

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE LOST FILM EXHIBIT AT THE MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPHIC GLORY OF VANISHED PAST

The Lost Film, an exhibition of stills from early motion pictures that have disappeared or disintegrated, will be officially on view, starting March 7, at The Museum of Modern Art. Scenes from 28 films from the twenties by such famous film directors as Erich von Stroheim, Josef von Sternberg, Howard Hawks, Tod Browning, and Frank Borzage are shown, including dramatic stills of Lon Chaney as a hypnotist, Norma Shearer, muffled by an unknown hand, Lewis Stone in the role of a libertine king, and Lionel Barrymore as the Greek manager of a side show.

Many of the themes are melodramatic and moralistic with Fay Wray, of King Kong fame shown as a member of the Salvation Army who reprimands the gangster, Emil Jannings, in the picture "The Street of Sin," made in 1928. By contrast "Polly of the Follies" (1922) has Constance Talmadge wearing a derby hat and smoking a cigar.

Other black and white scenes come from "The World's Applause" (1923), "Merton of the Movies" (1924), "Confessions of a Queen," (1925), "The Devil's Circus" (1926), "The Show" (1927), "Drag Net" (1928), and "The Case of Lena Smith" (1929). They feature many famous actors, among them Adolphe Menjou, Monte Blue, Lillian Gish, George Bancroft, Bessie Love, John Gilbert, and Bebe Daniels. While a youthful Edward Everett Horton leads a chorus of dancing girls, Janet Gaynor appears as a circus performer, Charles Farrell as an organ grinder, Blanche Sweet as Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Greta Garbo as "The Divine Woman" (1928).

The exhibition of 130 photographs was selected by Gary Carey, Assistant Curator of the Study Center of the Department of Film, and installed by Kathleen Haven, Design Supervisor. Hundreds of stills were examined before the final selection was made based on the director's importance, photographic quality of the still, sociological

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and thematic aspects, use of new techniques, and the fame of the actors.

All the photographs in the exhibition are from the still collection of The Museum of Modern Art, which consists of several million stills. The basis of the collection was a gift of stills given by Photoplay magazine in 1936.

The Lost Film exhibition dramatizes the need for film preservation. As Gary Carey writes in his introduction to the exhibition, film stock has proven to be more perishable than newsprint, even though the advent of the motion picture made it appear that historical performances and memorable productions would always survive on film for future generations to see and reappraise exactly as they were.

Mr. Carey points out that missing films leave a "lamentable" gap in the continuity of film history, a gap that plagues film scholars and archivists, who are constantly engaged in a fight against time to preserve the films they acquire. As a result the Museum's Department of Film has a twofold program: it not only maintains a repository for films for present and future generations, but it also takes protective steps to assure the durability of the film for posterity.

Additional information and stills 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.