

The Museum of Modern Art

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MUSEUM RETROSPECTIVE HONORS LILLIAN GISH IN RARE TRIBUTE TO DISTINGUISHED ACTRESS

"I consider that Miss Gish is to film what Duse and
Bernhardt were to the theater."

Henry King

"...she has a very rare and spiritual quality about her...
like the Mona Lisa...she has all the pain, the wisdom,
and the subtlety of the ages in her matchless smile."

Delight Evands in
Photoplay Magazine

The Museum of Modern Art will launch its fall film season with a major tribute to the accomplished actress Lillian Gish, whose illustrious career from 1912 to the present embraces 100 pictures and covers a span of seven decades.

To honor Miss Gish the Department of Film will present a retrospective of both her most important and also her lesser-known works, from September 19 to October 7, with the purpose of revealing the range, diversity and extraordinary talent of the internationally renowned actress, whose image is instantly recognizable all throughout the world.

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The Gish retrospective, though not all-inclusive, spans her entire career, from her first film, "An Unseen Enemy" (1912), through "A Wedding" (1978). Also shown will be several feature films she made under the direction of D.W. Griffith, including "Hearts of the World" (1918), "Broken Blossoms" and "True Heart Susie" (1919), and "Way Down East" (1920), as well as silent films directed by King Vidor ("La Boheme" of 1926) and Victor Seastrom ("The Scarlet Letter" of 1926 and "The Wind" of 1928). At least one motion picture from every decade of her sound film career, the 1930s through the 1970s, will be shown, including "His Double Life" (1933), "Miss Susie Slagle's" (1946), "The Night of the Hunter" and "The Cobweb, both 1955, "The Unforgiven" (1960), and "A Wedding" (1978). This exhibition was organized by Eileen Bowser, Curator in charge of the Museum's Film Archive, with the cooperation of Jon Gartenberg, Assistant Curator.

Miss Gish began her film career in 1912 at the Biograph Studios on 14th Street in New York City for D.W. Griffith. Under his tutelage, she acted in numerous short films as well as features, developing and refining her style. In the mid-twenties, she made films at MGM with such directors as Henry King, King Vidor, and Victor Seastrom.

Following her years as one of the highest ranking silent film stars, Miss Gish returned to the theatre. When "talkies" arrived she occasionally acted in sound films, and in ensuing years, television. Today she continues to act in film and in television and frequently lectures on film history and film preservation at universities and at international film festivals.

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The Museum's film preservation program makes much of the Gish program possible, as many of the films are drawn from the Museum's own collection. "His Double Life," which Miss Gish made with Arthur Hopkins in 1933, has been preserved especially for this exhibition. "Broken Blossoms" and the other Gish-Griffith films also have been preserved by the department. Writes Charles Silver, Supervisor of the Museum's Film Study Center, in the brochure accompanying the retrospective, "Broken Blossoms" is told "primarily from the point of view of the Yellow Man, whom Griffith romanticizes." The director and Lillian "fleshed out the fragile waif with a myriad of human touches. The resulting child-goddess is an exquisite creation, shattering all barriers in our minds between artifice and reality. As Burke puts it, 'She was a poem.'"

"Hearts of the World," an anti-war propaganda epic, made during World War I, is considered "one of the most underrated films," though it provides Dorothy Gish (Lillian's sister) with the opportunity to display her comedic skills. Dorothy Gish also plays opposite her sister in "Orphans of the Story," an epic on the French revolution, made in Mamaroneck, New York.

In addition to these two spectacles, "True Heart Susie," a typical rural romance, manifests D.W. Griffith's own bucolic youthful illusions, and in it Lillian gives "one of the sweetest and most moving performances ever committed to film."

Besides Griffith's work the Gish tribute includes two major films by the Swedish pioneer Victor Seastrom, "The Scarlet Letter" and "The Wind." It was Miss Gish who chose Seastrom because of his stark Northern style to bring the harsh world of Nathaniel Hawthorne to the screen. Other directors who have contributed to the Gish myth, and who are represented in this program

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are: the pioneer King Vidor who made "La Boheme" with the actress; Charles Laughton who turned from acting to direct "The Night of the Hunter;" Vincente Minnelli, John Huston and Robert Altman, among others. The Altman film is "A Wedding," in which Miss Gish portrays a wealthy matriarch.

The schedule of films is enclosed.

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