



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SUNDAY

APRIL 8, 2018

2:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

THE AVIATOR

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



With the realization of his long-planned *GANGS OF NEW YORK* (2002), Martin Scorsese entered the realm of the \$100 million super-production, a far cry from 30 years earlier when he had struggled to assemble the \$375,000 budget for *MEAN STREETS*, his breakthrough third feature. *THE AVIATOR*, Scorsese's follow-up to *GANGS*, was even more expensive (\$110 million), and was another ambitious attempt to create, in the director's words, "an American epic."

Unlike *GANGS*, though, *THE AVIATOR* had not been on Scorsese's mind for years. In fact, Michael Mann was originally set to direct. When instead Mann became one of the producers, Leonardo DiCaprio sent John Logan's script to Scorsese, who at first was not enthusiastic: "I don't really like flying very much. I'm fascinated by it, but I just don't like it." This is reminiscent of Scorsese's initial reaction to doing *RAGING BULL*: "I don't like boxing... Even as a kid, I always thought that boxing was boring... It was something I couldn't, wouldn't grasp." Yet in *RAGING BULL* he gave us some of the best-choreographed and most visceral boxing matches in film history; and, in *THE AVIATOR*, Scorsese created spectacular aerial sequences, with masterful orchestration of cinematography, editing, music, and special effects (utilizing elaborate models and green screens instead of computer-generated imagery).



For many, the name Howard Hughes evokes the image of an eccentric, homeless recluse at the end of his life in 1976. But *THE AVIATOR* presents Hughes from age 22 to 42 (1927-1947): the energetic, dynamic, entrepreneur; the man who innovated aircraft design and broke speed records; the lover of Katharine Hepburn and Ava Gardner; the anti-establishment maverick who battled Pan Am, the federal government, the Hollywood studios, and the Production Code.

Scorsese saw Hughes as a visionary: "(Logan's script) had the spirit of adventure—a hope of what this country could be. It's about the spirit of the explorer, who kept testing his limits and pushing and pushing. When they got to California, there was no place else to go. When you can't go further west, you go up in the sky, the last frontier"

At the same time, the film does devote significant time to Hughes's self-destructiveness (not surprising from the director of *TAXI DRIVER*, *THE KING OF COMEDY*, et al.), caused by irrational germ phobia and OCD: from small incidents such as his concern over a speck of dust, to unnerving scenes of ritualistic cleansing and endlessly repeated phrases, to vividly dramatized descents into paranoia and madness.

What attracted Scorsese most was Hughes' obsessive approach to filmmaking, illustrated by his World War I aviation spectacle *HELL'S ANGELS* (1930). Hughes first shot it as a silent film, then reshot it for sound, eventually spending \$4 million of his own money; asked Louis B. Mayer to loan him two cameras because 24 were not enough; and, according to the script, was so fanatic that he shut down production for eight months while waiting for specific kinds of clouds to appear.

Scorsese's own meticulous attention to detail includes a bold visual concept: to evoke 1927-1935, he presents the first 53 minutes in a recreation of the era's "two-strip" Technicolor—with emphasis on red and cyan (blue peas, anyone?)—and the rest of the film simulating the opulent "three-strip" Technicolor that debuted in features in 1935. Much of this was achieved digitally, in post-production, but it also involved careful color-coordination of sets, costumes, and makeup. Critic Richard Schickel asked Scorsese, "The average viewer is not going to know that it's two-color or three-color. You could have done a completely respectable-looking movie that would have satisfied viewers and critics. So why go through all of that trouble?" Scorsese: "Part of it is the enjoyment of doing something special and creating a look... I thought it would be nice to make a little history of the movies."

DIRECTED BY **MARTIN SCORSESE**
SCREENPLAY BY **JOHN LOGAN**
CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **ROBERT RICHARDSON**
EDITED BY **THELMA SCHOONMAKER**
PRODUCED BY **WARNER BROS. AND MIRAMAX**
(2004) 170 MINS.
STARRING **LEONARDO DICAPRIO, GATE BLANCHETT, KATE BECKINSALE, JOHN C. REILLY, ALEC BALDWIN, ALAN ALDA, IAN HOLM, AND JUDE LAW**

DID YOU KNOW: THE AVIATOR WAS NOMINATED FOR ELEVEN ACADEMY AWARDS AND WON FIVE: CINEMATOGRAPHY, EDITING, PRODUCTION DESIGN, COSTUME DESIGN, AND SUPPORTING ACTRESS (GATE BLANCHETT AS KATHARINE HEPBURN: THE ONLY INSTANCE OF AN OSCAR GOING TO SOMEONE PLAYING AN OSCAR WINNER).

NEXT UP: DIRECTOR RICHARD LINKLATER'S BIGGEST COMMERCIAL SUCCESS TO DATE, CREATED WITH WRITER MIKE WHITE AND COMEDIAN JACK BLACK, TELLS THE STORY OF HAPLESS ROCK MUSICIAN DEWEY FINN AND A CLASSROOM FULL OF KIDS. **THE SCHOOL OF ROCK** (2003) SPAWNED AN ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER MUSICAL ON BROADWAY IN 2015 AND A THREE-SEASON TELEVISION SHOW IN 2016. THE ORIGINAL SCREENS IN 35MM ON **WEDNESDAY, MAY 16 AT 7:00 PM.**