

schedule film

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

520826-55

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NEW CYCLE OF DAILY FILM SHOWINGS STARTING

SEPTEMBER 1 TO INCLUDE IMPORTANT SERIES BY ROBERT FLAHERTY

A new cycle of film programs, consisting of 3 different series to run for the next year, will start on September 1 in the Auditorium of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, with showings twice daily at 3 and 5:30 p.m. Of especial importance is a retrospective series of films by the late Robert Flaherty, the great pioneer of the documentary. These are being shown through the generosity of Mrs. Flaherty who has recently presented to the Museum's Film Library the Robert Flaherty Collection. Some of these films have never before been seen publicly; others are returned to view after long absence from the screen.

The succeeding series will deal with "Screen Personalities" showing famous players in their most characteristic roles and tracing their "screen characters" which persist from film to film, stemming from physical or personality traits as often as from craft.

The third series, to run next summer, will pay tribute to another great pioneer of the motion picture, Ernst Lubitsch, who prior to his death in 1947 had made himself master of every film genre except the epic. This group will include the sensationally successful German films that brought both Lubitsch and Pola Negri to the United States as well as his many well-remembered American-made films.

Throughout these series will be interspersed 19 films that have only recently been acquired by the Film Library and that have not before been shown in the Museum Auditorium.

Richard Griffith, Curator of the Museum's Film Library, writes as follows regarding the importance of the Robert Flaherty cycle, which will run from September 15 through November 9 and will include 10 films by this master:

The power of the motion picture camera to isolate and reveal what the human eye fails to notice is peculiarly associated with the name and work of Robert Flaherty, although he did not discover it. This particular property of the camera was known as early as 1900, when a celebrated surgeon stated:

"By looking at motion pictures of my operations, I have been enabled to eliminate 44 useless movements which hitherto I had not known I made"; (more than 40 years later, Henri Matisse discovered by means of a film that, unknown to himself, his hand made a sketching motion just before he applied his brush to the canvas). But this capacity of the film medium was early obscured by the commercial success of the staged narrative film, and was very nearly forgotten until Flaherty newly revealed it.

The revelation occurred in his first film NANOOK OF THE NORTH, 1922. In his effort to explore and disclose with the camera the life of the Eskimos as he had lived it with them, Flaherty soon discovered that while the human eye, governed by the laws of attention, selected from a field of vision only what momentarily interested its owner, the camera records (and by recording within a rectangular frame, dramatizes) everything before it. He came to trust its impersonal powers beyond his own perceptions. Says John Grierson, leader of the British documentary film movement, "He spoke almost mystically of the camera's capacity for seeing beyond mortal eye to the inner qualities of things. With Fairbanks he agrees that children and animals are the finest of all movie actors, because they are spontaneous, but talks also of the movements in peasants and craftsmen and hunters and priests as having a special magic on the screen because time or tradition has worn them smooth. He might also add - though he would not - that his own capacity for moving the camera in appreciation of these movements is an essential part of the magic. No man of cameras, to my knowledge, can plan so curiously or so bewilderingly anticipate a fine gesture or expression."

In later films, continues Grierson, it became an absolute principle with him, "to take the story from out the location, finding it essentially there: with patience and intimacy of knowledge as the first virtues always in a director....His idea of production is to reconnoiter for months..., and then, in months more perhaps, slowly to shape the film on the screen: using his camera first to sketch his material and find his people...."

How basic to his work was this principle can be seen in a revealing light in the few instances when he was persuaded to depart from it. TABU seems a factitious work when set beside MOANA. It is a principle which has remained almost peculiarly his, despite the development of the documentary film under his tutelage. Although John Huston called him the Giotto of the cinema, although the influence of his methods is visible in the films of many directors, the body of his work remains, like INTOLERANCE, a Colosseum from which other film-makers have quarried such bits and pieces as they could use, without attempting to elicit the secret of its structure. Uniquely he relied on the basic art of the motion picture, photography itself, and out of that reliance grew his method and his style.

Neither the method nor the style is fully understood, even today. But his films endure as do few others. Their aim was veracity, and they achieved it in that classic way which continues to convince and please generations unborn at the time of their making.