

BACKGROUND ON THE ROY AND NIUTA TITUS AUDITORIUM

The gift of one million dollars from Mr. and Mrs. Roy V. Titus will enable The Museum of Modern Art to renovate its 480-seat auditorium which first opened to the public in 1939 in the main Museum building designed by Philip Goodwin and Edward Durrell Stone. The gift will also provide an endowment for activities that the Department of Film could not otherwise undertake.

The new hall will be known upon its completion next summer as The Roy and Niuta Titus Auditorium in honor of the donors. It will continue to be used for the daily showing of motion pictures, domestic and international, as well as for the lectures, seminars, symposia, music recitals, and poetry readings that have made the auditorium a vital forum for the exchange of ideas on modern art and culture.

Well known as one of the first public screening rooms devoted to motion pictures as an art form, the auditorium serves the Museum's Department of Film on a daily basis. There are approximately 18 film showings each week — 950 each year — running the gamut from Edison's early breakthroughs to the newest experimental efforts of young filmmakers. There have been major tributes to the screen's greatest creative figures, of which last year's celebration of the D.W. Griffith Centennial is typical. Among the American filmmakers whose works have been shown here are Raoul Walsh, Ernst Lubitsch, Hal Roach, Henry Hathaway, George Stevens, Robert Rossen, Robert Wise, Otto Preminger and Stanley Kubrick. In addition, over the years special tributes have been paid to Anita Loos, Will Rogers, Robert Flaherty and Erich von Stroheim.

Recognizing the international nature of film, the Museum has presented a continuous program of foreign offerings: Cinema Novo from Brazil as well as new films from Yugoslavia, France, Japan, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ceylon, and the Netherlands. The work of such film masters as Carl Dreyer, Sergei Eisenstein, Robert Bresson, Jean Renoir and Ingmar Bergman is, of course, regularly presented

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and reexamined.

The current film cycle is a Bicentennial Salute to American Film Comedy; at the same time the Department of Film is utilizing the auditorium for its on-going programs — "Cineprobe," presenting the work of young filmmakers who often appear in person for an exchange of opinions and ideas with the audience; "What's Happening?," a weekly selection of films focusing on social issues, presented in cooperation with the Donnell Library; and the well-known "History of Film" series which, together with the weekly cycle of "Films from the Archives," utilizes the Museum's collection to make available to the public films of every origin, vintage and genre. The entire spectrum of film, a characteristic art of the twentieth century, is presented in the Museum's auditorium with a program unrivalled anywhere.

Beyond the showing of motion pictures, however, the auditorium has been the site of many significant events in the history of the modern arts in America. In the 1940s, Oliver La Farge discussed "Ever Changing Forms in Indian Art" on the occasion of an exhibition of America's Indian art (1941); writer Waldo Frank speculated on "The Future of Art in American Life and Culture" (1941); a seminar was held on the problems of post-war planning in New York City (1944); and the noted Parisian art dealer Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler spoke on "Braque and Cubism" (1949).

One of the truly outstanding programs held in the auditorium in the 1950s was a series of evenings with poets W.H. Auden, Marianne Moore, e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, Dylan Thomas, Katherine Anne Porter and Robert Frost. Dame Edith Sitwell gave a recital of scenes from Shakespeare. Wallace Stevens considered "The Relation between Poetry and Painting," and theologian Paul Tillich and psychoanalyst Theodore Reik offered their reflections on the purposes of the arts. The aesthetics of automobile design were probed by Raymond Loewy, Philip Johnson and George Nelson. Indeed, throughout the history of the auditorium, the prevailing criterion has been that the programs

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be of significant cultural and artistic interest. This standard was well satisfied by such other discussions of the 1950s as "How to Combine Art and Architecture," "Why Experimental Films?," "How Good Is Good Design," and "The Writer Looks at Painting."

At the beginning of the 1960s the Architectural League of New York, together with the Museum, sponsored a series of panels in the auditorium on the general theme of "The Building Boom: Architecture in Decline" with Peter Blake as moderator. With the burgeoning of television, John Grierson spoke on "TV — A Medium of Informal Education" and in the expansive art world of the Sixties such phenomena as "Pop Art," "The New American Cinema" and Surrealism became the focus of serious and memorable inquiry. Marshall McLuhan, who first drew public attention to the impact of electronic communications on traditional culture, spoke on "Understanding Media" in 1966. The list of those who spoke before public audiences in the Museum's auditorium during the 1960s reads like a Who's Who of contemporary thought — art historians Leo Steinberg, Rudolph Arnheim, and Robert Rosenblum; philosopher Walter Kaufman; actor Lee Strasberg; economist John Kenneth Galbraith; architect Louis Kahn; and critics Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Barbara Rose and Susan Sontag, to name but a few. In 1968, a literary evening was held in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Allen Ginsberg and Robert Penn Warren participating.

Over the years, many other educational institutions, in cooperation with the Museum, have used the auditorium facilities. These include the Julliard Acting Company, the NYU School of the Arts, the Dance and Theatre Workshop, and Space Video Arts, among others. Prominent among such events have been a host of musical performances, from Dixieland bands and gospel singers to the avant-garde experiments of John Cage, Morton Subotnick and Phil Glass, from Leopold Stokowski and Yehudi Menuhin to Gunther Schuller and Roger Sessions.

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