



PRESS RELEASE June

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## KOSMOS: A Soviet Space Odyssey



Space-age visions from *Aelita* and *Cosmic Voyage* to *Solaris* and *Stalker*

Throughout July and August **BFI Southbank** will present a summer of science fiction with **KOSMOS: A Soviet Space Odyssey**, the second instalment of the **BFI's** classic, cult and contemporary Russian and Soviet cinema season: **KINO**. Experts from the BFI have unearthed fantastic treasures from film archives in Russia for **KOSMOS** – a stunning showcase of UK premieres and films that have never been seen outside the Soviet Union – until now. **KOSMOS** will reveal how the roots of modern science-fiction in cinema are in Russian film, and illustrate how influential the fantastic titles screening were on the genre, across the western world, with films from as early as 1924 until 2008. The season also offers key documentaries in a programme that explores the cultural impact of the Soviet space dream on the cinema from the 1950s and 60s, through the more dystopian 1970s and 80s and on to the present day.

Alongside screenings of the more familiar classic ***Aelita, Queen of Mars*** (1924) and **Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris*** (1972) and ***Stalker*** (1979), there will be surprising events such as ***Red Space*** (when **Sergei Krikalev**, the Head of the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre will join in a day inspired by Russian cosmonauts), and a season introduction by **Sergei Kapterev** (from the Institute of Cinema Art in Moscow). For younger audiences there will be ***Rocket School***, a week of lunar themed fun and film for kids, **26–29 July**. This futuristic vision will screen in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of **Yuri Gagarin's** momentous journey into space and the nationwide celebrations of the occasion, and his visit to London - including the unveiling of a statue on the Mall, commissioned by the British Council.

Gagarin's orbit in space, on 12 April 1961, was revered around the world as one of mankind's greatest achievements. Some of the most fascinating footage of his launch and the ensuing celebrations, such as **Peleshian's *Our Century*** (1982), will feature alongside innovative visions of man's voyage to outer space in 1950s films, created by Russian visual-effects pioneers, notably **Pavel Klushantsev** (whose special effects would influence **Stanley**

**Kubrick** and a generation of Hollywood filmmakers) with **Road to the Stars** (1952) and the kitsch **Planet of Storms** (1962).

2011 also marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of **Stanislaw Lem's** novel *Solaris*, and would have marked the great writer's 90th birthday. KOSMOS presents a selection of rarely seen Eastern Bloc adaptations of Lem's trail-blazing fiction, including **Kurt Maetzig's** classic **The Silent Star** (1959), drawn from his novel *The Astronauts* and following an international expedition to Venus, set in 1985; **Icarus XB1** (1963), directed by **Jindrich Polák** and based on *The Magellan Cloud*, with cosmonauts who dress in black-tie for cocktail parties, while searching for life on distant planets; and **The Interrogation of Pilot Pirx** (1979), a Polish-Soviet co-production based on Lem's *The Inquest*. London-based partners also celebrating Stanislaw Lem this year include The National Theatre, the British Library and the Polish Cultural Institute.

The rocket-fuelled science-fiction genre was partly modelled on recent US productions, but influenced by Russian cultural traditions, mores and expectations. Fantastical images of the future were based on the tradition of lavish set design, previously established by the blockbuster *Aelita, Queen of Mars* (1924) and **Cosmic Voyage** (1936), which sees Josef Stalin on a voyage to the moon. Contributions from some of the original artists who worked on such classics, such as **Ernst Kunstmann**, veteran of **Fritz Lang's** *Metropolis*, would go on to inspire new generations of Soviet filmmakers; whilst titles that made it to 'the West' found their way on to the B-movie circuit in the 1960s – albeit mauled beyond recognition when enterprising US producers bought them cheaply at the height of the Cold War. Under **Roger Corman's** guidance, **Francis Ford Coppola**, **Peter Bogdanovich** and **Curtis Harrington** cut their teeth refashioning communist science fiction to suit Western sensibilities.

The Soviet era's optimistic golden age ended with the loss of the Space Race to the US at the end of the 60s. The onset of a deep, systemic economic crisis to the Russian space project found a new interpretation in Andrei Tarkovsky's **Solaris** (1972) and **Stalker** (1979), probably the best known titles in the West from this period. *Stalker* raised the stakes by bringing science fiction down to Earth, portraying a poisoned post-industrial world that is stranger and more treacherous than the distant planets of the cosmos.

By the fall of the Soviet Union the histories and iconographies of the communist era could be openly interrogated. KOSMOS will present three key recent films – **First on the Moon** (2005), **Dreaming of Space** (2005) and **Paper Soldier** (2008) – which together can be seen as part of a revisionist process to re-evaluate the place of Russia's legendary space programme in the cultural memory, without nostalgia for the repressive regime that sponsored it.

[www.bfi.org.uk/kino](http://www.bfi.org.uk/kino)

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## **Programme:**

### **Kosmos: Season Introduction by Sergei Kapterev**

The Soviet space programme was a major stimulus to Soviet science fiction and popular science enthusiasts, including filmmakers, who received a chance to formalise space-travel fantasies and experiment with novel techniques. In his review of the history and specificity of Soviet space films, Russian scholar Sergei Kapterev will discuss such issues as the Soviet obsession with technology and with secrecy, the establishment's suspicion toward unconventional subjects, the role of literature, the effects of the post-Stalin 'thaw', and Cold War rivalry.

**Fri 1 July 18:10 NFT2** Tickets £5

### **Kosmos Day Event: Red Space**

The 'space race' was a story as fantastical as any fiction, and the secrecy surrounding the Soviet space programme created myths and sometimes wild speculation. Join us for a day of documentary, art and discussion inspired by the pioneering Russian cosmonauts. We hope to welcome Sergei Krikalev, Head of the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Russia. Full programme to be announced. With thanks to the British Council

**Sat 16 July 11:00-17:00 NFT3** Tickets £13, concs £9.75 (Members pay £1.50 less)

### **Aelita, Queen of Mars**

USSR 1924 Dir Yakov Protazanov With Yuliya Solntseva, Nikolai Tserereli c120min. Live piano accompaniment

Martians always get the best costumes, but none can compare with Alexandra Exter's bold designs for Aelita's Constructivist court. The world's first interplanetary feature, which was to prove a vital influence on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, is a surprisingly Earth-bound affair, a multi-layered portrait of Soviet society, with a controversial antirevolutionary message. Released in the same year, the animated *Interplanetary Revolution* (Dir Nikolai Khodataev, Zenon Komissarenko & Youry Merkulov, 9min) capitalises on Aelita's popularity to satirise the 'world revolution' doctrine.

**Sun 10 July 18:00 NFT1, Mon 25 July 20:30 NFT2**

### **Cosmic Voyage** Kosmicheskiy reys: Fantasticheskaya novella

USSR 1936. Dir Vasili Zhuravlyov With Sergei Komarov, Kseniya Moskalenko. 70min. EST

This first journey to the Moon, aboard the spaceship USSR 1 - Josef Stalin, is surprisingly undertaken by an elderly scientist, a young woman and a boy. A big production for Mosfilm Studios, closely overseen by Soviet 'father of astronautics' Tsiolkovsky himself, this technologically prophetic depiction of space travel used scale models to animate the ship and thousands of electric bulbs on black velvet to suggest 'the cosmos'. Plus *The Moon* (*Luna*, USSR 1965. Dir Pavel Klushantsev, 51min, video) and *Voyage to the Moon* (Russia 1912, Dir Ladislaw Starewicz, c10min).

**Sun 24 July 20:20 NFT3, Tue 26 July 18:00 NFT3**

### **Road to the Stars** Doroga k zvezdam

USSR 1957. Dir Pavel Klushantsev. With Georgi Solovyov. 49min. Video. EST

Released one month after the launch of Sputnik 1, Klushantsev's trailblazing visualisation of the past, present and imagined future of the Soviet space programme became electrifying propaganda when a clip was shown by Walter Cronkite on the CBS Evening News.

#### **+ The Star Dreamer**

Denmark 2002. Dir Mads Bastrup & Sonja Vesterholt. 54min. Video. EST

The life and extraordinary achievements of Klushantsev, the little-known Russian special effects pioneer, are chronicled in this well-researched documentary.

**Mon 4 July 20:45 NFT2, Fri 8 July 18:10 NFT2**

### **Silent Star** aka First Spaceship on Venus Der schweigende Stern

E Germany-Poland 1959. Dir Kurt Maetzig. With Yoko Tani, Oldrich Lukes, Julius Ongewe, 95min. EST  
It is 1970, and the world is a socialist utopia. An international expedition of eight scientists flies to Venus, the source of a sinister message to Earth. But is there anything left except the radioactive remnants of a dead civilisation? Stanislaw Lem's novel *The Astronauts* provided the basis for this co-production, whose stunning glass forests (shown in *Total Vision*, the GDR equivalent of *Cinemascope*) are only marginally less striking than the pan-ethnic crew of the *Cosmokrator*.

**Tue 12 July 20:30 NFT2, Sat 16 July 18:20 NFT2**

### **The Call of the Heavens** Nebo zovyot

USSR 1960. Dir Mikhail Kariukov & Aleksandr Kozyr. With Ivan Pereverzev 77min. EST

Kariukov's first feature sees the impetuous American pilots of the Typhoon humiliatingly rescued on their race to Mars by the doughty comrades aboard the Rodina. The true hero of this picture, though, is art director Yuri Shvets, a veteran of Cosmic Voyage, 25 years previously. It's a retro-futurist's dream: pristine space probe miniatures parade past Soviet gunmetal installations and foilwrapped cosmonauts are eclipsed by the gouache aura of rising red planets. Plus *The Universe* (Kosmos, USSR 1951, Dir Pavel Klushantsev & Nikolai Leshchenko, 39min, video).

**Tue 19 July 20:30 NFT2, Fri 22 July 18:00 NFT2**

### **Planet of Storms** Planeta bur

USSR 1962. Dir Pavel Klushantsev. With Vladimir Yemelyanov, Georgi Zhzhynov, Gennadi Vernov. 78min. Video. EST

Three Russian spaceships are nearing the end of a four-month flight to Venus when one is destroyed without warning by a large and fast-moving meteor: the first peril to face our cosmic comrades, who must contest with carnivorous flora, furious volcanos and sundry prehistoric beasts to survive. Slow-paced, but delightfully surreal, mixing Soviet dogma and high camp in equal measure, Klushantsev's only fiction feature has all the makings of a cult classic. Plus *Meteors* (Meteory; USSR 1947, Dir Pavel Klushantsev, 10min): a short guide to space rocks by the red space maestro.

**Fri 1 July 20:40 NFT2, Sat 9 July 18:20 NFT2**

### **Toward Meeting a Dream** Mechte navstrechu

USSR 1963. Dir Mikhail Kariukov & Otar Koberidze. With Larisa Gordeichik 66min. EST

Beings from the planet Centurian decide to pay a visit, upon hearing the transmission of a song from a utopian space institute on Earth. But their spaceship crashes on one of Mars' moons, and a dangerous rescue mission must be launched. Made with a sizeable budget in the wake of Gagarin's triumph, Kariukov's second and last film for the Odessa Studios boasts expansive matte effects, impressive alien vistas and some of the finest ship designs ever created. Plus *Mars* (USSR 1968, Dir Pavel Klushantsev, 55min, video).

**Thu 21 July 18:10 NFT2, Wed 27 July 20:30 NFT2**

### **Solaris**

USSR 1972. Dir Andrei Tarkovsky. With Natalya Bondarchuk, Donatas Banionis 166min. EST. PG

Kris Kelvin's trip to a troubled space station, orbiting the remote planet Solaris, brings him close to an endlessly changing and apparently sentient alien ocean with the power to manifest repressed memories and unconscious desires. 'We don't want other worlds. We want mirrors', says the cryptic Dr Snaut. Echoing Aelita half a century before, and coming at the exhausted end of the ruinous Space Race, Tarkovsky is calling for a return to Earth.

**Sun 3 July 19:50 NFT1, Mon 18 July 17:50 NFT1, Sun 31 July 17:10 NFT3**

### **Icarus XB-1 Ikarie XB-1** aka Voyage to the End of the Universe

Czechoslovakia 1963. Dir Jindrich Polák. With Zdenek Stepánek, Frantisek Smolík 83min. EST

It doesn't get much more utopian than on board the Icarus XB1. It is the year 2163, and the philosophical crew groove through space to minimalist lounge-core, en route to a mysterious 'white planet' orbiting Alpha Centauri. A blast from the nuclear past, and emanations from a 'dark star' bring grief, neurosis and mental breakdown into the spaceship's chic modernist interiors, but this intelligently scripted and exquisitely shot Czech adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's Magellan Cloud never loses the plot.

**Fri 5 Aug 18:40 NFT3, Sun 7 Aug 18:20 NFT3**

### **The Interrogation of Pilot Pirx** Test Pilota Pirxa

USSR-Poland 1979. Dir Marek Piestrak. With Sergei Desnitsky, Boleslaw Abart. 95min. EST

Rocket pilot Pirx is hired for a top secret mission: to test a new robot crew, described by their makers as 'almost ordinary humans'. As the Goliath embarks on its interplanetary journey to Saturn, crew members' speculation on each other's identity leads to anxiety, division and treachery. This Soviet-Polish co-production of Lem's *The Inquest*, a cautionary tale on technological progress, features Aleksandr Kaidanovsky shortly before his appearance in *Stalker*.

**Thu 11 Aug 20:40 NFT2, Sun 14 Aug 18:40 NFT2**

### **Stalker**

USSR-W Germany 1979. Dir Andrei Tarkovsky. With Aleksandr Kaidanovsky 163min. EST. PG

*Stalker* takes two people, Writer and Professor, into a forbidden area called the Zone, at the heart of which is a Room, where your deepest wish will come true. 'What was it? A meteorite? A visit of inhabitants of the cosmic abyss?' The origins and precise nature of the Zone are never revealed, and

Tarkovsky's compelling exploration of faith, desire and desperation in a degraded world remains one of the great enigmatic works of cinema.

**Sat 6 Aug 19:50 NFT1, Mon 8 Aug 19:50 NFT1**

### **Kin-Dza-Dza**

USSR 1986. Dir Georgi Daneliya. With Stanislav Lyubshin, Levan Gabriadze. 135min. EST

A Moscow construction foreman and a Georgian student are accidentally teleported to the desert planet Pluke, in the galaxy Kin-Dza-Dza, and must negotiate their way home. This proves problematic, as while the humanoid inhabitants have deceptively advanced technology, their social system is primitive, and their only customary spoken words are koo and kew, (the latter being a swear word). Daneliya's steam-punk satire on Soviet society, reminiscent of Terry Gilliam and Douglas Adams, deserves to be a cult classic here, as it is in Russia.

**Sun 14 Aug 20:20 NFT3, Fri 19 Aug 18:10 NFT3**

### **Visitor to a Museum** Posetitel muzeya

USSR-W Germany-Switzerland 1989 Dir Konstantin Lopushansky With Viktor Mikhaylov 136min EST

In a devastated world, a visitor arrives at a remote outpost determined to visit a famous pre-apocalypse museum. The isolated remnants of the old civilisation keep a tight rein on the more numerous mutants, and when the visitor is identified as a long-awaited messiah, his journey takes on an unbearable significance. Made during the dying days of the Soviet Union, Lopushansky's dystopian parable is the most extraordinary vision of a society at the mercy of vast and irrational forces.

**Wed 17 Aug 20:20 NFT3, Sun 21 Aug 17:30 NFT2**

### **First on the Moon** Pervye na lune

Russia 2005. Dir Aleksei Fedorchenko. With Aleksei Anisimov, Viktoriya Ilyinskaya 75min. EST

Simulating 'archive' footage to suggest that Soviet space exploration began in 1938, Fedorchenko's film is less mock-documentary than an homage: to the sincerity and idealism of a lost generation, and to vintage space-race aesthetics, lovingly recreated by DoP Anatoli Lesnikov and set designer Nikolai Pavlov. Plus *Our Century* (Mer Dare; USSR 1982, dir Artavazd Peleshian, 47min, EST): A symphony for the promethean heroes of the cosmos, bringing together original and found footage in a breathtaking montage.

**Thu 18 Aug 20:40 NFT2, Sat 20 Aug 17:50 NFT2**

### **Dreaming of Space** Kosmos kak predchuvstvie

Russia 2005. Dir Aleksei Uchitel. With Yevgeni Mironov, Yevgeni Tsyganov, Irina Pegova. 90min. EST

Two young men live in a town in the Soviet Arctic in 1957, the year of the first Sputnik flights. One says that he is an astronaut in training. In fact he plans to escape the Soviet Union forever. In a coda, the other meets Gagarin on a train. Emigration is contrasted with space flight as a route out of Soviet torpor, and the contrasts between the two men reveal the ambiguities of the Thaw years.

**Thu 25 Aug 18:30 NFT2, Sun 28 Aug 20:50 NFT2**

### **Paper Soldier** Bumazhnyy soldat

Russia 2008. Dir Aleksei German Jr. With Chulpan Khamatova, Merab Ninidze. 118min. EST

German's iconoclastic take on life in and around the Baikonur cosmodrome in the spring of 1961 turns its back on the hulking metal mass of space rockets, focusing instead on the fictional Dr Dania's relationship with two very different women. Even Gagarin's momentous flight passes almost unnoticed in the depth of the frame: a backdrop to an unfolding personal tragedy in this thoughtful portrait of the Thaw-era intelligentsia.

**Fri 26 Aug 20:40 NFT2, Sat 27 Aug 18:10 NFT2**

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#### **About the BFI**

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- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £6.65 Members pay £1.40 less on any ticket. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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