

## Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film

Oct 21-31

The founding of the MoMA Film Library (now the Department of Film) on June 25, 1935 was a catalyst for the study of the motion picture as art in the United States. The function of the Film Library according to Iris Barry, its first curator, was to "trace, catalog, assemble, exhibit and circulate to museums and colleges single films or programs of films." These are methodologies the Department of Film adheres to more than 80 years after its establishment.

Using Barry's 1935 publication *Film Notes* as a guide post, *Modern Matinees: Iris Barry's History of Film* endeavors to reconstruct a range of those earliest programs originally organized in six thematic series and three monographic compilations. This broad re-consideration of those films Barry regarded as key for their "pervasive social effect...and as the only new art-form of modern times" commences with the devastating *A Fool There Was* (1915), explores the dawn of sound with *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and includes the animation classic *Steamboat Willie* (1928). Each of the films in this series became early acquisitions, building the Film Library's emergent collection.

Organized by Anne Morra, Associate Curator, Department of Film.

***A Fool There Was.*** 1914. USA. Directed by Frank Powell. Screenplay by Roy L. McCardell. Based on the poem "The Vampire" by Rudyard Kipling and the play "A Fool There Was" by Porter Emerson Browne. With Theda Bara, Edward José, Minna Gale. 35mm. Silent with musical accompaniment. Preserved by The Museum of Modern Art with support from the National Film Preservation Foundation/Park Service, the Film Foundation. 78 min.

"*A Fool There Was* gave the word *vamp* to the English language. As the incarnation of this aggressive variety of *femme fatale*, Theda Bara became famous overnight. Apparently the first screen player to be the object of a publicity campaign designed to create artificially a striking personality, this *circumspect and demure* girl was given out to be half-Arab, a seeress and inscrutably but frightfully evil. Constantly photographed with skulls, with snakes, she was condemned to a career of wickedness through forty subsequent films."

Mon, Oct 21, 1:30 T2

***The Execution of Mark Queen of Scots.*** 1895. USA. Produced by The Edison Co. Photography by William Heiss. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 20 seconds.

"This ruthless little Edison film was made for the peep-show or kinoscope, but in February 1894 (American showman) Jean A. LeRoy succeeded in projecting it on screen. After 1895, films were commonly shown on screens."

**Wash Day Trouble.** 1896. USA. Directed by Edmund Kuhn. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm subject printed twice on reel. 45 seconds.

“Film could do more than record and recreate; it could invent new stories. Comic incidents like this were improvised from the earliest days, and developed later into slapstick comedy.”

**Le Voyage dans la Lune.** (A Trip to the Moon). 1902. France. Directed and story by George Méliès. With Blulette Bernon, George Méliès, Depierre. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 16 min. Courtesy Flicker Alley, Lobster, Blackhawk Films.

“A *Trip to the Moon* was made when most films were only three minutes long. It displays the richness of Méliès invention and humor: his zooming close-up of the face of the moon is masterly and the whole film is charmingly unrealistic and gay.”

**The Great Train Robbery.** 1903. USA. Written and directed by Edwin S. Porter. With George Barnes, “Bronco Billy” Anderson, A.C. Abadie. Silent with musical accompaniment. 10 min. 35mm.

“This short story in cinematography created a sensation upon its appearance and has become a classic of the screen. The whole feeling of the film is definitely cinematic, movement is employed towards and away from the camera as well as horizontally in front of it. Once or twice, the camera is even swung to follow the action. “

**Faust.** 1910. France. Adapted and directed by Georges Fagot, Henri Andréani. Based on the poem by Goethe. Silent with musical accompaniment. 10 min. 35mm excerpt.

“This is not the *Faust* which Méliès made, but another version. The last half of the film is missing. It is interesting to note how, in an effort to let the audience know what the actors were thinking, *visions* were used as here when the tapestry on the wall gives place to Marguerite’s memory of her meeting with Faust.”

**Les Amours de la reine Élisabeth (Queen Elizabeth).** 1912. France/Great Britain. Directed by Louis Mercanton. With Sarah Bernhardt, Lou Tellegen. Silent with musical accompaniment. 36 min. 35mm.

“Sarah Bernhardt’s prestige surpassed that of any player now living: she could do no wrong, and the fact that she had consented to act for the films did much to diminish prejudice against the movies. The success of this film and of the Italian spectacle *Quo Vadis* (1913) helped to establish the longer feature.”

**Tue, Oct 22, 1:30 T2**

**The New York Hat.** 1912. USA. Directed by D.W.Griffith. Story by Anita Loos. With Mary Pickford, Lionel Barrymore, Robert Harron. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 15 min.

“When Griffith began directing films in 1908, he tried to make his characters resemble people in real life and to reveal them intimately. A girl with long curls, at first anonymous like all Biograph players, but

afterwards canonized as Mary Pickford, responded curiously to Griffith's direction. Her gestures were small, drawn-out but expressive: there was warmth and sincerity in the parts she played. Mary gives herself a half-disparaging look in the mirror, arranges one glove to look like a pair, and trips hopefully outdoors."

***The Taking of Luke McVane. (The Fugitive.)*** 1915. USA. Directed by William S. Hart. Supervised by Thomas H. Ince. With William S. Hart, Enid Markey, S.C. Smith. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 26 min.

"A film as ruthlessly tragic as this is rare today, but it was a peculiar style of *Western*, stamped with Bill Hart's rigid mask, that endeared Ince to Moviegoers. Illuminated subtitles, as used in *The Fugitive*, were contrived by Ince; he attempted to blend printed matter with film proper by decorating the borders of his captions with symbols—cactus for desert, buds for a maiden, a snarling wolf-head for a villain." This print carries the re-issue title *The Fugitive*.

***A Clever Dummy.*** 1917. USA. Directed by Herman Raymaker. Produced by Mack Sennett. With Ben Turpin, Chester Conklin, Wallace Beery. Silent with musical accompaniment. 16mm. 26 min.

"Eminently one of the purest types of films, slapstick comedy originated in the little comic incidents of the primitive cinema...It developed after 1905 under the French comedian, Max Linder, who introduced the visual surprises which are to the screen comedy what *gags* are to vaudeville comedians. Ben Turpin, associated with Chaplin in many of his Essanay comedies, is most celebrated for his *A Small Town Idol* (1921). *The Clever Dummy* reveals him as a singularly expressive zany—all of gallantry, for instance, is expressed by the kiss the clever dummy drops on the leading lady's hand."

**Wed, Oct 23, 1:30 T2**

***Intolerance.*** 1916. USA. Written and directed by D.W. Griffith. With Robert Harron, Lillian Gish, Marguerite Marsh. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 173 min.

"The film *Intolerance* is of extreme importance in the history of the cinema. It is the end and justification of that whole school of American cinematography based on the terse cutting and disjunctive assembly of lengths of film, which began with *The Great Train Robbery* and culminated in *The Birth of a Nation* and in this. All the old and many new technical devices are employed in it—brief, enormous close-ups not only of faces but of hands and of objects; the *eye-opener* focus to introduce vast panoramas; the use of only part of the screen's area for certain shots; camera angles and tracking shots such as are commonly supposed to have been introduced by German producers years later; and rapid cross-cutting the like of which was not seen again until *Potemkin*." This print represents the standard 1920's release version.

**Thu, Oct 24, 1:30 T2**

***Hande (Hands)***. 1928. Germany. Directed by Stella Simon, Miklos Bandy. German intertitles. 35mm. 13 min.

“Mrs. Simon, the New York photographer who made the present picture independently in Berlin, states it represents no more than an experiment which she carries out in order to discover for herself what could be achieved by treating the film as an abstract pattern in time and space. In a sense, *Hands* is a compromise between the purely abstract film and the realistic movie with a plot.”

***Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans***. 1927. USA. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Screenplay by Carl Mayer. With Janet Gaynor, George O'Brien, Jane Winton. 35mm. 94 min.

“*Sunrise* is both impressive and unequal. Few films begin more effectively. The dazzling glimpse of the railway station and the subsequent multiple shots suggest in brilliantly visual terms all the summertime gaiety of vacations and of resorts. Throughout the film the photography and lighting are masterly, and the sets unusually photogenic, except when they strive to reduplicate paintings. The tempo both of the acting and the cutting is well considered and, in the final sequence when the nemesis has belatedly overtake the here there is, in the present synchronized version of the film, a singularly apt use of music when the horns call with a prod found suggestion of loss and frustration across the dark waters of the lake.”

**Fri, Oct 25, 1:30 T2**

***Steamboat Willie***. 1928. USA. Animation by Ub Iwerks. Produced by Walt Disney. 35mm. 8 min.

“Mickey Mouse rushed in to success at a time when the human characters on the screen were still struggling under difficulties imposed by the new devices for recording speech and sound. Moreover, though Mickey never said much, yet he was perfectly eloquent. The brilliant use of sounds and of music as an integral part of each Disney cartoon, rather than as a mere accompaniment, constituted in 1928 a definite advance in sound-film technique...”

***The Jazz Singer***. 1927. USA. Directed by Alan Crosland. Screenplay by Al Cohn. With Al Jolson, Warner Oland, Myrna Loy. 35mm. 88 min.

“*The Jazz Singer* was ten reels long, over two-thirds of it silent with printed subtitles. It relates the story of a Jewish boy disowned by his father for devoting himself to secular, instead of sacred, music. After winning considerable success on the stage, the son returns to sing in the synagogue in place of his dying father, with whom he is belatedly reconciled. The acting is stilted and circumscribed, while Jolson's voice is anything but perfectly reproduced. There is little question that the film was an example, like the performance of Dr. Johnson's dog, of something being remarkable not because it was well done but because it had been done at all.”

**Mon, Oct 28, 1:30 T2**

***All Quiet on the Western Front.*** 1930. USA. Directed by Lewis Milestone. Screenplay by George Abbott, Maxwell Anderson, Del Andrews. Based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque. With Lew Ayres, Slim Summerville, Louis Wilhelm. 35mm. 129 min.

“Speech which in earlier talkies had been carried on continuously occurs in *All Quiet* only in intimate scenes, which in silent films were punctuated with dialogue in the form of printed subtitles. Spacious scenes of action are accompanied only by sounds—the screech of shells and the din of warfare. What was remarkable about *All Quiet on the Western Front* at the time it was made was that not only did it employ spectacle and the moving camera, but it also was cut almost as freely as a silent film.”

**Tue, Oct 29, 1:30 T2**

***Plane Crazy.*** 1928. USA. Directed by Walt Disney. Animation by Ub Iwerks. Silent with musical accompaniment. 16mm. 6 min.

“Mickey Mouse made his first appearance, like Oswald the Rabbit and other little creatures of the animated cartoons evolved by Walt Disney, as a silent figure. His creator took a long time before he was satisfied that he had achieved the proper nose, ears, whiskers and wardrobe for *the mouse form*, as the early Mickey is called at the Disney studio.”

***The Last Command.*** 1928. USA. Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Story by Lajos Biró. Adapted by John F. Goodrich. With Emil Jannings, Evelyn Brent, William Powell. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm 88 min.

“Distinguished, like all the films directed by Josef von Sternberg, for its painstaking photographic quality. *The Last Command* was inspired by a real-life occurrence in the film centre. It gives a fairly accurate idea of the conditions under which films at the time were produced and is one of the few pictures in serious mood ever to have presented a study of life behind the scenes in a studio. The pathos inherent in the careers of the many extra and small-part players of Hollywood, especially the aging ones, lent itself admirably to the popular conception of the sort of role Emil Jannings should play.”

**Wed, Oct 30, 1:30 T2**

***The Skeleton Dance.*** 1929. USA. Directed by Walt Disney. Animation by Ub Iwerks. 16mm. 6 min.

“Fame and fortune waited on the second Mickey Mouse, *Steamboat Willie*, made with sound. It scored an immediate success as its first showing in September, 1928. *The Skeleton Dance*, first of the Silly Symphonies, was made the following year. In the Mickeys and the Symphonies alike, the brilliant use of sound as an integral part of the cartoon, rather than as an accompaniment deserves special attention.”

***Der Golem.*** 1920. Germany. Directed by Carl Boese, Paul Wegener. Written by Paul Wegener. With Albert Steinrueck, Ernst Deutsch, Paul Wegener. German main titles, English intertitles. Silent with musical accompaniment. 35mm. 87 min.

“Wegener made an earlier version of the subject in 1914, working with a group of associates, Stellan Rye the Danish director, Henrik Galeen, the writer and Guido Seeber, the cameraman as he had done in the making of *The Student of Prague*. (In the 1920 version) the clay image of the Golem (is) brought to life by the old Rabbi. This legendary figure of the middle ages is afterwards instrumental in delivering the Jews from the oppression of their overlord. The entire film, of considerable interest for its exterior settings and its lighting as well as for the acting of Wegener (as the Golem).”

**Thu, Oct 31, 1:30 T2**