

Alexander Hammid

The First Screening of Avant-Garde Films in Prague at the Kotva Cinema

by
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Finally! That's the only way to say it.

Finally, after all the talking and writing, it has arrived in Prague. After so much indecision and delay only a few people had hope left that it would be realized. Since the first exposure to this kind of film art (known here, if at all, only from foreign news) comes to Prague so late, many people might wonder why so much joy. That needs to be explained.

It is debatable whether film is essentially more art or more industry. But it is certain that it has something of both. Film is art if it is made by an independent artist. The industrial character of film lies in the complicated technology of production and the necessity to produce on a large scale in order to show a profit, i.e., to produce for a large, broad public. For this kind of production, of course, factory efficiency is necessary, which greatly limits the freedom of creative individuality directing the production of the film. The creative strength of the film artist (both director and actor) is hindered and manipulated by the business end of production, to which the artist must submit because a film is usually a business venture. And to the businessman the artist is only the labor needed to improve his product (the film) and to increase his profit.

The "improvement" of the product means for the film investor and businessman delivering just what the customer – the public – wants. The film investor long ago gave up ideals like educating the public, or bringing culture to the masses, or patronizing pure art films which would raise cinema in the eyes of the whole educated world to the level of literature and the fine arts. The quicker way to profits is to come down and cater to the customer and satisfy his needs, no matter how low. That is how world cinema, with a few exceptions, sank to the level of junk literature, which grubs for its own profits by the same method.

If not for this state of affairs in the film world, a film avant-garde or independent cinema, which is the complete opposite of commercial cinema, would not be needed. But faith in the new-found possibilities of film art and the need to create freely and fully would not be silenced by materialistic business interests. If the businessman did not want to understand higher objectives and the need to create, at least film technology helped out those who did. The rapid development of film technology (which, admittedly, is credited to the rise of the film industry) made it possible to lower production costs enough so that the individual with a little financial support could undertake shorter films. In this way originated in France the first so-called avant-garde films, which represent the only untainted (though not always perfect) film art because they arose from a pure desire to create, and not to make money.

During the last ten years many films and shorts of this kind have appeared. They are difficult to find and categorize because they are not “world renowned productions”; they are very different and individual. Sometimes they are either so primitive or so refined and unusual that they are not accepted even where they should be. They are exclusive films and (especially the French and new Russian films) truly avant-garde because they are, both in concept and technique, far ahead of commercial cinema, which often learns from them later or coldly abuses some of their technical discoveries to vary their own conservative mold.

After France began, small independently produced films were made in Germany and then all over the world. Naturally, their authors and fans didn't remain isolated; they banded together. Thus originated in each country associations (mostly called Ciné Clubs) for the purpose of showing the best films (both avant-garde and exceptionally good commercial films) to those who love cinema for more than empty entertainment and, eventually, for the purpose of supporting the independent production of art films.

Independent cinema already has its own tradition, its own world-renowned works and masters. Every city has one or more special cinemas just for this kind of films (in Paris there are ten). Prague stills owes its public such a cinema.

The Bio Kotva is trying to pay off that debt. We wish them success.

Alexander Hammid

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