

# AV FESTIVAL

## POSTCOLONIAL CINEMA WEEKEND

**Fri 7 March – Sun 9 March**

This special weekend welcomes leading filmmakers in person to screen their rarely seen work. The focus on postcolonial cinema explores the complex histories and material traces of past colonial inequalities through contemporary strategies across documentary and fiction including: manipulation of archival footage, re-construction, re-enactment and the essay-film. Each filmmaker addresses the very real ghosts of the colonial past. [www.avfestival.co.uk](http://www.avfestival.co.uk)

**Yervant Gianikian & Angela Ricci Lucchi: *From the Pole to the Equator***

**Star and Shadow Cinema, Sun 9 March, 8.30pm, 101min, 1986**

This experimental film is drawn from the 1910 archives of Luca Comerio, a pioneering Italian documentary filmmaker who photographed 'exotic' peoples from the North Pole to the Equator. The spectral images suggest the disturbing theme of Western man as predator.

*From the Pole to the Equator* is the actual name of the documentary compiled in the late 1920s by filmmaker Luca Comerio, which drew on footage from around the globe to celebrate the vitality and achievements of European colonialism – most of all Italian fascism. Using this material, as well as other footage shot or collected by Comerio, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi refashioned Comerio's work in order to tease out the ideology written upon –and between–every image. The fact that so much of the film had begun to decay gives it a layer of abstraction and serves as a comment on the contingent nature of the images and their ideology and, in Gianikian's words, "on the violence of colonialism as it plays itself out in different situations and spheres."

To put it in context Comerio was the earliest Italian film journalist, and is considered with inaugurating the transformation of the camera eye into warfare's most conspicuous weapon. He was commissioned to work on different continents, including Africa and India, his archive is therefore rich in materials from the early part of the century through to the 1920s. It consisted mostly of films shot by himself and his company but also has films he collected.

Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's film is considered a tour de force of experimental and found footage filmmaking. Re-photographing hundreds of thousands of frames, colouring them, slowing down the images, and removing the intertitles and other original framing and contextual devices, Ricci Lucchi and Gianikian turn a Fascist documentary into a film that comments critically on rhetorics as well as representations of history and the entanglements of cinema, imperialism and Fascism.

The filmmakers reworking of Comerio's footage highlights that in Italy, no less than in France, Germany, and Britain, cinema played a central role in the culture of empire. We see the camera as a weapon of war and imperialism – seeing as an integral part of the act of killing – violence as inevitable and a masculine rite; the ability of modern technologies to tame and vanquish nature, performance as a lens on the essence of the 'primitive'; the privileged position of the cinematic apparatus and its operator in registering all of this.

The film also reminds us that both the history of cinema and the history of war and imperial expansion have depended on technologies of movement. No less than the train operator or pilot, the cameraman was an emblem of a mobile modernity. The qualities of a modern temporality based on 'assault, acceleration, and speed', which are also those of the battlefield, were a hallmark of Futurist aesthetics and came to define Fascist-era non-fiction film productions by Comerio and others.

The cinema of Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian is a cinema of fragments, of traces; theirs is a history cinema that paradoxically proclaims its ephemeral nature, not least by calling attention to the parallel processes of human and cinematic decay.

The rise of post-colonial thought, the new importance of ethnography for contemporary art practice, the turn towards documentary film, and the re-engagement with political and social realities – all these developments created a receptive environment for the work of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their work provides a link between ethnographic cinema and the avant-garde, by using artistic strategies to construct a critique of European culture. Their works "frame the framer as he or she frames the other" (Hal Foster). Or as Judith Butler describes:

*"The frame is always throwing something away, keeping something out, always de-realising and de-legitimatising alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version. And so, when the frame jettisons certain versions of war, it is busily making a rubbish heap whose animated debris provides the potential resource for resistance."*

### **Yervant Gianikian & Angela Ricci Lucchi**

Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi have created an incomparable documentary oeuvre consisting of over 40 films since the 1970s, whose rare beauty and integrity set them apart. Working at the intersections of history, the archive, the ready made and re-animation, their films are comprised of found footage mesmerizingly manipulated in order to give it new life and meaning: spectral apparitions that exhume forgotten and often shameful historical trespasses as they evocatively illuminate our own era.

Yervant Gianikian & Angela Ricci Lucchi's landmark experimental work *From the Pole to the Equator*, 1986, re-defined the documentary form and introduced recurrent themes in their work: war and peace, genocide and colonialism, death and cinema, the body and embodiment. Their techniques involve the manipulation of rare footage through re-photography, hand-tinted colour and altering film speed, to produce work that explores the fragility of the cinematic image and traces of historical ideologies.

The two have presented work at major international film festivals including Cannes, Rotterdam and Venice, and at leading museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Tate Modern, London.