

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## 80th ANNIVERSARY OF THOMAS A. EDISON VITASCOPE CEREMONY COMMEMORATES FIRST PUBLIC MOTION PICTURE EXHIBITION

80 years ago, on April 23, 1896, Thomas A. Edison's "latest marvel," the Vitascope, was unveiled at the famous Koster & Bial's Music Hall on Herald Square, Broadway and 34th Street, in New York City. No less than seven acts--William Olschansky, a Russian clown; the eccentric dancer Cora Caselli; the Three Delevines in their original Satanic Gambols; Paulinetti and Pico, the athletic gymnast and gymnastic comedian; the French Duettists M. and Mme. Ducreux-Geralduc; the Brothers Horn with their comic boxing act; and Herr Grais and his trick baboon and donkey--preceded the first public exhibition of the new invention by "Wizard Edison", shown to a packed house that greeted the novelty with tremendous applause.

In commemoration of this 80th anniversary on April 23, from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, will hold a symposium, open to the public, on "The Birth of the Cinema." The symposium, to be moderated by Ted Perry, Director of the Department of Film, will consist of a panel of professors of Drama, Film History, and Communications, who will present slides and films and discuss the impact and significance of this revolutionary invention at the turn of the century.

Bruce McNamara, Professor in the Department of Drama of New York University, will speak on "Entertainment in America on the Eve of the Motion Picture," covering vaudeville, the minstrel show, burlesque, the medicine show, the dime museum, the Wild West show, and the circus, all contemporary variety entertainment which influenced the infant medium.

P. Adams Sitney, Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at New York University and Director of Publications and the Library of the Anthology Film Archives, will discuss the concept of film as it emerged from the 19th Cen-

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tury; the filmic attitudes toward motion and photography, concentrating on Luigi Pirandello's first contact with film. The title of Professor Sitney's talk is "Film as a Threat to Literature."

Russell Merritt, Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Arts of the University of Wisconsin, will discuss, "Nickel Madness in the Promised Land." He will interpret the character of the audiences of the Boston Storefront Theatre from 1905 to 1914, with emphasis on the changing nature of the nickelodeon audience from a working class origin to a middle class clientele, as a result of aggressive campaigning by nickelodeon managers to capture the more affluent "white collar trade" for the storefront theatres.

John Fell, Chairman of Film and the Communications Arts Institute of San Francisco State University will present a series of song slides (which invited audience participation in a sing-along), as well as Winsor McCay's comic animated film "Gertie the Dinosaur," and he will consider the period's preoccupation with dreams, daydreams, and fantasies.

The morning after the Vitascope was premiered the New York Herald gave it a rave review. It explained how it differed from the kinoscope, though based on the same principle as that machine. The pictures, it reported, were "thrown through a lens and appear on a magnified screen. Moreover, the Vitascope reproduces all the colors of a picture." They were, in fact, hand-tinted.

According to the Dramatic Mirror, "the first picture shown was of the Leigh Sisters in their umbrella dance. The effect was the same as if the girls were there on the stage; all of their smiles and kicks and bows were seen. The second picture represented the breaking of the waves on the seashore. The effect was simply marvelous. Wave after wave came tumbling on the sand, as they struck, broke into tiny floods just like the real thing. Some of the people in the front rows seemed to be afraid they were going

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to get wet, and looked about to see where they could run to...." The Dramatic Mirror concluded: "The Vitascope is a big success, and Mr. Edison is to be congratulated for his splendid contribution to the people's pleasure."

The Vitascope was introduced when William McKinley was favored as a Republican candidate for the Presidency; bicycle police were ticketing speeding tandems; the coronation of Nicolas II of Russia was reported; war was being raged in Africa with the Boers; also present were the familiar doubts about the stock market and the possibilities of war, and a new anxiety over the danger of excess smoking.

The registration fee for the symposium is \$2.00, members of the Museum and students, \$1.00. Advance tickets are available at the Museum's lobby Information Desk.

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