

# Ulrike Ottinger

## *The Berlin Trilogy*

24. 4. – 26. 4. 2026

Film Series: 7 p.m. each day

Press talk: 24. 4. 2026, 11 a.m.

HALLE FÜR KUNST Steiermark

24.4.: *Ticket of No Return*, 1979 (107 min.)

25.4.: *Freak Orlando*, 1981 (126 min.)

26.4.: *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*, 1984 (150 min.)

in the frame of aktuelle kunst in graz

Ulrike Ottinger is considered one of the most important avant-garde contemporary filmmakers of her generation, having gained particular recognition for her cinematic work. Born in Konstanz in 1942, Ottinger can now look back on more than six decades of artistic work, which has not only taken her to many different places, but has also led her from the visual arts to filmmaking. In the process, she developed a non-linear, surreal, and sometimes bizarre film style.

At the age of 20, determined to become an artist, she moved to Paris, trained in etching at Johnny Friedlaender's studio, and attended lectures by Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser at the Collège de France. During her seven-year stay in Paris, she worked as an artist in the fields of painting, photography, and performance, and in 1966 wrote her first screenplay, entitled *Die mongolische Doppelschublade* (The Mongolian Double Drawer).

In 1969, she returned to Konstanz, where she founded the film club *Visuell* in cooperation with the University of Konstanz and opened the gallery and publishing house *galeriepress*. During this period, in the early 1970s, she also began her long-standing collaboration with the artists Tabea Blumenstein—with whom she made her first film, *Laokoon & Söhne* (Laocoon & Sons) (1971–1973), which premiered at the Arsenal Berlin—and Magdalena Montezuma. In 1973, she finally moved to Berlin, where she enjoyed her first international successes. In addition to her documentary and feature film projects, in which she deals intensively with ethnological and anthropological issues, she also creates stage works for theater and opera, and produced artist books.

This year, her film *Die Blutgräfin* (The Blood Countess), dialogues in participation with Elfriede Jelinek and a star-studded cast including Isabelle Huppert, Birgit Minichmayr, and Lars Eidinger, celebrated its world premiere at the Berlinale.

Ottinger's *Berlin Trilogy* was created between the late 1970s and early 1980s and will be shown on three consecutive evenings during this year's *Galerientage* in Graz, also known as *aktuelle kunst in graz*. The trilogy comprises the films *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (Ticket of No Return) (1979), *Freak Orlando* (1981), and *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press) (1984), featuring performances across the three films from Tabea Blumenstein, Delphine Seyrig, Magdalena Montezuma, Veruschka von Lehnendorff, Eddie Constantine, Nina Hagen, Orpha Termin, and Kurt Raab, with music by composer Peer Raben.

In *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (Ticket of No Return) with Tabea Blumenstein, viewers are taken on a journey to West Berlin in the 1970s, with its stylized aesthetic. In a somewhat detached manner, this experimental masterpiece of German cinema visualizes the topography of the city with a nameless and beautiful protagonist. She is a traveler arriving at Tegel Airport who wants to pursue her passion undisturbed: drinking—in order to forget.

In *Freak Orlando*, Ottinger uses five episodes to present a world chronicle incorporating error, incompetence, lust for power, madness, fear, everyday life, and cruelty, depicted through the

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lives of freaks and outcasts. The central figure is Orlando, who appears in many different guises and times: as an attraction in a department store, as a wondrous figure from the Middle Ages, as a victim of religious fanaticism and the Inquisition, as an artist in a sideshow, and finally as an entertainer at fairs and festivals. Depicted in five scenes, in this journey, Orlando passes through the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment, and the present day like a brightly lit theater, experiencing exploitation, persecution, love, betrayal, violence, and death, encountering religious zeal, colonial deportation, and society's thirst for sensation. With Magdalena Montezuma in the lead role, Ottinger paints an ironic picture of a world in which those who deviate are marveled at, persecuted, and sacrificed, and history turns out to be an endless succession of cruelty and spectacle.

Finally, with *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press), Ottinger exposes the potential totalitarianism of the media, with Veruschka von Lehnendorff and Delphine Seyrig in the leading roles. Dr. Mabuse is a powerful publisher who rules over a media conglomerate that dominates national public opinion. Out of her thirst for power she creates a being who is completely dependent on her: Dorian Gray. Androgynous, beautiful, young, and rich, Gray is a dazzling dandy, artfully created to feed the desires of the masses. Dr. Mabuse makes him an idol, only to then bring him down in a staged scandal. However, the creature slowly realizes his power and ultimately turns against his creator and the empire that once brought him to life.

Ulrike Ottinger (\*1942 in Konstanz on Lake Constance, lives in Berlin)

is an internationally renowned film director, author, and visual artist. She studied etching techniques with Johnny Friedlaender in Paris.

Films (selection): *The Enchantment of the Blue Sailors* (1975), *Madame X – An Absolute Ruler* (1978), *Ticket of No Return* (1979), *Freak Orlando* (1981), *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press* (1984), *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1988), *The Korean Wedding Chest* (2008), *Paris Calligrammes* (2019), *The Blood Countess* (2026).

Her multifaceted oeuvre has been exhibited worldwide, including at the Venice Biennale, documenta, the Berlin Biennale, the David Zwirner Gallery and MoMA in New York, the Centre Pompidou and the Cinémathèque française in Paris, the Deutsche Kinemathek, the KW Institute for Contemporary Art and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, the Witte de With – Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, and the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid.

She has received numerous awards for her artistic work, including the Hannah Höch Prize of the State of Berlin (2011), the Hans Thoma Prize of the State of Baden-Württemberg (2012), and the Award for Avant-Garde Achievements in Film at EnergaCAMERIMAGE (2022). Ottinger has been a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin since 1997 and a member of the Bavarian Academy of Arts in Munich since 2020. She has been a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which presents the Academy Awards annually, since 2019.

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