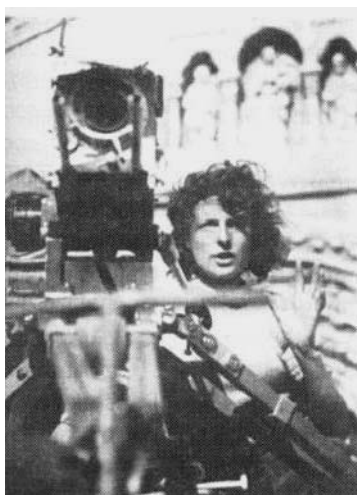


## Leni Riefenstahl

\*1902 †2003-09-08

After a life that encompassed more than twenty-five Olympiads Leni Riefenstahl passed away on September 8, 2003. She began her career as a student at the art academy in Berlin where she studied painting and drawing. Next to these studies she was educated in ballet and modern dance. Her first performances were at the beginning of the twenties. In 1923 Max Rheinhardt offered her a job as a solo dancer at the German Theatre in Berlin. In 1926 she started her career as a movie actress in Arnold Franck's (1889 – 1974) alpine movie *Der Heilige Berg*. Until 1933 various other alpine and winter movies followed in which she – as a skillful alpine athlete – played the main role. In the course of these movies she learned the business of a producer which led to a foundation of an own company in 1932. Her first movie as a director was an alpine movie and entitled *Das blaue Licht*. At the Biennale in Venice this movie was honoured with a silver medal. It filled the audience and Adolf Hitler, with whom she became closely acquainted, with enthusiasm. Results of this relationship were the movies *Sieg des Glaubens* (1933) and *Triumph des Willens* (1934). Both movies were produced with high technical support and are characterized by unusual shots, cuts and camera works. By this time high quality propaganda movies were produced which were awarded international prizes. *Triumph des Willens* was honored with an International Grand Prix at the World Fair in Paris in 1937. By various well chosen stylistic devices her movies became a means of national socialistic self propagation and a useful way of influencing the masses.

According to Riefenstahl the idea for the Olympic movie was stimulated by Carl Diem, who addressed her about this topic at an athletic field. In 1935 the company Olympia-Film GmbH was founded. It was some kind of a



cover company for the ministry of propaganda.

But nevertheless she managed to secure for herself some space of artistic freedom. The movie was produced with almost unlimited technical equipment and human endeavours. Especially the cutting work lasted two years. The first performance of the four hours lasting movie with its two parts – *Fest der Völker* and *Fest der Schönheit* – was on April 20, 1938; Hitler's birthday. In September of the same year she was awarded the Coppa

Mussolini of the Biennale for the best foreign movie.

At the IOC Session in London in 1939 she was awarded the Olympic Diploma, which originally had been suggested by Avery Brundage. It was to be given to her at the Olympic Games in Helsinki. This award means a quantum leap in the history of sport movies. By the help of new techniques concerning camera work, shots and cuts or by the use of slow motions the movie on the Olympic Games became an elaborated work of art. Particularly the scenes on the torch relay stress that Riefenstahl did not only film Olympic reality but worked on it in a creative manner.

After World War II it was Carl Diem who fought for a reshoot of the Olympic movie. It was his merit that Riefenstahl was honored with the Olympic Diploma which had been awarded to her in 1939. At the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972 she worked as a photographer. Even at the age of ninety she produced diving movies. She remained physically and mentally fit till the end of her life.

Her Olympic movies set the standard for sport movies. Her technical and esthetical innovations are still visible in today's world of media. Till the end of her life she denied political influence on her movies and was not able to take into perspective the political effects of them. What a pity!

Walter Borgers