

KINO
INTERNATIONAL

PRESENTS

A Talking Picture



a film by manoel de oliveira

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PRESSBOOK

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CAST

LEONOR SILVEIRA – Rosa Maria
JOHN MALKOVICH – Comandante John Walesa
CATHERINE DENEUVE – Delphine
STEFANIA SANDRELLI – Francesca
IRENE PAPAS – Helena
LUÍS MIGUEL CINTRA – Luís Miguel Cintra
DAVID CARDOSO – Pescador
ELIAS LOGOTHETIS – Padre ortodoxo
FILIPA DE ALMEIDA – Maria Joana

CREW

Producer- PAULO BRANCO
Director - MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA
Writer - MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA
Cinematographer - EMMANUEL MACHUEL
Sound - PHILIPPE MOREL
Costume Designer - ISABEL BRANCO
Line Producer - ALEXANDRE VALENTE

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A co-production between
Madragoa Filmes (Portugal)
Gemini Films (France)
Mikado (Italy)
RTP–Radiotelevisão Portuguesa (Portugal).

TECHNICAL SPECS:

Portugal
2003, Color, 95 Minutes
Dolby Stereo, 1:1.85

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SYNOPSIS

The first scene in Manoel de Oliveira's *A TALKING PICTURE* depicts Rosa Maria (Leonor Silveira), a young history professor, and her seven-year-old daughter Maria Joana (Filipa de Almeida) on a bucolic cruise through the Mediterranean Sea. Rosa's purpose for this trip is twofold: to join her husband in Bombay, India, for a family vacation, and to acquire first-hand knowledge of—and introduce her daughter to—historical sites at the various cities along their journey.

Starting in their homeland Portugal and moving through Marseilles (France), the ruins of Pompeii (Italy), Ceuta (Spanish Morocco), Athens (Greece), the pyramids of Egypt and Istanbul (Turkey), Rosa narrates to her young daughter some of the most important events in Western history—sometimes struggling to separate myths and speculations from concrete marks of irrefutable histories.

On the cruise, Rosa and Maria eventually befriend three famous women of different nationalities: a renowned French executive (Catherine Deneuve), a former Italian model (Stefania Sandrelli) and a celebrity Greek actress (Irene Papas). Dining with the ship's captain (John Malkovich), an American of Polish origin, all four passengers exchange pieces of their past while talking about the legacies of Western history—each speaking in his or her native languages.

But the curious tourists are forced to stop discussing the rhetoric of tradition and history when a strange threat disturbs the cruise, menacing the ship and the life of all of its passengers.

QUOTES

"What begins as a history lesson between a mother and her daughter on a cruise ship turns into something a lot more fanciful ... The 95-year-old director appears unstoppable." —*Wesley Morris, Boston Globe.*

"*A TALKING PICTURE* is one of those great late works in which a master dares to put aside aesthetic concerns and his own ego ..."
—*Amy Taubin, Film Comment.*

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MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA AND WORLD HISTORY.

Recently re-discovered by mainstream media in North-America, mostly due to the theatrical success of his 2001 feature film "I'm Going Home," Manoel de Oliveira is commonly referred to as the "oldest film director in the world." Without diminishing the merits of 96 years of active engagement in the arts, Mr. Oliveira's age is certainly the least interesting aspect of his current stand in the international film scene.

Winner of the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival with "The Letter" (1999), Oliveira has brought to his homeland Portugal dozens of film festival awards, including a lifetime achievement at the 2004 edition of the Venice Film Festival.

Highly regarded by film critics (Stuart Klawans refers to Oliveira as a "cinematic Olympus") and A-list actors (John Malkovich and Catherine Deneuve have taken leading and supporting roles in many of his films), Manoel de Oliveira has written and directed 20 films in the last two decades, making an average of one movie per year between the ages of 76 and 96.

Born in 1908, Manoel de Oliveira started his film career in 1931 with a silent-film documentary about the harsh life conditions of river-workers in his hometown Porto. Seen now as a classic of avant-garde cinema, "Working on the Douro River" was nevertheless coolly received when it was first screened in Lisbon.

Oliveira's career blossomed in the mid-1970s after two decades of relative low productivity—he directed only three feature films between 1940 and the late 50s. The sparseness of this period is commonly attributed to the abrupt reduction of federal funds allocated to film production and to effective censorship laws that curbed freedom of speech in all arts.

Implemented by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (the minister of finance who ascended to the post of prime minister in 1932, and became the civilian mainstay of Portugal's military dictatorship) these drastic budget cuts and censorship laws were orchestrated in order to stabilize Portugal's economy during the 1930s.

Salazar did more than decrease funds for national film production; he was responsible for re-strengthening links between the state and the Catholic Church and swiftly (and often brutally) pacified independent movements in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, three of Portugal's most important African colonies.

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MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA AND WORLD HISTORY.

—Continued—

In 1960, Portugal's military government dismissed the UN's call for all colonial powers to relinquish control of colonized territories and by the mid-1970s, Portugal had committed 80 per cent of its available military force to control insurgencies in African colonies.

This history of economic subservience and struggle has been a constant theme in several of Mr. Oliveira's movies ("The Letter" and "A Talking Picture" peripherally deal with issues of colonization). But it was in "No or the Vain Glory of Command" (1990) that Manoel de Oliveira made his most personal examination of Portugal's excursion in African territory.

Written and directed by Oliveira, "No or The Vain Glory of Command" is, like "A Talking Picture," a spoken meditation on the legacy of western history. Set during the latter days of the colonial wars in Africa, "No or The Vain ..." follows a group of Portuguese soldiers on their way to battle in Angola, in 1974.

While fearful of the enemy they would face, soldiers, lieutenants and generals discuss patriotism, nationalism and colonialism in the context of Portuguese history and a war they would eventually lose.

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA'S FILMOGRAPHY —DIRECTOR—

Quinto Império, O (2004)
Talking Picture, A (2003)
Uncertainty Principle, The (2002)
Porto of My Childhood (2001)
I'm Going Home (2001)
Word and Utopia (2000)
Letter, The (1999)
Anxiety (1998) (USA)
Voyage to the Beginning of the World (1997)
Party (1996)
Convent, The (1995)
Blind Man's Bluff (1994)
Abraham's Valley (1993)
Day of Despair, The (1992)

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**MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA'S FILMOGRAPHY
-DIRECTOR (Continued)-**

Divine Comedy, The (1991)
No, or the Vain Glory of Command (1990)
Cannibals, The (1988)
My Case (1986)
Satin Slipper, The (1985)
Cultural Lisbon (1983)
Nice - À propos de Jean Vigo (1983)
Memories and Confessions (1982)
Francisca (1981)
Doomed Love (1979)
Benilde or the Virgin Mother (1975)
Past and Present (1972)
Pão, O (1966)
Pinturas do Meu Irmão Júlio, As (1965)
Caça, A (1964)
Rite of Spring (1963)
Artist and the City, The (1956)
Aniki-Bóbó (1942)
Famalicão (1941)
Em Portugal Já Se Fazem Automóveis (1938)
Miramar, Praia das Rosas (1938)
Estátuas de Lisboa (1932)
Working on the Douro River (1931)

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA

—The Director Philosopher—

The great Portuguese auteur Manoel de Oliveira explains himself in the same way that a philosopher does: using syllogisms and figures of speech.

His new film **A TALKING PICTURE** was shown in competition at Venice, in 2003. It is a meditation on the old and new Europe, and also about the utopia of a universal language. "It's strange to talk about a film that's called A Talking Picture," says Oliveira.

Q: A Talking Picture also looks at a Europe that is still developing, the European Union. What does European cinema mean to you?

Cinema in general, and not just European cinema, is the last of the arts in date order. And like all the arts, it's a ghost of reality. Reality is the sum of actual facts and utopias.

Q: Will your next film also talk about utopia?

Yes, in a certain way. It will be called The Fifth Empire. It's a project about the myth of King Sebastian in the 16th century. He was a 15-year-old sovereign who wanted to spread "Christian peace" throughout the world and even gave up the idea of marriage to hold onto his spiritual power. But when you are looking for peace, war comes along. Sebastian attacked Morocco, and he was intended to reach Jerusalem. At the end of the story the king dies. And in Portugal, we are still waiting for his "return".

Q: A while ago, you were accused by a few critics of badly directing your actors. What do you say about these accusations?

It's impossible because I don't direct them. I promote spontaneous performances. The actors are the salt of a film. They give a body and a voice to the characters and make up the strength of the film. And this is the reason why choosing the actors is the most difficult part of making a film. Once I've done the casting, I'm much more relaxed. Unfortunately if there's any credit given, it usually goes to the director.

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EUROPEAN REVIEWS:

“In its own eccentric way, A TALKING PICTURE is sublime ... It has the air of remote, classical literature notionally and rather reluctantly transposed to a modern, cinematic setting ... Malkovich gives an absolutely extraordinary performance as the cruise-ship commander in dazzling white uniform, drawling bonmots with Catherine Deneuve at the captain's table ... The whole thing ends with a melodramatic flourish which sent me into a kind of clinical shock ...”

Peter Bradshaw, THE GUARDIAN (UK)

“The feeling of participating in a time of decadence is the subject of Manoel de Oliveira's latest opus ... Open to the sounds of what's going on in the world, Oliveira sees this end as the coming together of a cycle which will regenerate differently and in forms we don't know ... A TALKING PICTURE leaves the spectator dumbfounded, thrown from the cinema by a radical ending which leaves little space for idealism.”

Didier Peron, LIBERATION (France)

“Simply genius ... Starts as a history lesson, followed by tones of sophisticated comedy and finishes as a drama ...”

Roberto Nepoti, LA REPUBBLICA (Italy)

“A testament to the fifth Rome, the utopia of the community of nations, comprising today's Europe ... Oliveira is an old man who has the courage needed to challenge our contemporary utopia--the ideology of pooh-poohing controversial issues and hoping they will somehow go away... Even if--as we all hope--Oliveira's message of the coming end of Western civilization and the advent of a new Middle Ages is only a warning, this film is among the most important pictures shown at this year's Venice Festival.”

Janina Kumaniecka, FIPRESCI (International Critics Association)