

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

No. 18  
FOR RELEASE:  
Thursday, February 6, 1969

## ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN ANIMATED FILM PRESENTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FILM THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Three programs tracing the origins of the American animated film from 1900 to 1930 will be presented the week of February 6 by The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film. Approximately 45 films will be shown that explore the early days known as "The Golden Age of Animation" and indicate the development of techniques and themes. Each program, over an hour long, will be shown daily on three consecutive days. The series will be repeated on February 9, 10, 11. The performances are at 2:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., with an extra showing Thursday evening at 8:00 p.m. Saturday matinees are at 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Animation, like the cartoon and comic strip, is an extension of the graphic arts rather than an extension of photographic realism, according to Adrienne Mancina, Assistant Curator, who has organized this program with the cooperation of the Cinémathèque Canadienne in Montreal. The moving cartoon preceded the animated film, Mrs. Mancina said, citing such turn-of-the-century toys as the zoetrope, in which colored and hand-drawn paper strips when whirled become one-and two-second cartoons.

"Freed from the necessity of recording live action and reality, the graphic artist of the animated film is limited only by the medium itself and the power of his imagination. What emerges in these early films is a delight in the art of transmogrification and the satiric and humorous possibilities of anthropomorphic protagonists."

All the pranks, jokes, chases of the famous characters of the cartoon strip reappear in movement, and some of the most famous of the early cartoonists are represented. Gregory LaCava, later famous for his comedies, is among them. Rube Goldberg, celebrated humorist, Bud Fisher, creator of "Mutt and Jeff", and Dave and Max Fleischer, responsible for bringing "Popeye, the Sailor" to the screen, are also included, as is Walt Disney, whose early films "Alice in the Woolly West" and "The Four Musicians of Bremen" are on the program.

(more)

In the pre-Disney era, as far back as 1906, Stuart Blackton discovered the trick of one-turn-one-picture (frame-by-frame animation) and applied it to "a pixilated film," "The Haunted Hotel," in which the furniture and props jumped about the screen as if by magic. He had used the same technique in "Humorous Phases of Funny Faces," and both films are on the Museum program.

Another early and famous cartoonist is Winsor McCay whose "Little Nemo," presumably his son, has extraordinary adventures in dreamland; "Little Nemo" appeared weekly in the New York Herald Tribune and was later transferred to the screen like so many other cartoons. McCay's first movie, "Gertie the Dinosaur," dating back to 1909, a delicate line drawing against a plain background, will also be shown along with "How a Mosquito Operates." Some of McCay's original line drawings in black and white were exhibited two years ago at the Metropolitan Museum.

Early in animation artists created Aesop-like characters which were painless targets to illustrate human foibles, and the cat or mouse was the most frequently used type. "Felix the Cat," originated by the Australian-born Pat Sullivan, was derived it is believed from Kipling's cat "who walked by himself." Krazy Kat was another derivative, and "Krazy Kat Bugologist," made in 1916 by Leon Harriman, is among the representative cartoons being screened.

These cartoons were based on a rapid succession of tricks, transformations, association of ideas, visual puns,<sup>as</sup> /Ralph Stephenson writes in the book Animation in the Cinema. "Krazy Kat" has someone wind up his tail and turns into an airplane. Felix, who wanted to travel as a stowaway, turns into a bag, his tail the handle.

"Uncomplicated fun, mostly without social implications," is the way Stephenson describes the cartoons of this time, which were "without the never ending, extreme violence of the post-Hitler era." At the same time, it is noteworthy that nationality characteristics were frequently grossly exaggerated in a naive, spoofing way, and Stephenson concludes that the early cartoons "seem to belong to a world that has passed away, an innocent world, without automation, without social or economic problems, without violence, hatred or inequality, almost without sex. The hero triumphs over

(more)

his enemies by light-hearted tricks, he meets life with a sublime naivety, which is invariably justified."

The age of innocence came to an end by the time Disney made his classic "Skeleton Dance" in 1929. The most popular contributor to the animated film, Disney is responsible for the first frame-by-frame movement synchronizing musical accompaniment to the movements of the drawing. Mickey-Mousing is, in fact, the technical name still in use to indicate the correlation method between sound and image.

A new era began in the 1930's with the advent of larger, more impersonal studio production methods. While animation marched on to greater feature length glory, the simple and earliest efforts gave rise to its basic techniques and indicated how infinite and varied was its subject matter.

The program follows:

Thursday, February 6 2:00, 5:30 and 8:00 P.M.

Program I

- Enchanted Drawings (J.S. Blackton, 1900)
- Humourous Phases of Funny Faces (J.S. Blackton, 1906)
- The Haunted Hotel (J.S. Blackton, 1907)
- Artist's Dream (J.R. Bray, 1911)
- How a Mosquito Operates (W. McCay, 1912)
- The Phable of a Busted Romance (R. Barre, 1916)
- Parcel Post Pete's Nightmare (Frank Moser, 1916)
- Colonel Heeza Liar and the Pirates (J.R. Bray, 1916)
- Der Captain Discovers the North Pole (J. Foster and G. LaCava, 1917)
- Smokey Smokes (G. LaCava)
- Leap Year (R. Goldberg, 1916)
- Alice, the Jailbird (M. J. Winkler, 1925)
- Whys and Otherwise (P. Sullivan, 1930)
- The Oily Bird (P. Sullivan, 1930)
- The Merry Dwarfs (W. Disney, 1929)

Friday, February 7 2:00 and 5:30 P.M.

Program II

- Lightning Sketches (J.S. Blackton, 1908)
- Hair Cartoons (Syd Marcus, 1915)
- Bobby Bump and His Goatmobile (J.R. Bray and E. Hurd, 1916)
- Lettle Nemo (W. McCay, 1910)
- The Flying House (W. McCay, 1916)
- Tantalizing Fly (M. and D. Fleischer and J.R. Bray, 1915)
- Invisible Ink (D. and M. Fleischer, 1921)
- Lots of Water (Bud Fisher, 1916)

(more)

Program II (cont'd)

- Where Am I? (B. Gillet and M. Davis, 1925)
- Alice in the Woolly West (W. Disney, 1926)
- Felix Revolts (P. Sullivan and O. Messmer, 1923)
- Felix Woos Whoopee (P. Sullivan and O. Messmer, 1930)
- Mutt and Jeff in the Big Swim (Bud Fisher, 1918)
- Home Sweet Home (Rube Goldberg, 1926)
- Plane Crazy (W. Disney, 1928)
- Finding His Voice (M. Fleischer, 1929)

Saturday, February 8 3:00 and 5:30 P.M.

Program III

- Gertie the Trained Dinosaur (W. McCay, 1909)
- Bug Vaudeville (W. McCay, 1917)
- The Pet (W. McCay, 1917)
- Bugologist (F. Moser, 1916)
- Stage Coached (B. Harrison and M. Gould, 1928)
- Four Musicians from Bremen (W. Disney, 1922)
- The Hunt (W. Lantz and J.R. Bray, 1925)
- Boneyard Blues (E. Hurd, 1924)
- The Mouse That Turned (P. Terry, 1927)
- Land O' Cotton (P. Terry and F. Moser, 1928)
- Snowbirds (P. Terry, 1929)
- Non Stop Fright (P. Sullivan and O. Messmer, 1927)
- The Grafters (J.R. Bray, 1914)
- Nutty News (R. Goldberg)
- Felix Gets the Can (P. Sullivan, 1924)
- Skeleton Dance (W. Disney, 1929)

Sunday, February 9 2:00 and 5:30 P.M.

Repeat of Program I

Monday, February 10 2:00 and 5:30 P.M.

Repeat of Program II

Tuesday, February 11 2:00 and 5:30 P.M.

Repeat of Program III

Many of the films are being shown through the courtesy of the Cinéma~~the~~theque Canadienne.

NOTE: Approximate production dates.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lillian Gerard,  
 Film Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West  
 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.