his work as a director, succeeded in making a most remarkable film. ›Rachel, Rachel‹ was one of the films that marked the beginning of New Hollywood.

## Cinematic accomplices

Method acting reveals not only the chemistry between the characters in a film, but also in a particularly striking way the energy shared by the actors in front of the camera. Among all the method actors, Kim Stanley, who is highly regarded by her colleagues, stood out the most. "Nothing like the honesty and intense emotional gambling in which she engages in ›Seance on a Wet Afternoon‹ had been attempted before: It was dangerous acting, and she was remarkable," Marlon Brando said of Stanley. Directed by Brian Forbes and starring Richard Attenborough alongside Stanley, this star-studded English crime drama has been rediscovered by the retrospective. Brando, in turn, left his mark on numerous films through his acting, but few roles were more iconic than that of dockworker Terry Malloy in Elia Kazan's drama ›On the Waterfront‹. That film caused a sensation in 1954 and was awarded eight Oscars, including one for Brando, who, like more than a few of the actors who appeared in it, had also learned his craft at the Actors Studio co-founded by Kazan.

Also joining the ranks of legendary on-screen constellations are Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift in John Huston's ›The Misfits‹. A magically sombre film full of broken people both in front of and behind the camera, culminating in a magnificently disturbing scene in which mustangs are overpowered, this film is an incredibly moving swan song to the western.

›A Place in the Sun‹ catapulted that same Montgomery Clift to superstardom. He and Brando stood for a new generation of actors and actresses. George Stevens' film, which received six Oscars, tells of the glamorous future of a young man of humble origins who threatens to succumb to his dark past.



## **Tales of power, contempt and tolerance**

The retrospective also attests to the historically political side of method acting in cinema. Carried by Rod Steiger's acting and Sidney Lumet's precise directing, ›The Pawnbroker‹ is now regarded as a groundbreaking work of the 1960s that confronted both viewers and censors with the subject matter of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, Stanley Kramer's ›The Defiant Ones‹ is a significant film from the 1950s that clearly denounces not only racism and intolerance, but also the repression that took place under the notorious Senator McCarthy. In this film, Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis play two escaped prisoners who are shackled together – between them a world defined by the most profound racism, before them an odyssey across the southern United States. Francis Ford Coppola's ›The Godfather Part II‹ is also part of the retrospective as sophisticated subject matter, both in a political and an artistic sense. ›The Godfather Part II‹ is carried by numerous method actors, ranging from Al Pacino as the new Mafia don Michael Corleone and Robert De Niro as young Vito Corleone to John Cazale, Diane Keaton and the highly influential method acting teacher Lee Strasberg.

## **Putting oneself in the spotlight as today's form of acting**

“Method acting, at its peak, was very popular with an audience interested in a new depiction of reality. Looking at our media habits today, we can see that the influence of method acting transcends cinema. In a society in which people increasingly aim to market themselves and conveying authenticity online is key to this, the fundamental idea of method acting is here to stay,” says curator Hannes Brühwiler.

## **The films in chronological order:**

Body and Soul (USA 1947)

A Place in the Sun (USA 1951)

On the Waterfront (USA 1954)

The Defiant Ones (USA 1958)

The Misfits (USA 1961)

The Pawnbroker (USA 1964)

Seance on a Wet Afternoon (GB 1964)

Rachel, Rachel (USA 1968)

Wanda (USA 1970)

The Godfather Part II (USA 1974)



Norma Rae (USA 1979)

Raging Bull (USA 1980)

## Images

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## About the IFFMH

The IFFMH has been a unique platform for cultural, social and political dialogue via the art of film since 1952, making it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale. The central aim of the IFFMH is discovering and promoting talented young film professionals from all over the world. The 72nd IFFMH will be held in Mannheim and Heidelberg from 16 to 26 November 2023. The complete festival schedule will be announced in late October.

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