

A Cinema Guild Release

The Strange Case of Angelica

A film by Manoel de Oliveira

95 minutes / 35mm / 1:1.66 / Dolby SRD / Portugal / Not Rated
In Portuguese with English Subtitles / Stills available at: www.cinemaguild.com/downloads

The Cinema Guild, Inc.
115 West 30th Street, Suite 800
New York, NY 10001-4061
Tel: (212) 685-6242, Fax: (212) 685-4717
www.cinemaguild.com

Synopsis

The new film from master filmmaker Manoel de Oliveira, *The Strange Case of Angelica* is a magical tale of a young photographer who falls madly in love with a woman he can never have, except in his dreams. One night, Isaac is summoned by a wealthy family to take the last photograph of a young bride, Angelica, who has mysteriously passed away. Arriving at their estate, Isaac is overwhelmed by Angelica's beauty. But when he looks through his camera lens, something strange happens – the young woman appears to come to life. From that moment on, Isaac will be haunted by Angelica day and night.

About the Film

The Strange Case of Angelica was the Opening Night selection of the 2010 Cannes Film Festival's Un Certain Regard program, and an official selection of the 2010 Toronto and New York Film Festivals.

Filmography: Manoel de Oliveira

Douro, Faina Fluvial (Working on the Douro River 1931), short film
Ulha Branca (Hydro-electric power 1932), documentary
Estátuas de Lisboa (1932)
Miramar, Praia das Rosas (1938), short film
Já Se Fabricam Automóveis em Portugal (Em Portugal Já Se Fazem Automóveis 1938), short film
Famalicão (short film 1941)
Aniki-Bóbó (1942)
O Pintor e a Cidade (The Artist and the City 1956)
O Pão (Bread 1959), documentary
O Coração (The heart 1960), documentary
Acto de Primavera (Passion of Jesus, Rite of Spring 1963)
A Caça (The Hunt 1964)
As Pinturas do Meu Irmão Júlio (Pictures of My Brother Julio 1965), short film
O Passado e o Presente (Past and Present 1972)
Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe (Benilde or the Virgin Mother 1975)
Amor de Perdição (Doomed Love 1978)
Francisca (1981)
Memórias e Confissões (Memories and Confessions, made in 1982, to be released only after de Oliveira's death)
Lisboa Cultural (1983)
Nice à propos de Jean Vigo (1983)
Le Soulier de satin (O Sapato de Cetim, The Satin Slipper 1985)
O Meu Caso (Mon cas, My Case 1987)
Os Canibais (Les Cannibales, The Cannibals 1988)
A Bandeira Nacional (The National Flag 1988), documentary short film
'Non', ou A Vã Glória de Mandar (Não, ou a Vã Glória de Mandar, No, o la vana gloria de mandar, No, or the Vain Glory of Command 1990)
A Divina Comédia (La Divine comédie, The Divine Comedy 1991)
O Dia do Desespero (Le Jour du désespoir, The Day of Despair 1992)
Vale Abraão (Le Val Abraham, Abraham Valley 1993)
A Caixa (La Cassette, Blind Man's Bluff 1994)
O Convento (Le Couvent, The Convent 1995)
Party (1996)
Viagem ao Princípio do Mundo (Voyage au début du monde, Voyage to the Beginning of the World, Journey to the Beginning of the World 1997)
Inquietude (Inquiétude, Anxiety 1998)
La Lettre (A Carta, The Letter 1999)
Palavra e Utopia (Parole et utopie, Word and Utopia 2000)
Oporto da Minha Infância (La Porte de mon enfance, Oporto de mon enfance 2001)
I'm Going Home (Je rentre à la maison, Vou Para Casa 2001)
O Principio da Incerteza (The Uncertainty Principle 2002)
A Talking Picture (2003)
The Fifth Empire (2004)
Magic Mirror (2005)
Do Visível ao Invisível (2005), short film
Belle Toujours (2006)
O Improvável Não é Impossível (2006), short film
Christopher Columbus, The Enigma (2007)
Eccentricities of a Blonde-Haired Girl (2009)
The Panels of São Vicente de Fora – A Poetic Vision (2009), short film
The Strange Case of Angelica (2010)

A Conversation with Manoel de Oliveira

António Preto The film stems from an old project of yours dating back to 1952. Is this the first time you've recycled something from so long ago? What led you to make the film after 60 years?

Manoel de Oliveira I have a lot of projects I never went ahead with and never went back to. But years later, in the case of *Angelica*, I authorised the release of a decoupage in France, which used photos and drawings I provided. At the time I was sure I'd never do anything with the project. I had several reservations about the idea of filming a dream, given that the camera films neither dreams nor thoughts. Somebody says they had a dream or a thought but we can't be sure about what they say. It becomes distorted or it could even be a lie. We have no guarantee that a person has dreamt what they say they have or thought what they say they thought. Thoughts and dreams are entirely subjective and the camera has no way of verifying them. That's why I say theatre is more honest than cinema. Because it's realistic, the film *Eccentricities of a Blond-Haired Girl* is, on that level, much less problematic.

A.P. But there are differences between the original 1952 screenplay and the film you've just made. In this film, we could almost say you've adapted yourself.

M.O. I adapted the project to present circumstances. The project was conceived after the Second World War in which, if I'm not mistaken, six million Jews died. It was a time when the Jews fled to Spain and Portugal, and from there they took planes to America. Isaac, the protagonist of my film was one of those Jews fleeing the Nazi persecutions who had settled in Portugal as a photographer. But the war was a long time ago, last century. And the vineyards in the Douro are different and the bridges and the houses are different. Some things are the same, but others have changed.

A.P. But in the film, that past and the present coexist. The characters wear '50s style clothes and the social ambiance takes us back to that period too. But the setting clearly indicates we're in another era, the present.

M.O. No. All those elements are current. I didn't try to recreate the '50s. There's evolution. Despite the fact the setting is provincial, old-fashioned even, I evoke the present. What led me to adapt the original project is that persecution today is of a different nature. The world's problems are different. There's a chaotic tension underlying things; economic problems and many more difficulties. In an earlier version of the film there was a dialogue that debated the reasons which led to the persecution of the Jewish people, from ancient Egypt to today. But then I thought it would be more relevant to reflect on other matters. I brought the original screenplay up to date and switched from reflection on a political level to deduction. What must Isaac, as a Jewish person, have gone through before and what is he going through now? His visions and dreams of *Angelica* are, as he says himself, something that relieves the pressure of

persecution. That's an indication that Angelica provides a sort of release from his demons.

A.P. The part where he's about to take the photograph of the dead girl and sees a spirit-like image detach itself from the corpse has an autobiographical feel to it. Is that something you experienced, personally?

M.O. I'm using something that happened to me in completely different circumstances, and that inspired me to think of a persecuted photographer who sees in Angelica a form of release; in the way she smiles at him and in the way he sees her spirit detach itself from her body. In the first version, there's still a doubt because the photograph Isaac takes of Angelica when she smiles, is spoiled before he can develop it. In this new, more realistic, version, the photographs neither confirm nor refute Angelica's smile. But, as Isaac confesses, it's the recollection of the smile that makes him happy and frees him of all his traumas. Interestingly, the decorated ceiling in Angelica's house with the dove (representing the Holy Spirit), is a Jewish ceiling in the shape of a star. And there's the dialogue with the nun, who in the first version was just a very religious woman, but not a nun. Those two elements serve to show that the relationship between Catholics and Jews was not antagonistic, not exclusively argumentative but one of comprehension and exchange.

A.P. By establishing, somewhat insistently, a relationship between Isaac and olive trees – like when you frame him in front of an olive tree, or when he falls in the olive grove and some children appear singing a folk song about olive trees – are you not thinking about your own possible Jewish origins and, to some extent, reinforcing your identification with the character?

M.O. Well, the business with the olive trees is very important... I'm Oliveira (olive tree)... My paternal grandmother was very religious and my grandfather always gave his children two of his surnames instead of one and their mother's maiden name, which was from a different line from his. Two of his children became priests because my grandmother was so religious. There wasn't a trace of Judaism on that side. Someone told me that after the French revolution Jewish people were forced to adopt new family names: Isaac, son of..., Israel, son of... something like that. And among the names they chose were the names of trees: Oliveira, Pereira (pear tree) ... and so on. So it's a possibility, but the truth is I've never been able to come across any real evidence of Jewish heritage in my family.

A.P. In a way, *Angelica* is also a tribute to the workers of the Douro. The old ways of working the vineyards, which still exists today alongside modern mechanical methods, is something you evoke in this film. And what's the "essence" of the film? Isn't it, in fact, transformation?

M.O. The essence is Isaac's destiny, his fate. It's all about Isaac, the photographer, right from the start of the film. He's a cultured, spiritual man, which perhaps explains his propensity for the metaphysical and so justifies the end. There's only one very big compromise that I'm aware of: when Isaac dies, his spirit lives on. That ending is the riskiest aspect of the film. If he died, the film would end. But he survives. His soul meets up with Angelica's spirit. At the same time, his fate could mean that Man's only true release is through his own death, like you see in Dreyer's *Gertrud*. The search for absolute love that can only be found in death itself. Then there's the gravediggers' hostility. Their song is a stark contrast to all the pessimism, and that lightens a certain negativity that could otherwise surface through the film and especially at the end. Though of course, some strange things are strange simply because we can't get past them. St. Paul said that if Christ hadn't resurrected, all our faith would have been in vain. So we're always left with the uncertainty: "to be or not to be"...

A.P. Isaac is a photographer, an artist. He works a lot, as the landlady at the boarding house never tires of saying. He lives on the margins of a cohesive society.

M.O. His work is about antagonism. The very fact that Angelica smiles at him is an act of extreme antagonism. And that's what disturbs him - life's antagonism. The antagonism represented by the gravediggers despite their merry singing.

A.P. Isn't *Angelica* as well a film about the clash between artistic creativity and resistance or, if you like, the antagonism between the social side of things and the work of creating.

M.O. Yes, it is a work of resistance. All work is resistance. Nature is devious. She gave Man hunger to make him work, to make him survive and work. Hunger is the law of Man. If you have ten men and put two hundred bread rolls beside them they'll be fine. But if you put just one roll, they'll kill each other. Hunger is a phenomenal power.

A.P. This film leads once again to the controversy of "frustrated loves" that has figured in all your films.

M.O. Love is abstract and it's absolute. True passion between two beings is so violent that it doesn't even admit children. They would be disruptive to absolute love. Absolute love craves androgyny, it's the anxiety of two beings to become just one. It's an impossible desire, but it's real. Here, everything is violent. This is a terrifically violent film and much more violent than my films about war, which reveal a more or less calculated violence. This is real, it kills. It comes from the individual, the person. The act of filming is... I mean, of photographing, is in itself violent.

I once said that a director is like a murderer. And just as a murderer can't avoid killing, the director can't avoid the act of filming. It's its own attraction and it's fatal because it has nothing to do with life. Life is something else.

A.P. But when you film life aren't you really filming death. Isn't it death that you're continually filming?

M.O. Well, I presume to know a bit about life, but I know nothing about death. I've never tried it, no one has. So it's a puzzle: we don't know anything.

A.P. What is cinema for you today?

M.O. It's the same as it was for Lumière, for Méliès and Max Linder. There you have realism, the fantastic and the comic. There's nothing more to add to that, absolutely nothing.

A.P. And the tragic?

M.O. The tragic is in realism. Reality is tragic: Man dies. That's Man's limitation: in the end he's just a photograph. What has truly evolved is the technical side of things. But the technical side belongs to science and art belongs to expression. The technical side isn't expression, it can help it but it's something else. The essential is in the realism, in the fantastic and in the comic.

A.P. *Angelica* is also a film about progress and technology, about technical changes. There's a shot of a tractor shifting earth. The land is eternal: it's there, before and after the technology, like the wine.

M.O. The land doesn't change. Art doesn't change. Because Man's psychology doesn't change either. It learns and it prepares itself but it doesn't change. Man is invigorated by hope.

A.P. The land, like art, doesn't change and Isaac, being an artist, is someone who has no land, someone who doesn't work on the land.

M.O. The artist has no land. But he's rooted in his instincts, in his gift as a creator, just like the painter is or any other artist. I believe in fate, in the metaphysics of angels, let's say.

Rembrandt painted throughout his whole life, he produced a lot of self-portraits. The only thing that stayed the same was the look in his eyes. There was a Dutch director who filmed all of Rembrandt's self-portraits in close-up [Bert Haanstra], which confirmed that the eyes always stay the same, inalterable. The face changes, until it becomes old. In the last of those paintings he said: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity". The awards and the applause, it's all vanity.

Cast

Isaac	Ricardo Trêpa
Angelica	Pilar López de Ayala
Mother	Leonor Silveira
Engineer	Luís Miguel Cintra
Clementina	Ana Maria Magalhães
Servant	Isabel Ruth

Crew

Director & screenwriter	Manoel de Oliveira
Photography	Sabine Lancelin
Sound	Henri Maikoff
Editing	Valérie Loiseleux
Set	Christian Marti, José Pedro Penha
Costumes	Adelaide Trêpa
Produced by	François d'Artemare, Maria João Mayer, Luís Miñarro, Renata de Almeida & Leon Cakoff
A co-production of	Filmes do Tejo II, Eddie Saeta, Les Films de l'Après-Midi & Mostra Internacional de Cinema