

2013-04-22

The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

Daub, Peggy; Gomis, Melissa; Hallman, Phil

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/110220>

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Downloaded from Deep Blue, University of Michigan's institutional repository

Gangster Film

Thieves Like Us [1974]

A number of directors tried their hand at making unconventional gangster films after the success of *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967. Altman's entry in this field, *Thieves Like Us*, is a matter-of-fact treatment of the lives of criminals. His characters are not well-off city folk but impoverished rural southerners. Even the lovers at the center of the plot, Keith Carradine and Shelley Duvall, do not have the look of typical romantic leads. Altman's unique touches include depicting poverty with beautiful cinematography and using radio broadcasts from the times as commentary on the action.



Photographs from the set of *Thieves Like Us*.



Science Fiction

Quintet [1979]

Robert Altman's only foray into the realm of science fiction came with *Quintet* in 1979. That decade had seen the rise of the blockbuster sci-fi film with *Star Wars* (1977) and *Superman* (1978), as well as sci-fi/horror mixes such as *Alien* (1979) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978). *Quintet* is a futuristic story in which inhabitants of a post-apocalyptic ice age, including Essex (Paul Newman) and Vivia (Brigitte Fossey), spend their time playing a board game called "Quintet" involving human pieces.

While Altman's take on science fiction was not a success at the box office or with the critics, the film has often been noted for its strikingly futuristic and beautiful settings and oddly medieval costumes. Almost the entire film was shot on location at the abandoned and decaying site that had been built for Expo '67 (the 1967 International and Universal Exposition) in Montreal, Quebec.



Photograph of a site at Expo '67, Montreal.



This large original painting by Canadian artist Michel Pellus (1945-) is included in the Altman Archive. Robert Altman commissioned Pellus, then in his 20s, to create the painting as a possible promotional item, but it was never used. Measuring about 3 by 4 feet, it portrays players of the game in front of the pentagon-shaped board with the two lead characters, Essex and Vivia, behind.

Michel Pellus, oil painting for *Quintet*.