KINOKINO

THE HANDMAID'S TALE (1990)

Directed by Volker Schlöndorff

WEDNESDAY October 28th 7PM

SATURDAY October 31st 2pm / 7pm

16mm - Color - 1h 48m



In the 1680s, the people of Hadley, Massachusetts hanged a woman named Mary Webster as a witch; in the morning, she was still alive.

Three centuries later, her descendant Margaret Atwood dedicated a novel to her and set herself one rule while writing it: nothing would go into Gilead that people hadn't already done somewhere. Puritan theocracy; Romania's ban on contraception; the Argentine junta taking dissidents' babies; laws forbidding the enslaved to read. **The Handmaid's Tale** is speculative fiction built entirely from the historical record.

In Gilead all must be sorted and ranked according to value — especially people. Man or woman, fertile or Unwoman, faithful or Gender Traitor; once every question has just two answers, the state only must decide which one you are. In this series on cons and grift, it’s the prototype: a false choice between two doors, both leading to the house’s vault.

Studios had passed on the project for years, reckoning a film for and about women would be lucky to make it to VHS. Volker Schlöndorff (The Tin Drum) finally directed from a Harold Pinter script that Pinter later disowned, with Natasha Richardson, Faye Dunaway, and Robert Duvall leading the cast. The film was booed in West Berlin... then cheered in East Berlin three months after the Wall came down. It then all but disappeared. Queer audiences were hip enough to see what most critics couldn’t; in 1991 the picture won the first GLAAD Media Award ever given for Outstanding Film.

Rounding out the killer cast, iconic costumes and uncanny art direction is a hymn-haunted score by Ryuichi Sakamoto, who was fresh off an Oscar win for The Last Emperor. On Tuesday the 27th, the night before our first screening, our friend Sam Bett will co-present Tokyo Melody at SPACE Gallery as part of the tour for his new translation of Sakamoto's memoir, Music Sets You Free. Sam and I will tag-team Wednesday’s introduction and Print books will be on hand with copies of the translation.

Music might set you free, but Gilead never would. In the words of William Blake, “May God us keep / From Single vision & Newton’s sleep.”