

## Portraits of Poets and Rebels: The Cinema of Richard Dindo

In a career spanning more than thirty years, Swiss filmmaker Richard Dindo has made over twenty films, all of them documentaries. Nearly all are biographies: of artists, or revolutionaries, or both. Alongside world-famous rebels with cult status - like Che Guevara (Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *le journal de Bolivie*, 1994), Jean Genet (*Genet à Chatila*, 1999) or Arthur Rimbaud (*Arthur Rimbaud, une biographie*, 1991) - Dindo has also devoted a number of films to lesser-known but no less intriguing characters from Swiss contemporary history, each a rebel and a victim of injustice in one way or another.

Dindo's commitment to shedding light on controversial episodes from his country's recent past - from the Swiss role in World War II to the question of police brutality during the 1980s youth movements - has remained constant over the years. With his 2002 "*Verhör und Tod in Winterthur*", which looks back on the tragic lives of members of the 1980s youth culture, Dindo returned to a topic he had already treated fifteen years earlier, in "*Dani, Michi, Renato & Max*". While the newer film takes a more elegiac tone than the openly angry 1987 documentary, it still portrays the events of the time as vividly as if they had just occurred.

Unlike the semi-fictional genres of the bio-pic or docu-drama, Dindo's films focus on authentic material and "the facts": returning to the scene of historical events, collecting testimony from eyewitnesses, examining documents from the period in question. Dindo has occasionally worked with actors, most notably in his portrait of Rimbaud, which is based on scripted and staged scenes, or in *Genet à Chatila*, where a young actress performs the search for Genet's biographical and literary traces. But in most of his films he avoids dramatization, instead showing a distinct flair for setting up real situations in which the present may encounter the past. One memorable example is his homage to Paul Grüninger, the Swiss border policeman who was dishonourably discharged for illegally allowing Jewish refugees to enter the country during the Second World War and posthumously rehabilitated in 1993. In "*Grüningers Fall*" (1997), the St. Gallen courtroom where Grüninger was tried in 1940 becomes the scene where those same refugees return, nearly sixty years later, to share their memories of how he saved their lives.

Dindo's work in "reading" the past also involves the re-reading of works of literature. The poetry of Rimbaud, the lyrical prose of Genet, and the moving testimony of Che's last diaries form the basis for the films about them. At the same time, the films also function as commentaries on the texts. This interplay between the image and the word occurs most masterfully in "*Aragon, le roman de Matisse*" (2003). Here, the poet Aragon struggles to use written language to portray Matisse's visual art, while the film camera simultaneously captures the paintings, the prose, and the places where both were created.

With his latest film "*Ni olvido ni perdón*" (2003) Dindo turned back from poetry to politics to explore how the summer 1968 massacre of student demonstrators in Mexico City lives on in documents of the period and the memories of eyewitnesses. Dindo has said that this might be his last film to explicitly treat a political event. But there can be no doubt that both politics and poetry will remain important themes in his works to come.

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