

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART FILM LIBRARY PUBLISHES
FIRST FILM INDEX

Forty-five years ago today, on Wednesday night, April 23, 1896, the first American motion pictures to be projected on a theatre screen for the general public were shown at Koster and Bial's Music Hall on West 34th Street, New York, where Macy's department store now stands. As No. 8 on the vaudeville program that night, a group of one and two-minute films was shown through the medium of Thomas A. Edison's "latest marvel," the Vitascope. Millions of miles of celluloid have flowed past since then, and gallons of printer's ink have been spent in praise or criticism of "the liveliest art of the 20th century."

Today, April 23, 1941, the Museum of Modern Art Film Library and H. W. Wilson Company are jointly publishing a 780-page bibliography of the motion picture, the first volume of The Film Index, entitled The Film As Art.

Sponsored by New York City's Mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, The Film Index has been compiled under the editorship of Harold Leonard by a staff selected from the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the City of New York. Much of the research was done in the Film Library itself which has the largest collection in the world of books, manuscripts, stills, documents and memorabilia relating to motion pictures in this country and abroad.

Some arresting facts emerged from the mass of material studied during the three years research required for the book. It was found that The Birth of a Nation has been the most discussed of all motion pictures, and that D. W. Griffith still remains the most discussed of all directors. Films that have provoked the most comment (besides The Birth of a Nation) are Potemkin, Intolerance,

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Hearts of the World and The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, The Last Laugh, Broken Blossoms and A Woman of Paris.

The motion picture personality most often written about is Charles Chaplin with D. W. Griffith a close second and Mary Pickford third as the only woman included in the thirteen personalities most often discussed in articles on the film as art. Next follow Eisenstein, Thomas H. Ince, Mack Sennett, Pudovkin, Walt Disney, Douglas Fairbanks, Ernst Lubitsch and Cecil B. DeMille.

The Film Index is divided into two sections: I, History and Technique, which includes esthetics of the film, pre-screen history, acting and actors, color, dance, directing and directors, music, set design and several other classifications. Section II, Types of Film, is divided into the fictional film which includes adaptations from drama, fiction, opera, poetry and songs; animal films, children's films, fantasy, religious films, war films, westerns and other types; the Factual Film, which includes documentaries, newsreels, travel films and miscellaneous films such as animated cartoons and experimental films.

In The Film Index 4,300 films are referred to in digest; and 4,200 actors, directors, scenarists and other film artists are cited.

Iris Barry, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, has written the foreword to the first volume of The Film Index. She writes in part:

"The Index for the first time makes useful and accessible to the layman the enormous accumulation of information about films housed in the many libraries all over the country, in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library and in the Museum of Modern Art where much of the research work on this project was done.

"It was conceived as a guide to the motion picture's vast literature. Although the work includes comprehensive references to the European film, its total effect is to reveal the extent of America's contribution to this art. The information thus made available is curiously varied, and ranges from colorful details on personalities to abstruse arguments on aesthetics. It is surprising, for example, to observe that the pioneer W. K. L. Dickson had a book out in 1895, the very year which is often regarded as the birthdate of the movies; that the poet Vachel Lindsay was one of the first to provide critical appreciation of motion pictures; and that Minnie Maddern Fiske was among those who earliest signalled the talents of Charlie Chaplin. It is also interesting to discover that the art critic, Thomas Craven, reviewed Nazimova's Salome in 1923, that Joyce Kilmer wrote an obituary tribute to John Bunny and that Jack London as long ago as 1915 was hailing the motion picture as a means of universal education."

Harold Leonard, editor of The Film Index, drew up the project

and supervised the large staff of editorial assistants necessary for the undertaking. In his preface to the volume Mr. Leonard writes in part:

"The Film Index was undertaken to organize for reference and study the highly miscellaneous written materials of the motion picture. Old for its age, the film has long exerted an influence - as art, as industry, and as social force - unprecedented among more venerable forms of expression. But in the frenzied pace of the film's youthful career, developments have occurred with such swiftness and finality that half of its life is already forgotten and too many chroniclers begin their accounts in mid-course.

"It is to help in the piecing together of the full story that The Film Index has been compiled. Included is representative treatment of the film production of numerous countries and many types of film. But in its total effect the Index will pridefully make apparent the magnitude of the American contribution to this most vital and democratic of modern arts."

The Film Index: I. The Film as Art contains 780 pages, 51 illustrations and sells for \$10.00. It can be purchased either at the Museum or from H. W. Wilson.