

# The Museum of Modern Art

NO. 41  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

## PIONEER DISTRIBUTOR TOM BRANDON TO PRESENT SPECIAL PROGRAM OF 1930s DOCUMENTARIES AT MUSEUM

Pioneer film distributor Tom Brandon will introduce a series of three programs of rare social and political films from the 30s and 40s at special invitational showings on three Wednesdays in May; 8th, 15th, and 22nd at 7:30 pm in the auditorium of The Museum of Modern Art under the auspices of the Film Department. These films, many of which were thought to be lost and have not been shown publicly in New York in 20 to 40 years, represent an often-neglected chapter in American film history; they consist of works by organized groups of socially conscious filmmakers who were then producing newsreels and documentaries independently of the commercial industry.

The May 8th program is a repeat of the successful presentation last June 6th at the Museum; the second program features three productions by Frontier Films including the full-length dramatized documentary "Native Land" directed by Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand, with narration by Paul Robeson; and the third program on May 22nd includes a varied selection of adversary films of the period.

It is fitting that Tom Brandon should attempt to illuminate this period of American film, for he was a participant in the film activity of the 1930s. Brandon is well-known as a pioneer of independent film distribution in the U.S.A. Founder of Brandon Films, long a major source of foreign films and American documentaries in this country, he helped, as early as 1931, to form the Film and Photo League and the National Film and Photo League,

(more)

126

both of which influenced the rise of the American documentary film movement. He was also director of the Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, founded in 1934, and, later in the 1930s, Brandon distributed the productions of Frontier Films, a leading non-profit association of social/political filmmakers.

Brandon's principal contribution to these movements was as a distributor and exhibitor. Today, having retired from Brandon Films, now owned by the Macmillan Company, he has been researching the documentary films of the 1930s for a book on his "forty years in film"; he is also instrumental in uncovering many of these hitherto forgotten films.

The 1930s was a period of domestic unrest, particularly in the field of labor. Events such as the Hunger Marches of 1931-32, the Bonus March of 1932, the Kentucky Miners' Strike of 1932, the Ford Massacre of 1932, the struggles of sharecroppers, cotton-pickers and other rural workers, unemployment, civil liberties, exploitation and repression of blacks, strike scabbing, the rise of the C.I.O. and the building of the U.A.W. were among the issues that engaged serious filmmakers of the time. But these conditions of the 1930s were obscured by subsequent events -- World War II and the McCarthy era -- and the films were buried even as the memory of the events portrayed in them became blurred; and eventually little was known of such militant film activity. Many early films were lost in a storage fire in 1936.

Brandon's program, the result of years of research, includes newsreels, various length short documentaries and fragments of "lost" films, all of which illustrate the kind of work in social/political film accomplished during the 1930s. It is Tom Brandon's intention to continue presenting similar programs, in an effort to fill in a neglected chapter in American film history.

The program for May 8th follows:

(over)

1. WORKERS NEWSREEL NUMBER 12. Produced by Workers Film and Photo League, 1932. Newsreel excerpts from the lost 90-minute feature documentary of the historic National Hunger March of December 7, 1932. 10 min.
2. AMERICA TODAY. Produced by Workers Film and Photo League, 1933. A review film of original films and compilation material. 10 min.
3. THE FORD MASSACRE. Section of a Newsreel Special made by Workers Film and Photo League in Dearborn and Detroit, 1932. Coverage of the demonstration in Dearborn of the unemployed, the attack by the police and thugs, the funeral of four young workers killed, and the vow that went into the building of the UAW-CIO. 8 min.
4. MILLIONS OF US. Produced by American Labor Films, Inc., Hollywood, 1934-35. Dramatic staged story documentary made on location about strike scabbing and the unity of the employed and unemployed. 16 min.
5. PIE IN THE SKY. Produced by Nykino (New York), directed by Elia Kazan, Molly Day Thacher, Irving Lerner, Ralph Steiner, 1934. Featuring Elia Kazan and Russell Collins of the Group Theatre. A satirical and farcical partly improvised film on just that "pie in the sky." 14 min.
6. CHINA STRIKES BACK. Produced by Frontier Films, 1937. Written and edited by Jay Leyda, Peter Ellis, David Wolf, and Sidney Meyers. Based on material filmed by Harry Dunham in Shensi Province in Northwest China, hitherto inaccessible. Sustained coverage of the Chinese 8th Route Army, its guerilla tactics, educational program, relation with the peasants, and its efforts toward unity of Free China against the invading Japanese. 24 min.
7. DEADLINE FOR ACTION. Produced by Union Films, Inc. Sponsored by United Electrical Workers Union/CIO. Written and directed by Carl Marzani. A Brandon Films release, distributed by Brandon, U.E. and Union Films. A treatment of industrial monopoly from an independent trade union point of view. 5 min.
8. MEN AND DUST. Produced by Lee and Sheldon Dick for Dial Films, 1940. Commentary and photography by Sheldon Dick. Narration by Storrs Haynes, Will Geer, Eric Walz, and Robert Porterfield. Edited by J.V.D. Bucher. Associate editor Edward Anhalt. Music and sound arrangement by Fred Stewart. Director of commentary, Lee Dick. An exposé based on the findings of the Tri-State Survey, this film depicts the working people of the lead and zinc mining area at the junction of Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma, and their problems of survival. Includes the fight, led by the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union for improved mine owners' efforts to eliminate silicosis, lead poisoning, and tuberculosis. That campaign led to legislation for safer conditions and for better wage and hour agreements. 17 min.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Additional information available from Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of  
 Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019.  
 Phone: (212) 956-7296.  
 \*\*\*\*\*

May 3, 1974