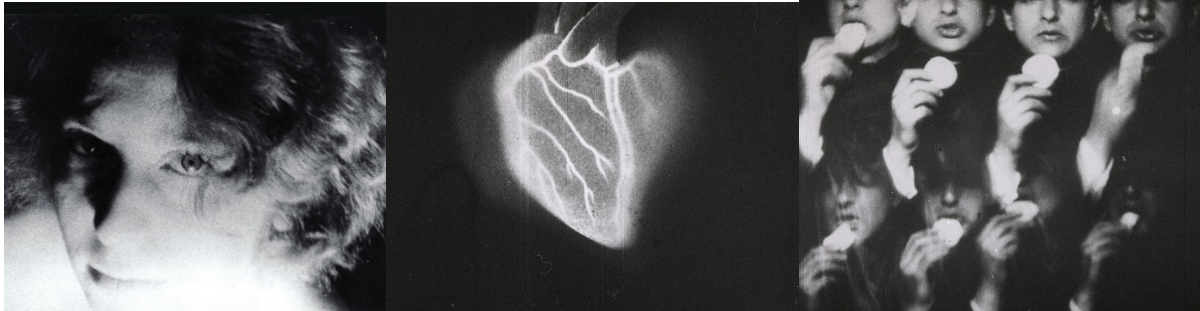




**PRESS
RELEASE**

RESTITUTED 80 YEARS AFTER ITS SEIZURE IN PARIS NAZI LOOTED LOST AVANT-GARDE MASTERPIECE EUROPA RECEIVES WORLD PREMIERE AT 65TH BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL



Franciszka Themerson (L) and Stefan Themerson (far R) taken from *Europa* (1931), Stefan and Franciszka Themerson / © Themerson Estate

- Rediscovery of major 'lost' work of avant-garde filmmaking seized by the Nazis
- Restitution of Stefan and Franciszka Themerson's 1931 anti-fascist masterpiece *Europa* negotiated by the Commission for Looted Art in Europe from the Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives)
- Original nitrate material donated to BFI National Archive for preservation by the Themerson Estate
- 2K restoration world premiere of *Europa* at 65th BFI London Film Festival

For immediate release: 10:00 BST LONDON AND KOBLENZ 14 September, 2021:

The BFI, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe and the Bundesarchiv, in partnership with the Themerson Estate and LUX, are delighted to announce the major rediscovery, restitution and restoration of Stefan and Franciszka Themersons' long lost 1931 anti-fascist masterpiece *Europa*, available to new audiences 80 years after it was seized in Paris during the Second World War.

Originally believed to have been destroyed by the Nazis, Stefan and Franciszka Themersons' incendiary film was rediscovered by chance in the Bundesarchiv, Berlin, in 2019. On behalf of the Themerson Estate, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe negotiated the restitution of the film from the Bundesarchiv which had preserved the original nitrate film since the reunification of Germany in the 1990s. The restitution of *Europa* in July this year is the first time a unique film masterpiece has been restituted from Germany in decades. *Europa* has now been donated by the Themerson Estate to the BFI National Archive for long term preservation. Housed at the BFI's Master Film Store in Warwickshire, it has been brought together with original material from the Themersons' other surviving films, most made after they arrived in England during the war and where they lived for the rest of their lives.

Fully restored in 2K, *Europa* will receive its world premiere at the 65th BFI London Film Festival in partnership with American Express on Wednesday 6 October at BFI Southbank, the first time that the film has been seen since the early 1930s. Hosted by Will Fowler, BFI National Archive Curator of Artist Moving Image, the *Europa* LFF event will welcome special guests to discuss the story of the work's creation and context and the film's loss and restitution as looted art. Also showing will be the two reconstructions of *Europa* created during its absence.

Anne Webber, Co-Chair of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, said: "We are delighted to have achieved the restitution of this remarkable work of art, lost for so long and believed to have been destroyed by the Nazis, but now available for audiences across the world to appreciate. We are grateful to the Bundesarchiv for all their cooperation and hope this will lead to many other films seized by the Nazis being found and returned"

Michael Hollmann, President of the Bundesarchiv, said: “*The Bundesarchiv is committed to securing and protecting its collection of more than 160,000 films comprising over 1 million film reels as well as possible. But in a few cases, we have learned that a film does not belong in our collection. We very much welcome the successful restitution of Europa and we hope that it will reach a very wide and interested audience.*”

Ben Roberts, CEO for the BFI said: “*We are honoured to be part of this valuable film’s incredible story, by preserving Europa’s original nitrate film in our collection and helping to make this significant piece of anti-fascist work available now and for the future. The BFI National Archive has worked closely with the estate of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, LUX and the Commission for Looted Art in Europe to bring the film to UK audiences. A major piece of European avant-garde filmmaking, long presumed lost or destroyed by the Nazis, the film’s rediscovery now has been a positive example of cultural collaboration and cooperation. We are delighted to finally reunite Europa with the Themersons’ other original work held by the BFI.*”

Benjamin Cook Director for LUX said: “*This is truly one of the most important film rediscoveries of recent years, a major lost work of the European avant-garde and an affirmation of Stefan and Franciszka Themersons’ important contribution to cinema history. We are thrilled to have played a part in the rediscovery of the film and its donation to the BFI National Archive and excited that Europa will join the Themersons’ other films to be distributed worldwide through LUX Distribution in the coming months.*”

ABOUT EUROPA’S EXTRAORDINARY HISTORY

The Themersons were Polish artists who met in Warsaw in 1930 and began a lifelong collaboration as writers, illustrators, publishers and avant-garde filmmakers. Made in Warsaw, in the couple’s bedroom, *Europa* was their second film, and the first significant avant-garde film made in Poland.

A startling prescient outcry against the rise of fascism in Europe, based on Polish poet Anatol Stern’s 1925 futurist poem of the same name, *Europa* utilises an incredible array of avant-garde film techniques; photograms, collages and repetitions to translate words into a montage of images and ideas that articulate the horror, inequality and moral decline that the artists witnessed from Poland, with Europe at the edge of a precipice. It was among the greatest achievements of European avant-garde film of the time.

The Themersons took one copy of each of their five films, including *Europa*, to Paris when they moved there in 1938. With the outbreak of war, *Europa* was deposited for safekeeping at the Vitfer Film Laboratory, together with the other four films, when the couple volunteered to join the Polish Army. All five films were seized from the film lab by the Nazis in 1940 and always believed to have been destroyed and lost forever.

Recognised as an important piece of avant-garde filmmaking, whilst *Europa* may have been lost it was not forgotten and there were several attempts to re-make and re-imagine it. Stefan Themerson made a reconstruction with the London Film-Makers Co-op in 1983 using surviving stills from the film, and in 1988, Piotr Zarębski, in homage to the Themersons, made his own reconstruction.

Both Franciszka and Stefan died in 1988, still believing that *Europa* had not survived. It was only in 2019 that their niece and heir Jasia Reichardt learned from Poland’s Pilecki Institute that a copy of *Europa* might be in the Bundesarchiv. In February 2020, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe was contacted by Robert Devcic, agent for the Themerson Estate, for help to identify and recover the film, and to negotiate its restitution from the Bundesarchiv.

The Commission’s research revealed that, after seizure in Paris, the original nitrate film of *Europa* had entered the Reich Film Archive (Reichsfilmarchiv) in Berlin and by 1959 it was in the holdings of the East German State Film Archive (Staatliches Filmarchiv). After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the Film Archive became part of the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) where the film had remained ever since. The Commission found there were two copies of the film in the Bundesarchiv, the 35 mm nitrate copy left at Vitfer Laboratories in 1940, and a preservation copy made by the Bundesarchiv.

Returned to the UK in July this year, *Europa* was subsequently restored by Fixafilm in Warsaw with a newly commissioned soundtrack composed by Lodewijk Muns. Both original copies and the restoration film files for *Europa* were donated by the Themerson Estate to the BFI National Archive, which holds the three surviving films made by the Themersons, two made in England for the Film Unit of the Polish Government-in-Exile: *Calling Mr. Smith* (1943) and *The Eye and the Ear* (1945) as well as the Polish-made *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* (1937). Their four other films

seized in Paris in 1940: *The Pharmacy* (1930), *Moment Musical* (1933), *Short Circuit* (1935) and the Paris copy of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* (1937) remain missing.

The 65th BFI London Film Festival in partnership with American Express takes place from Wednesday 6 October – Sunday 17 October, 2021.

-Ends-

PRESS CONTACTS

Press Officer BFI National Archive: Sarah Bemand

Email: sarah.bemand@bfi.org.uk | Tel: +44 (0) 7957 8940

(Selection of credited images for press available to download here:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/II08whzxwzbgpd/AAA_JxXe4FTsHFBRL99Ib6xea?dl=0)

Director Press and PR, BFI: Judy Wells

Email: Judy.Wells@bfi.org.uk | Tel: +44 (0) 207 957 8919

Co-Chair Commission for Looted Art in Europe: Anne Webber

Email: info@lootedartcommission.com | Tel: +44 (0) 20 7487 3401; +44 (0)7774 697324

Press Officer Bundesarchiv: Tobias Herrmann

Email: poststelle@bundesarchiv.de | Tel: +49 (0) 261 505 0

NOTES TO EDITORS

[LFF 2021 Booking Detail](#)

Tickets go on sale 20 September. BFI Members book early and American Express® Cardmembers can access presale from 17 September.

www.bfi.org.uk/lff (BFI Members) / www.bfi.org.uk/amex (American Express® Cardmembers)

About the BFI

We are a cultural charity, a National Lottery distributor, and the UK's lead organisation for film and the moving image.

Our mission is:

- To support creativity and actively seek out the next generation of UK storytellers
- To grow and care for the BFI National Archive, the world's largest film and television archive
- To offer the widest range of UK and international moving image culture through our programmes and festivals - delivered online and in venue
- To use our knowledge to educate and deepen public appreciation and understanding
- To work with Government and industry to ensure the continued growth of the UK's screen industries

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Tim Richards.

About the Themerson Estate

The Themerson Estate handles the legacy of Stefan and Franciszka Themerson. The Themerson Archive which includes manuscripts, original artwork and illustrations, printing plates, accounts, book reviews, publicity ephemera, catalogues, photographs, press coverage, correspondence and Gaberbocchus books is looked after by the National Library in Warsaw.

About the Commission for Looted Art in Europe

The Commission for Looted Art in Europe (CLAE), is an international, expert, non-profit representative body established in London in 1999. It negotiates restitution policies and procedures with governments and cultural institutions and promotes the identification of looted cultural property and the tracing of its rightful owners. It represents families from all over the world to locate and recover their looted artworks and has achieved the restitution of over 3,500 items of cultural property. It also provides a Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945 at www.lootedart.com.

About the Bundesarchiv

The Bundesarchiv has the legal mandate to conserve the archives of the German Federal Government for the long term and to make them accessible to the public. The archives comprise documents (including files, maps, pictures, posters, films and sound recordings in analogue and digital form) that have been produced by the governing bodies of the Holy Roman Empire (1495-1806), the German Confederation (1815-1866), the German Empire and Reich (1867/71-1945), the Occupation Zones (1945-1949), the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990) and the Federal Republic of Germany (since 1949). The Bundesarchiv guarantees access to the archival material of the Federal Government while observing the protection of private or public interests. Around 160,000 documentary and feature films are safeguarded by the Bundesarchiv.

About LUX

LUX is the UK arts agency for the support and promotion of artists working with the moving image. Founded in 2002 as a charity and not-for-profit limited company, it builds on a lineage of its predecessor organisations (The London Filmmakers Co-operative, London Video Arts and The Lux Centre) that stretches back to the 1960s. It represents Europe's largest collection of film and video works made by artists and works with a wide range of international partners including museums, galleries, festivals and educational establishments, as well as directly with the public.



About the BFI London Film Festival

BFI London Film Festival is Britain's leading film event and one of the world's best film festivals. It introduces the finest new British and international films to an expanding London and UK-wide audience and attracts significant international film industry participation. LFF is a compelling combination of diverse films, red carpet glamour, friendly audiences and vibrant exchange. LFF provides an essential profiling opportunity for films seeking global success; promotes the careers of British and international filmmakers through its industry and awards programmes and positions London as the world's leading creative city.



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

About American Express

American Express is a global services company, providing customers with access to products, insights and experiences that enrich lives and build business success. Learn more at [americanexpress.com](https://www.americanexpress.com) and connect with us on [facebook.com/americanexpress](https://www.facebook.com/americanexpress)

About American Express® Experiences

Through American Express Experiences, Cardmembers have access to presale tickets, as well as the best seats and exclusive offers at some of the UK's most sought-after entertainment events via partnerships with a range of institutions, including The British Film Institute, AEG, Live Nation, Somerset House, and the National Theatre. Amex Experiences is just one example of the powerful backing that American Express provides its customers.