

ANNUAL REPORT

of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library

to the International Federation of Film Archives

September, 1959

The aftermath of 1958 unfortunately continued to dominate the program of the Film Library during the year 1958-1959. While, as stated earlier, the fire did not come near the Film Library itself, its effect on the Museum as a whole has seriously delayed the maturation of our plans. Extensive and expensive reconstruction work, and the loss of admissions revenue during the period of almost six months when the Museum was closed to the public, produced a large deficit which strictly limited the activities of all of the Museum's departments during the year. Under these conditions, the Film Library's program had largely to be improvised. Thanks to the efforts of Ernest Lindgren, the exhibition, THE FILMS OF PAUL ROTH, was already in our hands, and this was offered as the first exhibition at the time of the re-opening of the Museum in October. Thanks to friends in the motion picture and television industries, it was possible to present as loan shows JOHN FORD: NINE FILMS and MARLENE DIETRICH: IMAGE AND LEGEND, Miss Dietrich kindly appearing in person at a benefit performance for the Film Library. It is at times like these, as other archives also may have had occasion to know, that one learns one's real friends.

CIRCULATING FILM PROGRAM

The Film Library notes the special emphasis in this year's agenda on the question of circulating film programs sent out by archives from beyond their walls for educational purposes. It is fortunate indeed that Miss Margareta Akermark, Director of Circulating Films for the Film Library, is to represent us at the meeting in Stockholm. Miss Akermark has made this field her own, having worked in the circulating department of the Film Library since 1941, and having been its Director for most of that period. She will be able to answer at length and informally any detailed question which members may have about the operation of the Film Library's circulating film program, and the following report is therefore brief.

When the Film Library was founded in 1935, it was envisioned from the start that films in its collection should so far as possible be made available for study through a rental service offering both 35mm and 16mm copies, and that the rental fees should be retained by the Film Library "as a contribution toward its maintenance." This was countenanced by the motion picture industry as a whole, which permitted the Library to draw circulating as well as archive prints from its negatives at cost. The industry's principal concern has always been that these extra-mural showings of the Film Library's collection be always strictly non-commercial and for educational rather than entertainment purposes. No question arose about their use in university and high school classrooms by other museums, or by drama, film or other groups officially connected with institutions of learning. Film societies without academic or museum connections were another matter. A considerable number of them were thinly disguised as study groups although their real purpose was amusement and, in some few cases, profit. In order to protect itself from unwittingly making films available to such illegitimate groups, the Library formed the practice of reporting each requested booking to the company (Paramount, M-G-M, or other) originally producing the film. The company then, through its local exchange, checked the bona fides of the requesting group and either authorized our booking to it or instructed us to refuse it. Thus the burden of responsibility for these borderline bookings rested on the companies themselves, a fortunate circumstance considering that the major critics of the operations of the Film Library in this field were theatre owners, who looked upon film society showings as bordering on competition to themselves - something of course never intended.

From 1935 to 1950 the circulating film program flourished and grew. Occasional small difficulties arose, when films were re-made or re-issued and their owners required us to withdraw the originals from circulation. But these works were rapidly replaced by others in the growing collection, and eventually by the originals themselves, when the re-makes and re-issues had run their course in the theatres.

Meanwhile, the circulation of films had grown to very considerable proportions. When the Film Library began, only one university in the United States offered a course in motion pictures. By the late Forties, more than 70 offered at least one and often more than one film course. An unknown number of film societies, but probably several hundred, used the Film Library's facilities, and any number of quasi-academic bodies, interested in everything from aesthetics to economics, occasionally booked our films. If it be true, as Cecile Starr said in *The Saturday Review*, that "a good 80 per cent of the film study classes and informal groups in this country owe their origin and continuation to the low-rental policy and the unswerving integrity of the Museum's film circulation department," then the Museum has played some considerable part in the creation of a culture of the film in this country.

The extent of the Film Library's circulation of films at modest rental prices attracted interest in other than educational quarters, first from the small commercial distributors of 16mm films, who, when they bought the non-theatrical rights to certain films, especially European films, had required us to withdraw our copies from circulation. Moreover, the major companies, which had always considered revenue from 16mm circulation to be beneath contempt, now, in the throes of competition with television, began to reach everything for money, and themselves - led by Columbia, Universal, and M-G-M - entered the 16mm business and caused us to withdraw a considerable number of films from the circulating collection. Finally, the sale of the studio backlogs to television agencies has forced the Film Library to re-negotiate with these agencies for the right to continue to circulate films which have been in our custody for years.

This new situation, complicated and difficult as it may sound to members overseas, is far from being as bad as it might be. There have been surprisingly few withdrawals of films compared to what might have happened, and meanwhile we continue to add new pictures to the collection every year. The major companies, driven by economic necessity, have had to put additional restrictions on our use of their property, but they, the independents, and Hollywood in general have shown an increasing awareness of the problems created for us by film withdrawals. What the Film Library has now to recognize is that properties once considered valueless are now worth a good deal of money, thanks to their use on TV and in the 16mm field. It may be that the privilege long extended to us by the motion picture industry, of taking prints from their negatives at cost, will have to be modified in the direction of our paying a percentage of cost for that privilege, just as the Museum buys painting and sculpture in the open market and at market prices. This is a difficult decision to make and one which is now the subject of prolonged discussion. For myself, I can only say that I am considerably more optimistic about the eventual outcome than I was a few years ago.

- Richard Griffith

DAILY AUDITORIUM FILM EXHIBITIONS

THE FILMS OF PAUL ROTH, October 8 - November 5, 1958
 THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS: PART II, *The American Film: The Development of the Narrative*, November 6 - January 17, 1959
 THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS: PART III, *The Superproduction*, January 18 - April 7, '59
 MARLENE DIETRICH: *IMAGE AND LEGEND*, April 8 - June 6, 1959
 JOHN FORD: *NINE FILMS*, June 7 - August 8, 1959
 NEW ACQUISITIONS: *THE CIRCULATION PROGRAM*, August 9 - September 20, 1959

THIRD ANNUAL SATURDAY MORNING FILM SERIES, October - March, 1959;
 a showing of films from the collection for the purpose of staff review and for film students. This year was highlighted by a group of German silent films, a group of British feature films and documentaries, and films showing the development of animation.

SPECIAL EVENTS

AN EVENING WITH MARLENE DIETRICH, April 7, a benefit for the Film Library. A gala evening featuring Miss Dietrich in person, excerpts from her films, culminating in a champagne reception.

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL FILM AWARDS, presented to three New Yorkers, February 24, 1959, sponsored by the Film Library and the Belgian Government Information Center. Medals were presented to Len Lye, Francis Thompson and Hilary Harris by Dr. Jan-Albert Goris, Commissioner of Information for Belgium, and the prize-winning films were screened for an invited audience.

POWER AMONG MEN, premiere of the new United Nations film, March 5, 1959, for an invited audience.

CONFERENCES

THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON MOTION PICTURE EDUCATION, March 25 and 26, 1959. A varied program including a talk by Dore Schary, producer, director and writer, on "New Freedom of the Screen - It's Use and Abuse," a roundtable discussion, "Minimum Requirements for a B. A. in Cinema," led by Professor Hugh Gray of the University of California's Department of Cinema, and screenings of films. Highlight of the Conference was the formation of the Society of Cinematologists, a new national association of film educators, with Professor Robert Gessner of New York University as President.

PUBLICATIONS

MARLENE DIETRICH: IMAGE AND LEGEND, by Richard Griffith, a monograph with an index to Miss Dietrich's screen career.

CATALOGUES OF THE CIRCULATING FILM PROGRAMS, with notes on the films by Film Library staff members.

SCHOLARSHIP

Special assistance to Mr. John Kuiper of the State University of Iowa, writing his doctoral dissertation on the films of Sergei M. Eisenstein, to screen films, to view them on the movieola, and to use special library materials; as well as screenings and information provided for many other scholars, students, writers.

FILM FESTIVALS

TWENTIETH VENICE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART, Fall, 1959. Loan of films for the Retrospective of the most important films shown in Venice in the period 1932-1939.

LECTURES AND APPEARANCES BY RICHARD GRIFFITH, CURATOR OF THE FILM LIBRARY

THE COMMUNITY CLUB OF GARDEN CITY, November 19, 1958; a lecture; "The Movies," supplemented with some films from the collection.

WJAR-TV, Providence, Rhode Island, April, 1959; appearance on a week-long series devoted to the history of the movies.

BETTER FILMS COUNCIL, Worcester, Massachusetts, May 5, 1959; a lecture, "Contemporary Films."

NATIONAL SCHOLASTIC FILM AND FILMSTRIP AWARD, May 7, 1959; guest speaker at the presentation ceremonies.

RADIO WBAI-FM, June 14, 1959; interviewed by Gideon Bachmann on his weekly radio program, "The Film Art."

TELEVISION SERVICES

Continued cooperation with television programs of serious intent in the way of advice, research, and footage supplied where rights can be cleared by the networks.

FILMS ACQUIRED SINCE SEPTEMBER, 1958

THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM, 1955
 THE MAKING OF A MOVIE, a documentary on the making of ST. JOAN GASLIGHT, 1940
 Out-take of Dietrich scene made for WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION, 1957
 HELEN KELLER IN HER STORY, produced by Nancy Hamilton for Louis de Rochemont
 THE SET-UP, 1949, directed by Robert Wise
 SHALL WE DANCE, 1937, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers
 CROSSFIRE, 1947, directed by Edward Dmytryk
 THE MAGIC BOX, 1951, directed by John Boulting
 OUR BETTERS, 1933, directed by George Cukor

FILMS PRESERVED IN RECENT YEARS

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| 1955 | INTOLERANCE | F.G.M. |
| | BIRTH OF A NATION | " |
| | THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY | " |
| | RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST | " |
| | MYSTERY OF THE LEAPING FISH | " |
| | THE GAUCHO | " |
| | ROBIN HOOD | " |
| | THE GREATEST QUESTION | " |
| | MARK OF ZORRO | DUPE. NEG. |
| | IRON MASK | " |
| | WILD BILL HICKOCK | " |
| | GRANDMA'S BOY | " |
| | CIVILIZATION | " |
| | THE GENERAL | " |
| | ISN'T LIFE WONDERFUL | " |
| | NANOOK OF THE NORTH | " |
| | SAFETY LAST | " (16mm) |
| | JACK'S JOKE | " (16mm) |
| | MOANA | F.G.M. |
| 1956 | DOUBLING FOR ROMEO | DUPE. NEG. |
| | JUBILO | 35mm POSITIVE |
| | CARMEN | DUPE. NEG. |
| | DOWN TO EARTH | F.G.M. |
| | WILD AND WOOLLY | F.G.M. |
| | MODERN MUSKETEER | DUPE. NEG. |
| | BLIND HUSBANDS | " |
| | FIGHT FOR LIFE | " |
| | THE LOVE FLOWER | F.G.M. |
| | AMERICA | " |
| | HEARTS OF THE WORLD | " |
| | IDOL DANCER | " |
| | FOOLISH WIVES | DUPE. NEG. |
| | ORPHANS OF THE STORM | F.G.M. |
| 1957 | SO THIS IS PARIS | DUPE. NEG. |
| | PAVLOVA DANCES | F.G.M. |
| | IRON HORSE | DUPE. NEG. |
| | SEVENTH HEAVEN | " |
| | UBERFALL | " |
| | TAMING OF THE SHREW | " |
| | SUNRISE | " |
| | A FOOL THERE WAS | " |
| 1958 | GUERNICA | DUPE. NEG. |
| | HOME SWEET HOME | " |
| | RESCUED BY ROVER | F.G.M. |
| 1959 | BIRTH OF A NATION (Sound Version) | F.G.M. |
| | MY COUSIN | DUPE. NEG. |
| | DEVIL IS A WOMAN | " |
| | TRESPASSER | " |
| | HIS BREAD AND BUTTER | " |
| | QUEEN KELLY | " |
| | MALEC AERONAUTIC | " |
| | MOLLYCODDLE | " |
| | HISTORY OF A PAIR OF TROUSERS | " |