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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOUR GREAT ACTRESSES OF THE PAST SHOWN ON THE SCREEN

Réjane, Bernhardt, Fiske and Duse live again on the screen in a short program composed by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. It consists of excerpts from four twenty-year old films in which these great stage celebrities starred separately. This program, primarily of interest to theatre-lovers rather than film fans, will have its premiere showing to members of the Museum of Modern Art at the Dalton School, 108 East 89 Street, Wednesday, November 16, at 5:30 P.M. It will be circulated about the country for use in museums, colleges, schools and study groups. In this way American audiences will have an opportunity to see illustrious actresses of the past who, to many, are only great names.

In her program notes Iris Barry, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, writes:

"Nothing could be unkind, in a sense, than to exhibit (as in this program) the distinguished executants of one fully refined medium as they were translated into another unfamiliar medium still in process of development. What is presented on the screen is not the inimitable Bernhardt, the incomparable Duse but the thin shadow of stage celebrity. Yet since this is all that remains to be studied of these great actresses of the past, affection and curiosity unite to demand the preservation of their films. At least the screen keeps a partial record of the physical appearance, stature, gait and gestures of the illustrious dead. And wherever the films sought piously to recreate famous theatrical performances, they furnish instructive glimpses of extinct theatrical styles and traditions."

All four actresses represented were past their prime at the time they made these films. Unfamiliar with screen technique, they were further handicapped by their vehicles, three of which were lifted bodily from the stage instead of being translated into screen terms. Duse alone...almost sixty, ill, unhappy and faced with poverty.... realized the necessity for a new technique not of the theatre. She was miscast in this adaptation of the novel "Cenere" as a heroine, who, at the opening of the story, is only twenty years old. Yet her sense of timing and her nobly eloquent gestures carry the conviction of greatness, and one is glad the film was not destroyed, as Duse herself wished. "Cenere", produced in 1916 by Ambrosio-Caesar-Film, has been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library through the courtesy of Mrs. Edwin H. Knopf.

In 1911 the great Réjane was starred in a motion picture version of her stage success, "Madame Sans-Gêne." The film preserves much of the vivacity and precision which distinguished Réjane and gives an excellent idea of what her stage performance must have been like in the famous play about Napoleon and his former washerwoman.

Bernhardt made her screen debut in 1900 in the duel scene from "Hamlet." The excerpt included in the "Great Actresses of the Past" program, however, shows the idolized actress as Camille, a role she had been interpreting successfully for more than thirty years. "La Dame aux Camélias" was produced in 1912 by the Film d'Art. Contemporary criticism deplored the harsh lighting of Bernhardt's face but praised the film, in which the actress simply recreated her stage performance. The death scene, played in a manner all her own, is especially striking.

Also included in the program is a fragment from the Edison-Kleine production of "Vanity Fair" with Minnie Maddern Fiske in her famous role of Becky Sharp. It was produced in 1915.