



Lunacy

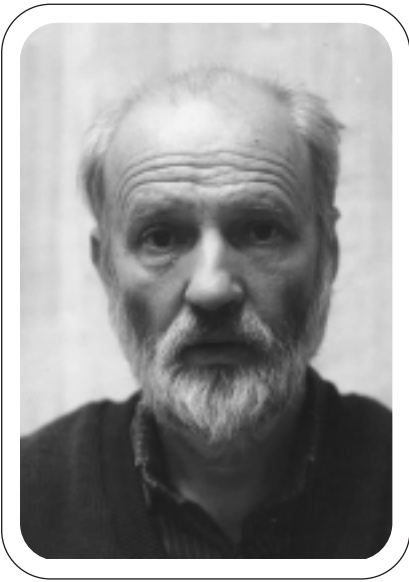
a film by Jan Svankmajer

A Zeitgeist Films Release

Lunacy

The latest provocation from surrealist master Jan Svankmajer (*ALICE*, *CONSPIRATORS OF PLEASURE*, *LITTLE OTIK*) is loosely based on two short stories by Edgar Allen Poe and inspired by the works of the Marquis de Sade. In nineteenth-century France (albeit one full of deliberate anachronisms) a young man, Jean Berlot, is plagued by nightmares in which he is dragged off to a madhouse. On the journey back from his mother's funeral he is invited by a Marquis he meets at lunch to spend the night in his castle. There Berlot witnesses a blasphemous orgy and a 'therapeutic' funeral. Berlot tries to flee but the Marquis insists on helping him conquer his fears and takes his guest to a nearby lunatic asylum where the patients have complete freedom and the staff are locked up behind bars. Described by Svankmajer as a "philosophical horror film," *LUNACY* combines live action and stop-motion, sex and violence, grand guignol terror and gallows humor, and a lot of animated meat.





Introduction



Ladies and Gentlemen,

What you are about to see is a horror film—with all the degeneracy peculiar to that genre. It is not a work of art. Today, art is all but dead anyway. In its place is a kind of trailer for the reflection of the face of Narcissus. Our film may be regarded as an infantile tribute to Edgar Allan Poe, from whom I've borrowed a number of motifs. And to the Marquis de Sade, to whom the film owes its blasphemy and subversiveness.

The subject of the film is essentially an ideological debate about how to run a lunatic asylum. Basically, there are two ways of managing such an institution—each equally extreme. One encourages absolute freedom. The other, the old fashioned, well tried method of control and punishment. But there is also a third one, that combines and exacerbates the very worst aspects of the other two. And that is the madhouse we live in today.

—Jan Svankmajer

Jan Svankmajer

One of the great Czech filmmakers, Jan Svankmajer was born in 1934 in Prague where he still lives. He trained at the Institute of Applied Arts from 1950 to 1954 and then at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (Department of Puppetry). He soon became involved in the Theatre of Masks and the famous Black Theatre, before entering the Laterna Magika Puppet Theatre where he first encountered film. In 1970 he met his wife, the surrealist painter Eva Svankmajerova, and the late Vratislav Effenberger, the leading theoretician of the Czech Surrealist Group, which Svankmajer joined and of which he still remains a member.

Svankmajer made his first film in 1964 and for over thirty years has created some of the most memorable and unique animated films ever made, gaining a reputation as one of the world's foremost animators, and influencing filmmakers from Tim Burton to the Quay Brothers. His brilliant use of claymation reached its apotheosis with the stunning 1982 film *Dimensions of Dialogue*. In 1987 Svankmajer completed his first feature film, *Alice*, a characteristically witty and subversive adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, and with the ensuing feature films *Faust*, *Conspirators of Pleasure*, *Little Otik* and his newest film *Lunacy* Svankmajer has moved further away from his roots in animation towards live-action filmmaking, though his vision remains as strikingly surreal and uncannily inventive as ever.

Svankmajer filmography

- 1964 — The Last Trick
- 1965 — J.S.Bach - Fantasy in G Minor
- 1965 — A Game with Stones
- 1966 — Punch and Judy
- 1966 — Et Cetera
- 1967 — Historia Naturae
- 1968 — The Garden
- 1968 — The Flat
- 1969 — Picnic with Weismann
- 1969 — A Quiet Week in the House
- 1970 — The Ossuary
- 1970 — Don Juan
- 1971 — Jabberwocky
- 1972 — Leonardo's Diary
- 1973-9 — The Castle of Otranto
- 1980 — The Fall of the House of Usher
- 1982 — Dimensions of Dialogue
- 1982 — Down to the Cellar
- 1983 — The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope
- 1987 — Alice (*feature*)
- 1988 — Virile Games
- 1988 — Another Kind of Love
- 1989 — Meat Love
- 1989 — Darkness-Light-Darkness
- 1989 — Flora
- 1990 — The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia
- 1992 — Food
- 1994 — Faust (*feature*)
- 1996 — Conspirators of Pleasure (*feature*)
- 2000 — Little Otik (Otesánek) (*feature*)
- 2006 — Lunacy (*feature*)

Eva Svankmajerova

Eva Svankmajerova, Jan Svankmajer's wife and longtime artistic collaborator, and a major contributor to Lunacy, died on October 20, 2005. This is her obituary from The Guardian (UK).

The Czech artist Eva Svankmajerova, who has died at the age of 65, painted barren, dreamlike landscapes filled with familiar surrealist themes—dismembered limbs, private parts and lolling tongues—as well as some intact anatomies. Her glowing colours and sense of the grotesque made her an ideal partner to her husband Jan Svankmajer, whose films *Faust* (1994) and *Little Otik* (2000) are vitalised by her animation and puppetry.

It was, however, through her writing that Svankmajerova was able to explore most profoundly her favourite topics: the absurdity and wastefulness of contemporary life and, above all, the role of women in a society moving painfully from communism to capitalism. The climax of her literary career was the episodic novel *Baradla Cave*, an ambitious allegory written during the 1980s and recently translated into English by Gwendolyn Albert.

Born in Kostelec nad Cernymilesy, Eva Dvorakova, as she then was, moved to Prague as a teenager to study interior decoration, a thankless task in post-Stalinist Czechoslovakia. She quickly developed other interests, especially puppet theatre, which took her, in 1958, to the drama department of the city's musical academy. Two years later, she met Jan, then working at the experimental Semafor Theatre, where, in 1961, the couple held their first joint exhibition—a collaboration followed, three years later, by Eva's role as art director in Jan's first film, *The Last Trick of Mr Schwarzewalde and Mr Edgar*.

During the 1960s, Svankmajerova also began to show her gender stereotypes in art. Her Emancipation Cycle parodied such paintings as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* by replacing the female characters with men; in 1967, she tackled a greater taboo by constructing Stalin's face out of smaller figures and scraps of lettering.

Her use of double images, in which a single form simultaneously depicts more than one subject, effectively prepared her for joining the Czech surrealist group in 1970. She was encouraged by the group's leader Vratislav Effenberger, who was later to create a photographic "portrait" of her in metaphorical terms: a gorge crossed by a bridge hewn from the living rock.

With Effenberger, the Svankmajers contributed to the surrealist periodical *Analogon*, as well as organising shows at the Gambra gallery in their house in Prague. In so doing, they often crossed the boundaries of legality in one of eastern Europe's most repressive states. They also demonstrated how communism could make relevant the nonsensical fantasies of surrealism—at a time when the movement had degenerated in the west into a tool of cheap publicity and popular culture.

Freudian symbolism gave Svankmajerova a particularly useful stock of imagery with which to represent the politics and exploitation of sex. Her paintings often show women in domestic contexts surrounded by suggestive bowls and pots. Their rounded, hollow forms are laden with erotic significance, as indeed is much of Svankmajerova's ceramic art—an orgy of copulating vessels with little culinary purpose.

This eloquent feminism was especially audacious in a society in which women were expected to combine the roles of lovers, mothers, housewives and workers. Svankmajerova later described how as a child she had hated the fat tractor driver with the scarf in her hair as portrayed on official posters: in 1986, she constructed a grotesque head from propaganda photographs of female labourers.

In contrast to the regimentation of socialist realism, the heroines of Svankmajerova's paintings are individuals, often monumental and powerful, but still threatened and abused. Their nudity conveys a disturbing sexuality, sometimes enthusiastic, but also expressive of the wariness described in Svankmajer's poem: "Your ideas of home life are a bit distorted after all/ To want my legs around your neck all night long and every night..."

Svankmajerova's most sophisticated critique of the modern female is presented in *Baradla Cave*, in which the complex ambivalent characters also function as allegorical figures. Baradla is herself both a woman and a dismal, vast cavern, a symbol of a corrupt country caught between socialism and ruthless, rampant capitalism. Like a collage, the book is filled with startling juxtapositions—pseudo-geological exegeses swiftly transformed into the crudest vernacular—accompanied by suitable photographs: slimy stalactites and subterranean holes with superimposed body parts, lips, tongues and teeth.

Notwithstanding the book's conclusion, the period after the collapse of the Iron Curtain was one of great success for Svankmajerova and her husband. In 1998 they collaborated in an exhibition entitled *Anima, Animus, Animace*, which toured the Czech Republic, while their work also appeared in galleries in London and other British cities. Their greatest honour was last year's retrospective at Prague castle, and they also received the Czech Lion awards for the art direction of *Faust* and *Little Otik*.

In *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (1998), a few pieces of Svankmajerova's poetry were published in English by the University of Texas. The translation—"To learn that: a line can thrill you like the flight of fire./ Colour can deprive you of your sanity like blood and despair"—hardly conveys the quality of the word-play. But its liberating humanity deserves attention: "How often I dreamed about some kind of escape/ You don't know how easy it is when a siren addresses you/ Here you wave a pinion and fly out of a dovecote ... / Oh you don't know how easy it is when a siren calls you/ No timidity no hurricanes/ Not until we come back ..."

Svankmajerova's last collaboration with her husband was as art director of the film *Lunacy*, shortly to be released in the Czech Republic. The couple were the subjects of a documentary, *Les chimères des Svankmajer*, in 2001. She is survived by her husband and their children, Veronika and Vaclav.

Eva Svankmajerova, painter, potter and poet, born September 25 1940; died October 20 2005

—Christopher Masters
The Guardian, November 15, 2005

Lunacy

CAST

Jean Berlot.....Pavel Liska
The Marquis.....Jan Tríska
Charlota.....Anna Geislerová
Dr. Coulmiere.....Martin Huba
Dr. Murillope.....Jaroslav Dusek
Dominik.....Pavel Novy

Screenplay and Direction.....Jan Svankmajer
Artistic Direction.....Eva Svankmajerová, Jan Svankmajer
Director of Photography.....Juraj Galvánek
Sound.....Ivo Spalj
Film Editing.....Marie Zemanová
Costume Designer.....Veronika Hrubá, Eva Svankmajerová
Animation.....Martin Kublák, Bedrich Glaser
Producer.....Jaromír Kallista
Co-Producer, Barrandov Studios.....Helena Uldrichová
Co-Producers, Czech Television.....Jaroslav Kucera, Jirí Kostyr
Co-Producer, C-GA Film.....Juraj Galvánek

**Loosely based on the Edgar Allan Poe short stories “The Premature Burial”
and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”
and inspired by the works of the Marquis de Sade**

**Czech Republic/Slovakia • 2006 • 118 mins • Color • Dolby Digital
In Czech with English subtitles • Aspect ratio: 1.66:1**

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