

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM PLANS DOCUMENTARY FILM CYCLE

A series of recent documentary films will be presented by the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, 11 West 53rd Street, from February 8 through April 4, it was announced today. The eight-week cycle, entitled THE AMERICAN SCENE, 1945 - 1953, consists exclusively of films produced in the United States and has been selected by the Film Library with the aid of producers, sponsors, and critics in the field. It is the first time since 1945, when the Film Library presented "Documentary Film, 1922 - 1945", that the Museum has offered such a comprehensive series of documentary films.

Commenting on the cycle, Richard Griffith, curator of the Film Library, says:

The American film of fact and opinion, generally believed to have "come into its own", during World War II, has achieved a quieter but in many ways a more impressive growth in the succeeding years. As these programs show, it has put down deeper roots in the American scene, and has served the national interest in projecting that scene before the world at the same time that it has served the special interests of science, industry, and art. Taken together the programs show, as no single film could show, new directions in our changing national life.

Familiar names and new techniques characterize the cycle. By far the largest proportion of producers, directors, photographers, and writers who made these films began their careers before the war, and served, sometimes arduously, as wartime film-makers. But the techniques displayed, while a straight development from the "documentary idea" of the 1930's, seem in many cases so unfamiliar as to suggest an inappropriateness in applying the old documentary label to them. These new methods have grown out of new subject matter, new sponsoring interests, and, perhaps, a new sponsorial concept of audience-interest.

The latter factor is especially evident in the lack of "propaganda", in the invidious sense, in most of these films. While the majority of them have a definite purpose, they seek for points of audience interest - largely, human-interest - in their material, instead of employing the hortatory or "selling" approach so familiar in previous films of this kind.

Boldness of technique is especially evident in an imaginative camera approach to the meaning of everyday scenes in the psychiatric films, and in general in the use of dialogue. Perhaps under the influence of the late Robert Flaherty's LOUISIANA STORY (omitted from the cycle only because it was shown at the Museum so recently at Christmas week), the non-actors who appear in these films do not parrot written lines. Instead, for the most part, they were told what to say in a general way and then improvised their own lines in their own fashion. As a result, the common speech of the country comes to the screen in a manner unknown since King Vidor's HALLELUJAH, made in the first year of sound.

As noted, most of these technical innovations are the contribution of mature artists whose further development they mark. The vitality of the fact film form and purpose is signalled, however, by the attraction to it of such diverse talents as the still photographer Helen Levitt, the critic James Agee, Burgess Meredith, and Fred Zinneman, the Hollywood director of HIGH NOON and

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FROM HERE TO ETERNITY, who says he derived his film method from Flaherty, and who in BENJY has created fresh and inspiring proof of the potentialities of the fact film.

THE PROGRAMS

- Feb. 8 - 14: WORKS OF CALDER (1950), produced by Burgess Meredith, directed by Herbert Matter. The relation between natural forms and the mobiles of Alexander Calder, as revealed to a small boy.
 CONEY ISLAND (1952), produced and directed by Valentine Sherry. A lively and highly personal view of the famous resort.
 OUT OF THE NORTH (1953), directed by Larry Madison for Nash-Kelvinator. The migration of ducks from their nesting grounds in Hudson's Bay to the far South, and their hunting as they pass over the United States, photographed in color.
- Feb. 15 - 21: ROOTS OF HAPPINESS (1953), directed by Henwar Rodakiewicz for the Mental Health Film Board. A lyric film of the sources of family happiness, made for Puerto Ricans and communicating its complex psychiatric concepts in poetic, almost Biblical, terms.
 THE QUIET ONE (1949), directed by Sidney Meyers for Film Documents, Inc. The celebrated film about a disturbed Negro boy who penetrates to the roots of his unhappiness.
- Feb. 22 - 28: NOTES ON THE PORT OF ST. FRANCIS (1952), directed by Frank Stauffacher for A. F. Films. Camera aspects of the port and city of San Francisco.
 THE PHOTOGRAPHER (1948), directed by Willard Van Dyke for United States Information Service. The life and work of the American photographer Edward Weston, lovingly sketched by his noted disciple.
 LAND OF ENCHANTMENT (1948), directed by Henwar Rodakiewicz for United States Information Service. The American painter Georgia O'Keefe against the background of the New Mexican desert where she lives and works.
- March 1 - 7: ANGRY BOY (1951), written and produced by Irving Jacoby; directed by Alexander Hammid for the Mental Health Film Board. Childhood hostility absorbed from the hidden hostilities of parents.
 THE LONELY NIGHT (1952), directed by Irving Jacoby for the Mental Health Film Board. The loneliness that comes from self-hatred, seen in the life patterns of a young girl.
- March 8 - 14: DECISION FOR CHEMISTRY (1953), directed by Sidney Meyers for the Monsanto Chemical Company. American industry will face a shortage of trained chemists unless more college students major in the field. This film shows the creative rewards and far-reaching social usefulness that come to modern chemists.
 AMERICAN FRONTIER (1953), directed by Willard Van Dyke for the American Petroleum Institute. The discovery of oil can turn a country village into a honky-tonk boom town. But today, oil drillers have developed new methods, social and economic as well as technical, by which they can get oil from the earth without disrupting the life of the community.
- March 15 - 17: FEELING ALL RIGHT (1947), directed by Fred Lasse for the Southern Educational Film Production Service. An intensely human account of how Southern Negroes have been taught to protect themselves against venereal disease.
 WORKING AND PLAYING TO HEALTH (1953), directed by Willard Van Dyke for the Mental Health Film Board. The staff of a mental hospital enact their therapeutic problems and techniques in the form of an improvised play, here literally photographed with great effect.

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- March 22 - 28: **IN THE STREET** (1953), directed by Helen Levitt and James Agee. The unconscious self-revelation of people in New York streets, caught by concealed cameras.
- AND NOW - MIGUEL** (1953), directed by Jo Krungold for the United States Information Service. The life of sheep herders of Spanish-Indian descent in New Mexico, where the calling descends from father to son.
- PUERTO RICO** (1947), directed by John Ferno for the Puerto Rico Office of Information. The economic problems of the island and its struggle for a better life and more self-government.
- March 29 - April 4: **STEPS OF AGE** (1951), directed by Ben Maddow for the Mental Health Film Board. The tragedy of the unoccupied aged, and how it can be averted.
- WHO'S BOSS** (1952), directed by Alexander Hammid for McGraw-Hill. The conflict between two careers in the same marriage, and the adjustment that ends it.
- BENJY** (1951), directed by Fred Zinneman for the Los Angeles Orthopedic Hospital. Made by Hollywood craftsmen who contributed their services, **BENJY** brilliantly demonstrates that the camera treatment of a human experience, especially human suffering, can build emotional involvement that propagandist appeal becomes unnecessary. The film significantly singles out the psychological rather than the physical aspects of the need for orthopedic surgery.

The Museum thanks the producers, sponsors, and distributors who loaned prints of their films for these showings.