

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## MUSEUM HONORS ARTHUR MAYER IN HIS 85th YEAR

### DEPARTMENT OF FILM AND INTERNATIONAL FILM IMPORTERS AND DISTRIBUTORS ASSOCIATION CO-SPONSOR TRIBUTE

To celebrate the 85th year of Arthur L. Mayer, motion picture importer, exhibitor, publicist, writer, lecturer, author and professor of film, a special citation, marking his dedication to the annals of film, will be presented to him July 29, at a luncheon in his honor in the Founders Room of The Museum of Modern Art. The luncheon at which this presentation will be made will be co-sponsored by the Museum's Department of Film and the International Film Importers and Distributors Association, and it will serve to inaugurate the forthcoming series to be presented by the Museum, devoted to The Foreign Film in America, 1946-1971. This retrospective will begin August 5 and continue for the next month.

Seven years ago Mr. Mayer, author of two books on film, an autobiography, "Merely Colossal," and a history, "The Movies," written in collaboration with Richard Griffith, the late curator of film at the Museum, began a new career teaching film in universities. This year he was named adjunct professor at Dartmouth College. In addition to his annual course on the history and aesthetics of film given there, he also teaches at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and conducts a motion picture seminar at Stanford University as well.

Between courses at these various universities, he writes and lectures on his favorite subject. His book "The Movies" sold 50,000 copies since it was published in 1957, and, recently brought up to date, it has been reissued by the publishers, Simon and Schuster. "The Movies" covers the gamut of film: store shows, slapstick, serials, spectacles, stars and studios from the nickelodeon age to today. "We wrote the book," said Mr. Mayer, "because we loved the movies and wanted to create in other people the same feelings we had."

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Well known to critics, and admired by his students, Arthur Mayer has had a unique career, beginning with his early days, barnstorming the country selling what is now known in the jargon of Variety as "flicks" to the "hicks" in the "sticks"--the outer reaches of the U.S.A. After working for Samuel Goldwyn who called him "my pupil," he became Advertising and Publicity Director of Paramount Pictures prior to assuming ownership of the Rialto Theatre. At that time he was the self-styled "Merchant of Menace," purveying action and horror movies to the male audiences who attended the newly built Rialto on the site of the old theatre landmark.

Horror movies had not yet reached the status of art, so Mr. Mayer, as balm to his commercial life, entered into the importing and distribution of foreign films with his late partner Joseph Burstyn. Together they formed the company of Mayer and Burstyn, and among other films they introduced "The New Gulliver;" "The Promised Land," a documentary on Palestine before it became Israel; and "The Eternal Mask," an early psychological drama now in the Museum archives.

In the post-war years the Mayer-Burstyn firm presented "Open City," "Paisan," and "Bicycle Thief," the first Italian neo-realist films to be shown here. Later Mr. Mayer, with Edward Kingsley, imported the Mexican "Los Olvidados," "7 Days to Noon" from Great Britain, and France's "Jour de Fete." While he is reported to have said "nobody ever lost money underestimating the taste of the public," the bulk of Mr. Mayer's own career has consisted of a series of efforts to disprove his own theory.

Born in Alabama in 1886, Arthur Mayer attended Harvard and was distinguished for his ability as an orator. After graduation, a frustrating attempt to corner the Panama hat market led him to seek artistic rewards. Hoping to open an art gallery, he confided to a backer his interest in pictures. The backer mistakenly assumed that he meant motion pictures, and referred him to Samuel Goldwyn, who seized upon his elocution talent to convert him into a salesman to talk up Goldwyn's silent films.

His accidental entry into the realm of twentieth-century art did not deter Arthur Mayer from having a distinguished career, and he has frequently held highly specialized

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governmental and industry posts. At the outset of World War II he was appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Red Cross in the Pacific; in 1944 he was named Film Consultant to Secretary of the Army Patterson. Decorated by President Truman with the Medal of Merit in 1947, he became in the following year Chief of the Film Division of the U.S. Military Government for Germany, where he was dispatched to work under General Clay in order to reestablish the German film industry.

As a representative of the industry, Mr. Mayer was executive vice president of the Council of Motion Picture Organizations (COMPO), embracing all crafts and unions and other branches of the film industry, including writers and directors, exhibitors, distributors and producers. He was later president of the Independent Motion Picture Distributors of America, which has since become the International Film Importers and Distributors Association of which he remains an honorary member and elder statesman.

His wife Lillie Mayer is a painter. A graduate of Bar ard, she is an aficionado of motion pictures. Over the years, and until recently, she was an active member of the Green Sheet, representing ten women's organizations which viewed films, gave opinions and "suggested audiences" for movie-goers around the world. The Green Sheet was only disbanded when the present rating system began.

Mrs. Mayer will mark her 82nd birthday on July 29th, when her husband is honored by the citation the Museum and importers group will present.

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