

EUROPA PRESS RELEASE

Poland's lost avant-garde film, *Europa* by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson (1931/32) was found in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin in 2019 by the Pilecki Institute. It is now 80 years since it was stolen by the Nazis during the occupation in Paris in 1940. This year, for the first time since the 1930s it will have a series of international screenings.

Tate Modern, London, 17 April 2020

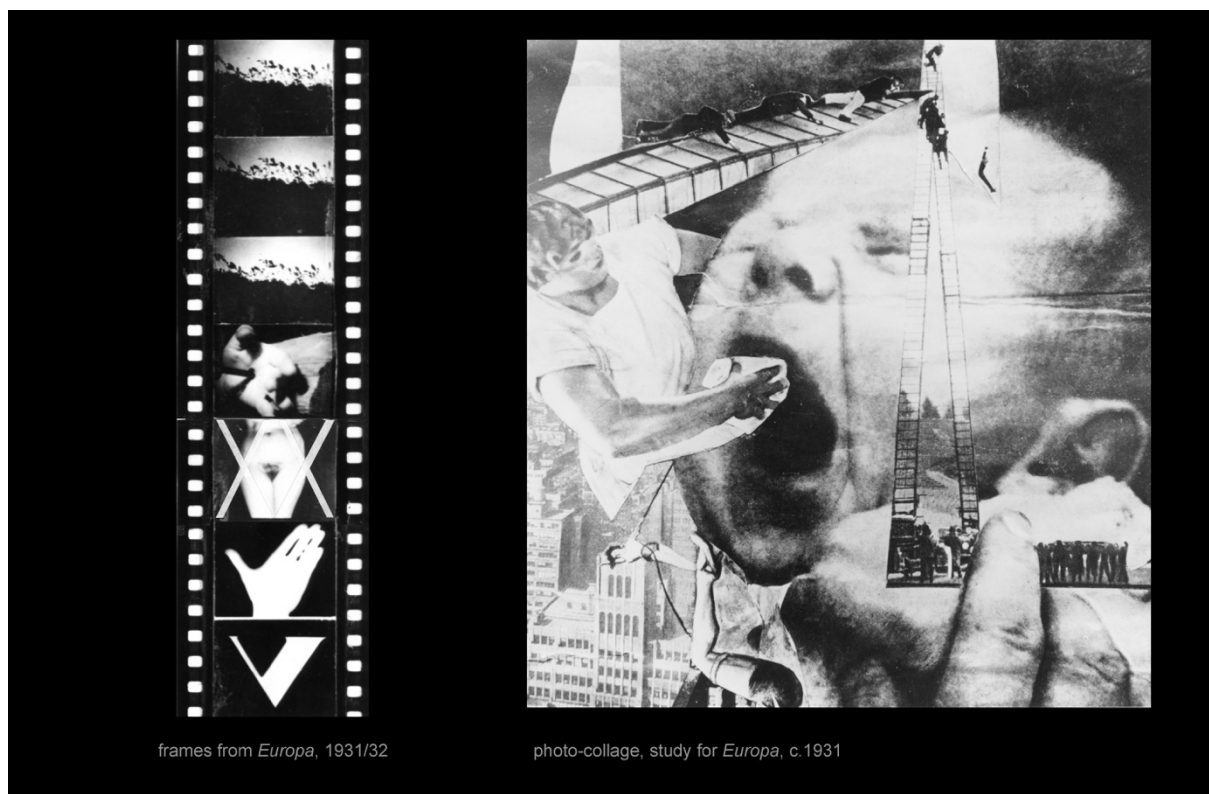
National Film Archive, Warsaw, 20 April 2020

Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw, 23 April 2020

Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 24 April 2020

Babylon Berlin, 27 April 2020

Le Centre Pompidou, Paris, 6 May 2020



Europa was the first avant-garde film made in Poland. This story is almost a century old, and it all started in Warsaw.

In 1925, the magazine *Reflektor* published Anatol Stern's futurist poem *Europa*. This is where the poem first appeared. Subsequently it was republished in other magazines, but in 1929 it became a book designed by two avant-garde artists Mieczysław Szczuka and Teresa Żarnower. The content found its reflection in the design.

The poem was about social crisis, loss of moral equity, with Europe at the edge of a precipice. Stern described it: 'my dry chronicle devoted to the tragedy, the misery, the wisdom and the wickedness of Europe'.

Stefan and Franciszka Themerson, inspired by the poem made it into a film, translating the words into moving images with photograms and collages. The film, short, silent, black and white, was made in Warsaw in 1931/32, in the Themersons' bedroom on ulica Królewska. It was as emotive on screen as the poem was on the pages of the book.

Europa was the first film made by the Themersons. When they moved to Paris in 1938 to continue their work there, they took *Europa*, and their other films with them. In 1940, about six months after World War II broke out, Stefan Themerson deposited their five films at the Vitfer Film Laboratory in Paris, and this was from where the Nazis took them. The last time that *Europa* had been screened was in Poland during the early 1930s.

After reaching London, Franciszka in 1940 and Stefan in 1942, they made two more films and each continued with their own work, Franciszka, painting, drawing, designing for the theatre and for the page, and Stefan writing novels, poems and essays.

In 1948, they launched their publishing company, Gaberbocchus Press, and in 1962 published an English translation of *Europa*, in facsimile but slightly smaller. With a preface by Oswell Blakeston and an introduction by Michael Horovitz, in Stefan's and Michael's translation, the poem was followed by the surviving stills from the film and some of the contemporary reviews from the early 1930s.

The story of *Europa* continued. In 1983, Stefan together with the London Film Makers Co-op, in which John Claus reads the translated poem, made a 9-minute tape-slide reconstruction of the film using surviving stills of the film.

And, in 1988, the year when both Franciszka and Stefan died, Piotr Zarębski made *Europa II*, about which he had corresponded with Stefan before.

The next event in the story of *Europa* was the discovery of the original film by the Pilecki Institute in Berlin at the Bundesarchiv in 2019 after it had been stolen by the Nazis from the Vitfer film Laboratories in Paris, in 1940.

• • •

NOTES FOR THE PRESS

Media enquiries in English: Robert Devcic +447775828465, robert@gvart.co.uk

Media enquiries in Polish and German: Patryk Szostak +48660 939 999,
p.szostak@pileckiinstitut.de

Media enquiries in French: Klaudia Podsiadło 0036611701965, klaudia@commonroom.eu

Enquiries about film rental: LUX distribution, +4203141 2960

About Stefan and Franciszka Themerson

Stefan and Franciszka Themerson's produced five films in Poland between 1930 and 1937 (*Pharmacy, Europa, Moment Musical, Short Circuit, and The Adventure of a Good Citizen*).

Between 1942 and 1944 they made two more films in England for the Film Unit of the Polish Government in exile: *Calling Mr. Smith* and *The Eye and the Ear*.

The films of the Themersons were the most important Polish independent experimental filmmakers in the inter-war years and their films can easily be placed among the greatest achievements of European avant-garde film of the time.

Three of their pre-war films are still missing.



About the Pilecki Institute

Thanks to the latest research endeavours of the Pilecki Institute, which was established in Warsaw in 2018 and opened its Berlin branch in 2019, *Europa*, the avant-garde film by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, was found and retrieved from the Bundesarchive. The rediscovery of this treasure of Polish and European culture is a result of the Institute's archival work in cooperation with the Bundesarchiv and its own digitisation project devoted to archives, documents and sources. The Pilecki Institute is a research institution founded to conduct international research into the history of the 20th century and to provide access to archival sources. <https://instytutpileckiego.pl/en>.



About the Themerson Estate

The Themerson Estate has been looked after by Jasia Reichardt and Nick Wadley since the Themersons died in 1988. The first monograph about Franciszka, published recently by Themerson Estate, is distributed by Idea Books.

<https://www.ideabooks.nl/9781916247406-franciszka-themerson>

The Estate is publishing a three volume catalogue of the Themerson Archive which is now at the National Library in Warsaw, which will be out later this year.



About LUX

LUX is the UK agency for the support and promotion of visual artists working with the moving image. Founded in 2002 it builds on the legacy of its predecessor organisations the London Filmmakers Co-operative (LFMC) and London Video Arts (LVA) stretching back to the 1960s and represents Europe's largest collection of films and videos made by artists. The organisation first started working with the Themersons in the early 1980s when it was the LFMC and its staff at the time worked with Stefan Themerson to create the *Europa* reconstruction. www.lux.org.uk

All images © Themerson Estate to be credited as agreed.