

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## A SPECIAL EDITION OF MoMI's RECURRING 'CAAN FILM FESTIVAL' RETURNS NEXT MONTH

Celebrating the life, career, and legacy of the late legendary James Caan.  
Featuring *The Godfather*, *El Dorado*, *Games*, *The Gambler*, *Thief*, *Elf*, and more.

September 16–October 9, 2022



Astoria, New York, August 18, 2022 — Museum of the Moving Image's **Caan Film Festival** returns this September to celebrate the life, career, and legacy of the late legendary James Caan. Running Friday, September 16 through Sunday, October 9, the festival in its fourth edition will revisit the most iconic performances of Caan's six-decade career. ***The Godfather*** (1972), ***El Dorado*** (1966), ***Games*** (1967), ***The Gambler*** (1974), ***Harry and Walter Go to New York*** (1976), ***Cinderella Liberty*** (1973), ***The Killer Elite*** (1975), ***Thief*** (1981), ***Elf*** (2003), and more will be screened—many in 35mm—over the course of four weekends in the Museum's Redstone Theater and Bartos Screening Room.

For sixty-plus years, Caan lent his incomparable magnetism to a wide spectrum of films, playing both tough guys and punching bags, talkers and mumblers, charmers and monsters. With his broad-shouldered athleticism and a granite-cut jaw, Caan brought a frank physicality to the screen, making even mild-mannered performances seem subtly threatening. Yet he also drew from a deep reserve of emotion, exemplifying a postwar American masculinity that reinvented itself one mission, one conflict, one heartbreak at a

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time. A son of Jewish immigrants, the Bronx-born, Sunnyside-raised Caan could have taken over the family's meat delivery business, but instead he wound his way through competitive sports (he played football at Michigan State) before alighting upon acting, studying under Sanford Meisner during the explosion of New York talent in the early 1960s.

He appeared on TV and in bit parts in films throughout the decade before stealing the show from John Wayne and Robert Mitchum in Howard Hawks's *El Dorado* (1966), and starring in queer trailblazer Curtis Harrington's psychological horror film *Games* (1967). Though he auditioned for the part of Michael Corleone, he was instead cast as his brother Sonny in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972); his electric performance would net his only Oscar nomination. He was arguably just as great, if not even better, as conflicted crooks living on the edge in both Karel Reisz's *The Gambler* (1974) and Michael Mann's *Thief* (1981), films that bookended his most fruitful era on screen. Those heavy-hitting dramas notwithstanding, Caan played comedy equally well, as evidenced in two films directed by repeat collaborator Mark Rydell, *Cinderella Liberty* (1973) and *Harry and Walter Go to New York* (1976)—the latter co-starring fellow '70s Jewish heartthrob Elliott Gould. Caan would cycle through auteurs like Robert Altman, Claude Lelouch, Richard Rush, Herbert Ross, Mel Brooks, Norman Jewison, and the mercurial Sam Peckinpah, for whom he battled ninjas in the espionage thriller *The Killer Elite* (1975).

Throughout the '80s, '90s, and 21st century, Caan maintained a steady screen presence, from lead performances in ***Alien Nation*** (1988) and ***Misery*** (1990), invaluable supporting turns in the comedies ***Bottle Rocket*** (1996) and *Elf* (2003), and as the commanding patriarch in James Gray's *The Yards* (2000)—fittingly set in the actor's hometown of Sunnyside, Queens, which is situated less than a mile from Museum of the Moving Image, where his legacy and legend live on.

The Caan Film Festival is organized by Curator of Film Eric Hynes and Assistant Curator of Film Edo Choi.

The full schedule is included below and online at <https://movingimage.us/series/caanfilmfestival/>. Additional titles may be added. Tickets are \$15 (\$7 Museum members at Senior/Student levels and above), with discounts for seniors, students, and youth. Advance tickets are available online.

### **SCHEDULE FOR 'THE CAAN FILM FESTIVAL,' SEP. 16–OCT. 9, 2022:**

All screenings take place in the Sumner M. Redstone Theater or the Celeste and Armand Bartos Screening Room at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Ave, Astoria, NY. Advance tickets are available online at [movingimage.us](https://movingimage.us).

#### ***The Godfather***

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 6:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 4:00 P.M.

Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. 1972, 175 mins. 35mm. With Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James Caan, Robert Duvall, Diane Keaton, Talia Shire, Sterling Hayden. The granddaddy of contemporary crime films remains one of Hollywood's greatest works of modern storytelling. With this first part of the multilayered Corleone saga, a violent allegory of American industry, Coppola instantly became a cinematic titan, Brando found a colossal role he would always be remembered for, Pacino became a bona fide movie star, and Caan (in his only Academy Award-nominated performance) stole the show as Sonny, the tetchy, combustible id of the family. It is gripping from the first frame to last, with exquisite visual texture courtesy of cinematographer Gordon Willis.

### ***El Dorado***

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 3:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Howard Hawks. 1966, 126 mins. Archival 35mm. With John Wayne, Robert Mitchum, James Caan, Charlene Holt, Edward Asner. For his penultimate film, Howard Hawks recruited longtime collaborator Wayne to star as a wizened gunslinger who teams up with an alcoholic sheriff, self-effacingly played by Mitchum, to defend a town against a greedy rancher and his hired guns. Not only does Hawks give a young Caan his first major Hollywood role, he's also given a star entrance—in a saloon, in a black hat, hurling a knife to the chest of a smirking bad guy. While Hawks, legendary DP Harold Rosson (*Singin' in the Rain*, *The Wizard of Oz*) and writer Leigh Brackett (*Rio Bravo*, *The Empire Strikes Back*) devise swirling, emotionally intricate set pieces, Caan manages to steal a measure of the spotlight from titans Wayne and Mitchum, adding a modern, low-key energy to the mix, and flashing his pearly grin as a deadly weapon.

### ***Games***

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 6:00 P.M.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 3:00 P.M.

Dir. Curtis Harrington. 1967, 100 mins. 35mm. With Simone Signoret, James Caan, Katharine Ross, Don Stroud. After the critical success of his 1961 indie classic *Night Tide*, Curtis Harrington, a key figure of the west coast avant-garde, churned out two Corman quickies before completing his (short-lived) transition to Hollywood with this psychedelic occult thriller for Universal. In a kinky setup vaguely reminiscent of the following year's better remembered *Rosemary's Baby*, with which the film also shares the great cinematographer William Fraker and an artificially conjured Manhattan setting, Caan and Ross are a callow young couple whose facade of security and privilege begins to crack when a mysterious older woman (a wonderfully weird Signoret) comes knocking at their door. Delightfully macabre and deliciously colored, *Games* is one of Harrington's most successful films and a hidden highlight of Caan's early career.

### ***The Gambler***

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 7:00 P.M.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 6:00 P.M.

Dir. Karel Reisz. 1974, 111 mins. Archival 35mm. With James Caan, Paul Sorvino, Lauren Hutton, Morris Carnovsky. In a magnetic, psychologically rich performance, Caan plays Axel Freed, a college literature professor who teaches Dostoyevsky by day and echoes the author's antiheroic Gambler by night. James Toback's wise and unpredictable script posits a man who gambles not to win, but to lose, purposefully and anxiously squandering opportunities and privileges won by his immigrant family. It is a fascinating, unconventionally thrilling 1970s portrait of a man deliberately behaving with his worst interests in mind. In his four-star *Chicago Sun-Times* review, Roger Ebert wrote, "The

*Gambler*, which begins as a portrait of Axel Freed's personality, develops into the story of his world, and then pays off as a thriller. We become so absolutely contained by Axel's problems and dangers that they seem like our own."

### **Harry and Walter Go to New York**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1:00 P.M.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 3:30 P.M.

Dir. Mark Rydell. 1977, 115 mins. Restored DCP. With James Caan, Elliott Gould, Michael Caine, Diane Keaton, Charles Durning. Caan's second collaboration with Rydell (*Cinderella Liberty*) is a dish that only 1970s Hollywood could serve. When bumbling vaudevillian con men Harry (Caan) and Walter (Gould) get sent to the same clink as dashing celebrity thief Adam Worth (Caine), they hatch an absurd plan to beat him to the punch—robbing Durning's heavily fortified bank with the help of Keaton's erstwhile do-gooder journalist Lissa Chestnut. Mixing slapstick comedy with sepia-toned lensing by master DP László Kovács, and featuring committed performances by both the lead cast and a deep well of great character actors (Burt Young, Carol Kane, Val Avery, Jack Gilford), *Harry and Walter Go to New York* remains a strange and inviting brew.

### **Cinderella Liberty**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 3:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Mark Rydell. 1973, 117 mins. With James Caan, Marsha Mason, Kirk Calloway, Eli Wallach, Burt Young, Bruno Kirby, Dabney Coleman. In this overlooked gem from Hollywood's 1970s heyday, Caan plays Baggs, a sailor marooned in Seattle on extended shore leave when his records are lost amid a ship transfer. After hustling each other in a pool hall, he falls for Mason's Maggie, a brassy part-time working girl who lives with her precious young son. Seemingly by compulsion, Baggs begins to play surrogate father and overprotective partner, even as Maggie's life and psyche start to unravel. Mason received an Academy Award nomination for her performance, but no less impressive is Caan as a man too long at sea suddenly determined to drop anchor and find some measure of permanence. Shot by the late great Vilmos Zsigmond and featuring an Oscar-nominated early score by John Williams.

### **The Killer Elite**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 6:00 P.M.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 5:30 P.M.

Dir. Sam Peckinpah. 1975, 122 mins. 35mm. With James Caan, Robert Duvall, Arthur Hill, Bo Hopkins, Gig Young, Burt Young. Released during the heyday of the 1970s conspiracy thriller, Peckinpah's *The Killer Elite* might rank as the most cynical of them all. Caan plays Mike Locken, a contracted agent for a private security firm affiliated with the CIA. After getting double-crossed and critically shot by his partner (Duvall), he's determined to rehabilitate and resume his career, if only to avenge his betrayer. He gets his chance when called upon to save a Chinese anti-communist from marauding ninjas, a group that's recruited his old partner. While Caan wasn't a fan of the film—he once told Gene Siskel that he ranked the film "zero out of ten"—his weary disaffection and physical frustration (he's saddled with a limp and locked elbow for most of the duration) perfectly suits Peckinpah's odd tonalities and dramatic subversions.

### **Thief**

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 7:00 P.M.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 5:30 P.M.

Dir. Michael Mann. 1981, 122 mins. DCP. With James Caan, Tuesday Weld, Willie Nelson, Jim Belushi, Robert Prosky, Dennis Farina. Mann's debut film reveals a master already at work, and it offered James Caan one of his greatest roles. After one final heist, safecracker Frank hopes to leave his criminal past behind, but string-pulling Leo (a fiendish Prosky) has other plans in mind. Mann's moody male melodramatics are in full effect, finding luminosity in Chicago's dark alleys and mining the skittish pathos beneath Caan's hustle and brawn.

### ***Alien Nation***

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2:00 P.M.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1:00 P.M.

Dir. Graham Baker. 1988, 91 mins. 35mm. With James Caan, Mandy Patinkin, Terence Stamp. Bedecked in '80s genre trappings yet motivated by allegory, *Alien Nation* situates a mismatched buddy cop story within a near-future Los Angeles inundated by 300,000 humanoid extraterrestrials. After his partner is killed by "the newcomers," avenging (and bigoted) Detective Matthew Sykes (Caan) teams with brainy Sam Francisco (Patinkin), the LAPD's first newcomer detective, to solve the crime. Evocatively shot throughout L.A., and savvily refracting historical elements of U.S. immigration and racism through the prisms of noir and sci-fi—embodied by Caan's iconic machismo and Patinkin's reptilian other-ness—*Alien Nation* has aged better than most of its Reagan-era, B-movie-with-a-blockbuster-budget peers. It spawned a popular '90s TV show as well as a reboot currently in development.

### ***Bottle Rocket***

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 4:00 P.M.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 7:30 P.M.

Dir. Wes Anderson. 1996, 91 mins. 35mm. With Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson, Ned Dowd, Robert Musgrave, Andrew Wilson, Lumi Cavazos, James Caan. In Anderson's beloved, tonally distinctive debut comedy, three aimless Texas friends aspire to a life of crime and outlaw notoriety, elaborately scheming up low-level burglaries that ride the line between fantasy role-play and real-world consequences. While Owen and Luke Wilson steal the show, earning robust Hollywood careers in the years that followed, Caan turns up as an eccentric local con man named Mr. Henry who sets the boys up for their big take. He comes across as a forbidding tough guy, but may be just as delusional as his protégés.

### ***Misery***

OCTOBER 1, 6:00 P.M.

OCTOBER 2, 3:00 P.M.

Dir. Rob Reiner. 1990, 107 mins. 35mm. With James Caan, Kathy Bates, Richard Farnsworth, Lauren Bacall. Famous for his imposing presence and strapping physique, Caan spends most of *Misery* physically broken and detained, subjected to everything from imprisoning idolatry to femur-cracking punishment. Adapted from the Stephen King novel, Caan plays Paul Sheldon, a famous author rescued from a snowy car crash by shut-in superfan Annie Wilkes (Bates). As his protracted convalescence finally nears an end, Wilkes becomes increasingly, and sadistically, unwilling to let him go. While Bates took home a Best Actress Oscar for her hilarious and terrifying turn, Caan plays the perfect foil, somehow managing to be both victimized and deserving, the embodiment of a writer whose scorn for his own readers lies just beneath an accommodating surface.

### ***Elf***

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1:00 P.M.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 3:00 P.M.

Dir. Jon Favreau. 2003, 97 mins. 35mm. With Will Ferrell, James Caan, Zooey Deschanel, Mary Steenburgen, Edward Asner, Bob Newhart. Ferrell stars in this wildly popular and truly unconventional contemporary Christmas classic, which combines holiday cheer with offbeat comedy. Buddy (Ferrell) is a bigger-than-average-sized man raised as an elf at the North Pole, a Tarzan of sorts who's late to realize he's actually human. Sent to New York in search of his true identity, he meets his father, Walter Hobbs (Caan, in classic show-stealing straight-man mode), a grinchy children's book publisher who's on Santa's naughty list. Buddy attempts to redeem his father and earn his acceptance, guided by a purity of purpose that can't prevent him from causing some chaos along the way.

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Top image: James Caan in *The Gambler* (1974, Dir. Karel Reisz). Image courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Photofest.

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### **MUSEUM INFORMATION**

**Museum of the Moving Image** ([movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)) advances the understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of the art, history, technique, and technology of film, television, and digital media. In its stunning facility—acclaimed for both its accessibility and bold design—the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings of significant works; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, craftspeople, and business leaders; and education programs which serve more than 50,000 students each year. The Museum also houses a significant collection of moving-image artifacts.

Hours: Thurs, 2:00–6:00 p.m. Fri, 2:00–8:00 p.m. Sat–Sun, 12:00–6:00 p.m.

Museum Admission: \$15 adults; \$11 senior citizens (ages 65+) and students (ages 18+) with ID; \$9 youth (ages 3–17). Children under 3 and Museum members are admitted free. General admission is free every Thursday.

Film Screenings: Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and as scheduled. Unless otherwise noted, tickets: \$15 adults, \$11 students and seniors, \$9 youth (ages 3–17), free or discounted for Museum members (depending on level of membership). Advance purchase is available online.

Location: 36-01 35 Avenue (at 37 Street) in Astoria.

Subway: M or R to Steinway Street. N or W to 36 Ave or Broadway.

Program Information: Telephone: 718 777 6888; Website: [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us)

Membership: [movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member](http://movingimage.us/join-and-support/become-a-member) or 718 777 6877

Museum of the Moving Image is housed in a building owned by the City of New York and has received significant support from the following public agencies: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York City Council; New York City Economic Development Corporation; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature; Institute of Museum and Library Services; National Endowment for the Humanities; National Endowment for the Arts; and Natural Heritage Trust (administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation). For more information, please visit [movingimage.us](http://movingimage.us).