



## Michelangelo Antonioni

Director, Screenwriter, Editor, Actor

Birth                Sept 29, 1913 (Ferrara, Italy)  
Genres             Drama

Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni redefined the concept of narrative cinema, challenging the accepted notions at the heart of storytelling, realism, drama, and the world at large; his films — a seminal body of enigmatic and intricate mood pieces — rejected action in favor of contemplation, championing image and design over character and story. Haunted by a sense of instability and impermanence, his work defined a cinema of possibilities, a shifting landscape of thoughts and ideas devoid of resolution; in Antonioni world, riddles were not answered, but simply evaporated into other riddles.

Born September 29, 1912, in Ferrara, Italy, as a child Antonioni interests included painting and building architectural models (an interest which continued in the design and decor of his films). After graduating from high school, he attended the University of Bologna, where he initially studied classics but later emerged with a degree in economics. While at college, Antonioni interest in the theater blossomed, and he also began writing short fiction and film reviews for a local newspaper, *Il Corriere Padano*, often running afoul of the motion-picture community for his savage attacks on the mainstream Italian comedies of the 1930s. His initial attempt at filmmaking was a documentary profiling a nearby insane asylum; the project was aborted after the inmates would lapse into fits of panic each time the lights of the camera were turned on.

By 1939, Antonioni had chosen the cinema as his life's work, and soon he relocated to Rome, where he accepted a position at *Cinema*, the official Fascist film magazine edited by Mussolini's son, Vittorio. After being dismissed over a political disagreement, Antonioni enrolled at the Centre Sperimentale to study film technique. By age 30, he was working professionally in the film industry; his first screenplay went unproduced, but he soon was hired to co-write Roberto Rossellini's *Un Pilota Ritorna*, followed by a stint as the assistant director to Enrico Fulchignoni on *I Due Foscarini*. In 1943, Antonioni traveled to France to work with Marcel Carne on *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. He was soon called back to Italy for military service, where he managed to wrangle funding from the Luce Institute for *Gente del Po*, a documentary portrait of the impoverished lives of the fishermen along the Po River.

The Allied invasion of Italy brought film production there to an end for some time, forcing Antonioni to earn his living as a book translator; he also wrote prolifically for a number of magazines, including *Film Rivista* and *Film d'Oggi*. Additionally, he was commissioned by Luchino Visconti to write a pair of screenplays, *Furore* and *The Trial of Maria Tarnowska*, neither of which was ever produced. Finally, in 1948, Antonioni was able to return behind the camera, and over the course of the next two years he directed no less than six documentary shorts; among them, *Nettezza Urbana*, *L'Amorosa Menzogna*, and *Superstizione* hinted most strongly at the work still to come, their style of photography Spartan and unadorned, forgoing strong contrasts to focus on the middle range of gray tones.

In 1960, Antonioni masterpiece *L'Avventura* premiered at the *Cannes Film Festival*. His most extreme work to date, as a study of alienation among the bourgeoisie, it progressed at a snail's pace, its long, beautiful shots telling virtually no story whatsoever. Even the basic plot — the search for a missing woman — willfully disintegrated at the end, prompting a near-riot among *Cannes* viewers. Ultimately, *L'Avventura* won the festival's Grand Jury Prize, becoming a phenomenal success across the globe; Antonioni became a major figure in international cinema virtually overnight, and his lead actress, Monica Vitti — a luminous cipher perfectly suited to her director's austere formalism — emerged as a huge star. *La Notte* — the second film in the trilogy begun with *L'Avventura* and exploring the existential ground of alienation, non-communication, and meaninglessness — appeared in 1961. A transitional work also starring Vitti as well as Marcello Mastroianni and Jeanne Moreau, *La Notte* experimented more freely with editing techniques, relying less on the long, expansive takes which defined Antonioni's earlier work. The 1962 release *L'Eclisse* reduced its plot structure to the barest minimum, replacing narrative with an acute psychological portrait of a woman (Vitti) who drifts from one romantic liaison into another. *Deserto Rosso*, his fourth and final film starring Vitti — as well as his first color feature — followed in 1964, and in 1966 Antonioni went to England to shoot *Blow-Up*, his most commercially successful effort. Set in the "Swinging London" scene of the mid-'60s, it starred David Hemmings as a fashion photographer who accidentally photographs a murder.

The wide popularity of *Blow-Up* brought Antonioni to America, where in 1970 he made his lone U.S. feature, *Zabriskie Point*. *Chung Kuo Cina*, a four-hour television documentary filmed in China and subsequently denounced by the nation's government, followed in 1972; *The Passenger*, a thriller shot in North Africa starring Jack Nicholson, appeared three years later, while *Il Mistero di Oberwald* did not bow until 1980. With 1982's *Identificazione di Una Donna*, Antonioni's career largely ground to a halt; a savage early review by the *New York Times'* Vincent Canby prompted its U.S. distributor to drop the film, and due to the loss of potential revenue, he was unable to realize several planned projects. A 1985 stroke left him partially paralyzed and unable to speak, but a decade later Antonioni returned to filmmaking with *Par-Dela Les Nuages*, a feature co-directed by Wim Wenders.

In 1995, [Antonioni](#) received an honorary Lifetime Achievement Academy Award. —  
**Jason Ankeny**

## Director - filmography (selected)

1. [Eros](#) (2004) (segment "Il Filo pericoloso delle cose")  
... aka Ai shen (China: Cantonese title)
2. [Lo Sguardo di Michelangelo](#) (2004)  
... aka The Gaze of Michelangelo (literal English title)
3. [Il Filo pericoloso delle cose](#) (2001)
4. [Al di là delle nuvole](#) (1995)  
... aka Al di là delle nuvole (Italy)  
... aka Beyond the Clouds (USA)  
... aka Jenseits der Wolken (Germany)  
... aka Par-delà les nuages (France)
5. [Noto, Mandorli, Vulcano, Stromboli, Carnevale](#) (1993)
6. [12 registi per 12 città](#) (1989) (segment "Roma")
7. [Kumbha Mela](#) (1989)
8. [Identificazione di una donna](#) (1982)  
... aka Identification d'une femme (France)  
... aka Identification of a Woman (USA)
9. [Il Mistero di Oberwald](#) (1981)  
... aka Das Geheimnis von Oberwald (West Germany)  
... aka The Mystery of Oberwald  
... aka The Oberwald Mystery
10. [Chung Kuo - Cina](#) (1972)  
... aka China  
... aka Cina (Italy)
11. [Zabriskie Point](#) (1970)
12. [Blowup](#) (1966)  
... aka Blow-Up (USA)
13. [I Tre volti](#) (1965) (segment "Il provino")  
... aka The Three Faces  
... aka Three Faces of a Woman
14. [Il Deserto rosso](#) (1964)  
... aka Le Désert rouge (France)  
... aka The Red Desert (UK)
15. [L'Eclisse](#) (1962)  
... aka Eclipse (USA)  
... aka L'Éclipse (France)  
... aka The Eclipse (UK)
16. [Gente del Po](#) (1943)  
... aka People of the Po River