

The Museum of Modern Art

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

NO. 36
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSEUM EXHIBITION SPOTLIGHTS ART DIRECTORS

Kane's Xanadu, Scarlett's Tara, Rebecca's Manderly, Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory--these and many other indelible images sprang from the drawing board of the Hollywood art director. Since the birth of the art form some sixty years ago, the art director has been the architect of our movie dreams--and, ironically, the most anonymous of all the craftsmen who have contributed crucially to film art.

Now, in an exhibition entitled DESIGNED FOR FILM: THE HOLLYWOOD ART DIRECTOR, The Museum of Modern Art is spotlighting the art director's achievement through more than 100 sketches, matte paintings, storyboards, and film stills. The exhibition, which is on view in the Auditorium Gallery from May 11 through September 26, was directed by Mary Corliss, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Film; and designed by Kathleen Haven. Carlos Clarens acted as Consultant.

The source of much of Hollywood's spectacular glamour will be on display in this exhibition--from an early sketch for the Babylonian sequence from D.W. Griffith's "Intolerance," through designer William Cameron Menzies' continuity sketches for "Gone With the Wind," to a six-foot panorama of Imperial Rome made by art director John de Cuir for "Cleopatra." Design styles range from the super-realistic (George Jenkins' meticulous plan for the Washington Post newsroom in "All the President's Men") to the surrealist (Salvador Dali's design of the dream sequence in Hitchcock's "Spellbound").

The studio style of Hollywood's Golden Age is represented by

sketches and stills of the most memorable sets from major productions including pastel mattes from the MGM musicals: "The Wizard of Oz," "The Great Ziegfeld," and "Ziegfeld Follies."

But the art director does more than make pretty pictures; he makes moving pictures. Frequently, he is involved in every phase of the film-- from choosing locations to sketching each shot as it will appear in the film. He works closely with the director to create and insure an elegant visual continuity; he designs the production. DESIGNED FOR FILM documents the art director's involvement in several ways: through storyboards (such as Robert Boyle's for the attack of the seagulls in "The Birds"), sketches (Boris Leven's for the lonely house on the prairie in "Giant"), and mattes (Albert Whitlock's amazingly realistic matte paintings for "The Birds" and "Frenzy").

DESIGNED FOR FILM: THE HOLLYWOOD ART DIRECTOR is an achievement of original scholarship (a 36-page color section, based on the exhibition, appears in the May-June issue of Film Comment), and a feast for the eyes, mind, and memory of everyone who ever entered the dream world of the movies.

May 1978

For additional information, please contact Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, or Kent Wittrup at (212) 956-7296, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019. Photographs available on request.

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ADVANCE FACT SHEET

- EXHIBITION:** DESIGNED FOR FILM: THE HOLLYWOOD ART DIRECTOR
- DATES:** May 11 - September 26, 1978
- CREDITS:** Directed by Mary Corliss, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Film
Installed by Kathleen Haven
Consultant: Carlos Clarens
- CONTENTS:** Over 100 drawings, sketches, matte paintings, storyboards, and film stills illustrating the importance of the Hollywood art director's contribution to the visual style of film.
- OBJECTIVE:** The past decade of film studies has been characterized by a serious re-evaluation of the American commercial film. What began in the Sixties with the establishment of the film director as an auteur, the sole creator of the work, has given way to an exhaustive and exhilarating research project, exploring the work of all the artists and craftsmen whose talents combined to produce the best American film. The contributions of producers, screenwriters, actors, cinematographers, editors, even costume designers have been analyzed in monographs and presented in retrospective exhibitions. Now the achievement of the art director/production designer--the person who, it can be argued, had the most to do with establishing the "look" of any given film, and perhaps of the Hollywood cinema itself--is being recognized and evaluated. The exhibition does not attempt to install the art director as this week's auteur, for the Hollywood film is the product of a corporate vision. The art director didn't do it all; he only made it all look glorious.
- HISTORY:** As early as 1916, the year of D.W. Griffith's "Intolerance," the infant industry was luring designers, architects, and illustrators to Hollywood. Wilfred Buckland, Belasco's stage designer, was soon creating Palestinian palaces and porcelain bathtubs for Cecil B. DeMille; Joseph Urban, designer for the Metropolitan Opera and the Ziegfeld Follies, was signed by William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Pictures; Ben Carre, from the Paris Opera, was working with Maurice Tourneur to develop the cinema's first cohesive sense of film design in films such as "Prunella" and "The Blue Bird" (both 1918). Other designers were both with, and to, the medium: William Cameron Menzies was just out of Yale when he worked on his first film in 1918. Of all art directors, Menzies is the most influential and respected; his work spans 40 years, and includes Douglas Fairbanks' spectacular adventure films, Griffith's "Abraham Lincoln," the Paramount "Alice in Wonderland," and his masterpiece, "Gone With the Wind," for which contribution he became the first man to be called "production designer."
- STUDIO STYLES:** By the Thirties, the Hollywood studio system was functioning like the smoothest assembly line, and studio art departments were developing individual styles that would be most recognizable visual element in their films. The styles--Paramount Art Deco, Universal Gothic, MGM grand bourgeois--were, in effect, the trademarks of their respective

studios. Supervising Art Directors such as Hans Dreier (Paramount), Charles D. Hall (Universal), and Cedric Gibbons (MGM) employed an army of sketch artists, unit art directors, and special-effects technicians; but individuality was acceptable only within the confines of the general studio look. Examples of Studio Style in the exhibition: sketches for "Klondike Annie" (Paramount), "Frankenstein" (Universal), "Rose Marie" (MGM), "Top Hat" (RKO), "The King and I" (Fox).

Some of the most powerful producers and directors established, in fact or in effect, small studios, and collaborated closely with their art directors to create their own design styles. David O. Selznick and Cecil B. DeMille were two such men who were strong enough to break away from the studio trend, and lucky enough to find superior art directors. Examples from the exhibition: sketches and continuity for "Gone With the Wind" and "Rebecca" (Selznick); sketches for "Madam Satan" and "The Ten Commandments" (DeMille).

- PERSONAL STYLE:** By the late Sixties, when the studio system had virtually ceased, many producers and directors were working independently within the major companies. The art director was now free to create his own style. Today's films strive for an individual look, a personal visual style, which is more the creation of the art director/production designer than of anyone else. Where once he would have been commissioned to design or build a set on the studio assembly line, he now works closely with the director on every facet of the film. Examples from the exhibition: Dale Hennesy ("Young Frankenstein"), George Jenkins ("The Miracle Worker," "Klute," "All the President's Men"), Boris Leven ("Giant," "West Side Story"), Harry Horner ("The Hustler"), Robert Boyle ("Gaily, Gaily"), Ted Haworth ("The Bachelor Party," "Cross of Iron").
- MATTE PROCESS:** The matte process is the superimposition of a painted interior or exterior onto a live-action sequence of film to create the illusion of a single image. The acknowledged master of the matte is Alberg Whitlock, three of whose oil-on-glass paintings--two from "The Birds" and one from "Frenzy"--will be on display. In the Video Gallery adjoining the exhibition, a film demonstrating Whitlock's techniques and accomplishments will be shown. The exhibition also includes several examples of Warren Newcombe's pastel mattes from such MGM classics as "The Wizard of Oz," "Ziegfeld Follies," and "Yolanda and the Thief."
- STORYBOARDS:** Storyboards and continuity sketches provide a frame-by-frame plan of a film sequence--the detailed positions and movements of both camera and actors. They are the most evident proof of the art director's involvement with every phase of the film. Examples from the exhibition: Alexander Golitzen's storyboards for "Nana" (1934), Robert Boyle's continuity sketches for "North By Northwest" (1959) and "The Birds" (1963).
- SCALE MODEL:** Models provide the vital link between sketch and set. Example from the exhibition: the teahouse from "The Teahouse of the August Moon."
- LECTURE:** Matte artist Albert Whitlock will lecture on the use of the matte process, and on the variety of special effects incorporated in matte photography; his lecture will be illustrated through excerpts from the films "Earthquake," "Bound for Glory," "The Hindenburg," and others. May 12, 6:00 p.m., Roy and Niuta Titus Auditorium.

PUBLICATION:

The May-June issue of Film Comment includes a 36-page color section on the work of the art director, featuring interviews with 10 of the most prominent Hollywood art directors and more than 40 illustrations from the exhibition. On sale in the Museum bookstore.

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