

Call for Papers/Participation

IMAGINING THE PAST Ken Russell, Biography, and the Art of Making History

March 19-20 2014, Cinema RITS
Brussels, Belgium

In collaboration with Offscreen Filmfestival



Film director Ken Russell's (1927-2011) critical reputation hovers somewhere between high camp and low cult. He has been criticised for being at once outrageously vulgar and overly intellectual. His biographical films about artists have been dismissed as indulgent fantasies that, as one critic put it, tell us more about Russell himself than about his ostensible subjects. For many critics his work is simply bad, for others he is an absolute genius. Several of Russell's films have become cult classics, notably *The Devils* (1971), but also *Women in Love* (1969), *The Music Lovers* (1970), *Tommy* (1975), *Altered States* (1980), *Crimes of Passion* (1984), and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988).

This conference wants to meet the challenge of Russell's extensive and excessive oeuvre by questioning received opinion on his work and the scholarly issues it triggers. For what do we really mean when we call his films (or any film) a "cult" film? It often seems that calling films cult or camp is simply an excuse for not treating them in a serious or profound manner. It de-fuses the work. But Russell's work presents us with many tough questions that are extremely relevant for current debates in the humanities. What do we do when we do biography? What does it mean to reconstruct a life? Where do facts end and where does fiction begin? What does it mean to re-imagine the past in a work of art? How far does the artist's responsibility to be "objective" extend? And what can objectivity mean in this

context? Do we recover or reconstruct the past? Is history something found or something that is made, again and again, by those who write it?

Because his films activate all these debates Russell's work is an excellent playing ground to let interdisciplinary research come to fruition in a post-theoretical context. This conference wants to address Russell's work, the genre of film biography, and the pursuit of history through fiction. The aim of the conference is to take Russell's work as a point of departure to reflect on:

- concepts of "cult" in the cinema
- the art of (filmed) biography
- the representation of the past in cinema and art
- the re-imagining of the past in cinema and art
- the ethics of representation

We welcome papers from all disciplines. Russell's work engages issues from film history, aesthetics, art history, adaptation studies, television history, iconography, biography, literary studies, and so on. We therefore welcome propositions from all these disciplines or cutting through the several disciplines. We welcome both proposals that start from Russell's work or focus on its social or artistic context. The conference explicitly invites graduate students in these fields to present work in progress or case studies. The conference will be enlivened with film screenings to maintain a workshop atmosphere that keeps scholarship entertaining, as Russell would have wanted it.

This conference is a joint venture of Maastricht University, Université Libre de Bruxelles, RITS School of Arts and Offscreen Filmfestival

Organizers: Christophe Van Eecke (Maastricht), Karel Vanhaesebrouck (Brussels), Murielle Andrin (Brussels), Jack Post (Maastricht)

Please submit a 250-word abstract and a brief bio, including contact details and institutional affiliation (if any), before **Monday 2 December 2013** to Christophe Van Eecke at: christophe.vaneecke@maastrichtuniversity.nl. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by December 20.

General enquiries are also welcome.