

Burn Marks – Film Posters from a Salt Mine

November 28, 2019 – May 31, 2020

An exhibition of the Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen

In 1986, materials from the Reichsfilmarchiv (Film Archive of the Third Reich), which had been stored in a German salt mine in Grasleben near Helmstedt, were discovered and safeguarded. The find – containing singed and burned fragments of film posters and other artifacts – mainly related to an official review process for film advertising in the “Deutsches Reich” (German Reich), established in 1920 during the Weimar Republic. The posters have been extensively restored and digitalized, as commissioned by the Deutsche Kinemathek. A special exhibition now tells the history of this spectacular discovery: the significance of the Reichsfilmarchiv; of going down into the salt mine to rescue the objects; and featuring 24 restored original posters made for 22 films.

Did a miner’s lamp in Grasleben really tip over out of carelessness in June 1945, triggering the destruction of countless film materials? In a salt mine of all places, where these and other cultural assets were supposed to be protected from the effects of war? Or had American agents and special units already largely evacuated the storage area two months before and then used the fire to cover their tracks? These questions will presumably never be answered. What has survived are historical film posters into which the traces of time have literally been burned. These works have come into the care of the Deutsche Kinemathek, while other documents and materials are still slumbering in the depths of the salt mine.

Why and how did a part of this important film archive make its way there in 1944–45, during the last months of WWII? And what happened at the mine after the war ended? This exhibition tells these stories. It also addresses the subject of protecting cultural assets and looks into the painstaking efforts that are undertaken to keep historical legacies from being forgotten.

Burn Marks can be compared to an archaeological study of materials on paper. In this exhibition visitors are immersed into the histories of the film posters from their initial review processes up to the present day. In addition to the 24 recovered film posters, on view from the salt mine are other materials related to film approval or censorship, photographs and written documentation, many previously unknown photos and threads of the history of the Reichsfilmarchiv, film recordings of two rescue operations in Grasleben in 2017 and 2019, as well as documentary film material showing the restoration of one film poster as an example.

Fifty additional restored and digitalized film posters from the salt mine in Grasleben are shown in the “Digital Collection” on the Deutsche Kinemathek website in a parallel, online presentation that supplements the *Burn Marks* exhibition.

We invite you to join a press tour with the curators on **November 27th, at 11 am.**

In cooperation with the Bundesarchiv, Berlin

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