

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 19, 1957
No. 146

720 English
papers
305

PAUL ROTHSA FILMS TO BE SHOWN AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART NEXT SPRING

"The Films of Paul Rotha," a comprehensive review of the film work of the distinguished British director, producer and film historian, will be shown in the auditorium of the Museum of Modern Art in the spring of 1958, it was announced yesterday by the Museum's Film Library.

Among the Rotha films to be included in the cycle will be CONTACT (1932), SHIPYARD (1934 - 35), THE FACE OF BRITAIN (1935), TODAY WE LIVE (1936), NEW WORLDS FOR OLD (1937), WORLD OF PLENTY (1943), LAND OF PROMISE (1945), THE WORLD IS RICH (1947), A CITY SPEAKS (1946), NO RESTING PLACE (1950), WORLD WITHOUT END (1953). Many other shorter films produced or directed by Mr. Rotha will be included in the cycle, as well as excerpts from certain films not shown in their entirety.

Commenting on the Rotha cycle, Richard Griffith, Curator of the Film Library, said:

"In 1930, the book The Film Till Now reached people all over the world with the excited realization that there was an art of the film - as they had all along suspected - though it was yet in embryo, its potentialities far greater than its record. Its young author's passion was film-making, and his international readers looked forward eagerly to the day when in his films he would realize his and their dream of what the cinema could be. The first actual Rotha films astonished and perhaps somewhat shocked his early admirers. For Paul Rotha had joined what has become known throughout the world as "the British documentary film school": a school devoted not to film for film's sake, but to films which served purposes beyond themselves.

"One of those purposes was what had already been called by Sir Stephen Tallents 'the Projection of England' - the projection not alone of her imperial achievements but also and even more of those qualities which have occupied the long debate of British public life - justice, equality, social improvement and development, what we call civilization. Indeed, the young men around John Grierson who included such talents as Basil Wright, Sir Arthur Elton, W. H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Walker Leigh, Harry Watt, and Sir William Coldstream among others, conceived themselves social servants first and film artists a long way after: such was the climate of the Thirties. As documentary expanded in this climate, it fell to Rotha more and more often to produce films rather than direct them, to encourage and train young talents and open new fields of subject matter. While this was useful, and a designed part of British documentary progress, it was a matter of regret to many that

MORE :

a film talent of this proportion should be to a degree dissipated in administration and promotion.

"When Rotha's personal touch re-emerged in his films, it was in a new climate and in a new kind of film. The necessities of World War II made him the producer-editor of a number of films composed from "stock shots." As Frank Capra simultaneously discovered with his American "Why We Fight" series, only compilations from the vast newsreel record of global war could reflect and interpret the great humanities and inhumanities of the conflict. The aesthetic problem was to shape thousands of shots taken at different times and places into a coherent and magnetic whole. The particular approach Rotha took to this problem, in such films as WORLD OF PLENTY and THE WORLD IS RICH was entirely new to films. Previous documentaries had been narrated by a 'voice of God' commentator who with varying degrees of oversimplification explained the visuals with an authority which brooked no back-talk. Back-talk was exactly what Rotha, and his script-writer the late Eric Knight, introduced into this new form; they provided several commentators, each with a mind of his own, who argued the issues of the film from varying points of view - and in doing so, for the first time let the audiences into the argument too.

"Whether this approach to this material led him into it, or because it was logical to Rotha's personal development, his films from 1943 increasingly featured an international approach to social, economic, cultural and other human problems. Even when his subject was specifically British, it got itself expressed in terms of a shrunken world where we now all stand naked to the winds of doctrine and of destiny. NEW WORLDS FOR OLD, WORLD OF PLENTY, THE WORLD IS RICH, WORLD WITHOUT END, THE WORLD IS OURS - in these films Rotha tries to speak for modern man, lost in the chaos of the machine civilization he has created, and now seeking to create a new life on a more human scale. For these films of complex social and economic argument touch at every turn the humblest levels of living - birth and death, feast and famine, beauty and ugliness, the elements of experience common to all.

"In that sense they approximate, more perhaps than any other films, the old original dream of film-lovers, that the movie would become a universal language, 'a kind of Esperanto,' as Lillian Gish called it so many years ago. In that sense, too, it becomes increasingly clear that Rotha never abandoned his love for the aesthetics of films in favor of its social utility. His documentary films are meant to persuade and to persuade a film must come to life. If that is to be, emotion must shape observation. It is clear enough in any case from his one fiction film, NO RESTING PLACE, which, though it deals with the life of Irish tinkers little-known to the rest of the world, speaks the language of everyman."

For additional information please contact Herbert Broxstein, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York City. CI 5-8900.