

The Museum of Modern Art

West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

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Four old "Iron Horse" Mutoscopes and one sheet metal machine, fondly remembered from penny arcades, are showing original turn-of-the-century one-minute moving pictures such as "Diving Horses," "Mr. Hurry-Up" and "What the Bootblack Saw," in the Auditorium Gallery of The Museum of Modern Art. The movies, actually flip card reels, are from the archive of the Museum and are being exhibited here publicly for the first time. The Mutoscopes are from the collection of Douglass Crockwell, illustrator and filmmaker.

The continuing vitality of the 70-year-old medium is illustrated in the exhibition by six modern Mutoscopes encased in plexiglas, designed by Mr. Crockwell for reels he has made employing a variety of techniques, including photography, prints, color cards and lettering.

In deference to the electronic age and the Museum audience, the penny slots used by the original viewers have been plugged, the hand wheels stopped, and the machines now operate electrically. Promotional title-cards, a cartoon about Mutoscopes and enlarged photo blow-ups supply the background for the machines themselves. Nine Mutoscope reels, including "Affair of Honor," "(W)ringing Good Joke," "Horse Thief" and "Robbed of Her All," are combined by Mr. Crockwell in his film The Classic American Mutoscope, continuously projected in the gallery on a 30 x 40 inch screen.

MUTOSCOPIES, which will be on view from August 2 through October 1, is directed by Margareta Akermark, Associate Director, Department of Film, and designed and installed by Clyde Rich, an architect on the Museum's staff.

For about twenty years, Douglass Crockwell has sought Mutoscopes and their reels in junk and antique stores and in the amusement parks of Coney Island and Palisades. The Mutoscopes were often in poor condition, and he has repaired, wired and painted them and installed original reels.

Born in 1904, Mr. Crockwell is an artist and illustrator whose work has appeared widely in national magazines. Two of his films, Glens Falls Sequence (1946) and Long Bodies (1947), are in the Museum's film collection and will be shown here Wednesday, August 2, at 12 noon. Mr. Crockwell lives in Glens Falls, New York, where he is a Trustee and Acting Director of The Hyde Collection, a museum of the fine arts operated by a charitable Trust.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Patricia B. Kaplan, Associate, Press Services, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.

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HISTORY OF THE MUTOSCOPE

The Mutoscope, a precursor of the motion picture, utilizes a reel of cards that rotates rapidly, either by hand cranking or battery, thus creating a moving image. The individual cards were contact printed from 70 mm film.

Although by the late 1880's motion pictures were widely in use, the projector had not yet been invented, and Edison's Kinetoscope, a film-viewing box, was used in penny arcades. The first Mutoscope was produced in 1895 and soon replaced the earlier machine since the cards of stills were larger than the film frames and they did not deteriorate with use. By 1897, the Mutoscope dominated the arcade parlors; some of the early machines and reels are still being operated commercially.

The original Mutoscope patent was issued in 1895 to Herman Casler of Oneonta, New York, and the prototype was built in the D.C. Lipe Machine Shop in Syracuse, where he worked. Some time later, W.K.L. Dickson, an associate of Edison, stated that the original idea was his. The two men and two other partners formed a syndicate that later became the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. Although the card-flipping principle was not new (thumb books had been in use for years), the circular card reel was an innovation. The viewing time of one rotation (800 to 850 cards) was about one minute, the same as that of the average thirty-foot film produced by the existing cameras.

The Biograph Company developed its own camera, the "Mutograph", and later a projector, the "Biograph." With this projector, the commercial motion-picture theater became a reality, and the Mutoscope fell into disregard, though it continued its life in the arcades.

Between 1897 and 1907, the classic age of the Mutoscope, over 4,000 titles and 100,000 reels were printed and distributed, and perhaps 500 of these are still in existence. The actors and actresses -- hundreds of personalities from the stage -- appeared anonymously. Some reels were made in series like "Happy Hooligan," "Rip Van Winkle" and "Foxy Grandpa," others were broad morality plays and comedies, and

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still others were scenic views like "Niagara Falls," "Atlantic City Boardwalk" and "Paris from the Seine," in which the camera shot generally remained rigidly fixed.

After projected films began to be produced, newsreels, sporting events and Hollywood films were cut to fit the Mutoscope's one minute viewing time. Chaplin, Mabel Normand, Tom Mix and other name actors appeared in fragmentary episodes, but the Mutoscope is above all famous for the "Girllies" dance and strip-tease subjects.

The Mutoscope reel has proved to be/^{an} especially good, durable vehicle for the motion picture under one minute. Douglass Crockwell's new Mutoscopes, encased in plexiglas boxes rather than the traditionally enclosed cast iron, permit viewing by at least a dozen people, thus taking the art out of the category of a peep-show while maintaining the impression of close personal contact. The Mutoscope permits the development of an artistic idea seen in sequence, rather than flat on a wall.

Beginnings of the Biograph by Gordon Hendricks, the story of the invention of the Mutoscope and its technical development, published in 1964 by The Beginnings of the American Film, is on sale at the Museum bookstore.

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