



Through original objects and showings of films, "la Caixa" Foundation takes visitors on a fascinating journey into the world of one of the greatest creative artists in film history

# GEORGES MÉLIÈS

## THE MAGIC OF FILM

*"Films have the power to capture dreams."* Georges Méliès (1861-1938) introduced magic and fiction to film during the early days of cinema, when the new art form was devoted practically entirely to the documentary. The French film-maker made an absolutely essential contribution to the Seventh Art. He was a draftsman, magician, theatre director, actor, set designer and technician, as well as producing, directing and distributing more than 500 films from 1896 to 1912. Méliès was the undisputed master of the fantasy genre and cinematic trick effects for nearly twenty years, before he fell into the oblivion and financial ruin that led him to destroy the negatives of all his films. "la Caixa" Foundation presents *Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film*, the first major retrospective to be devoted in our country to cinema's first illusionist. The exhibition explores Méliès' cultural and aesthetic roots and the origins of his techniques through some 400 pieces: films, photographs, drawings, posters, original equipment from the period, costumes, models and documentation. The 21 films that will be shown include, outstandingly, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). The exhibition was organised in cooperation with the Cinémathèque française, which conserves the world's largest collection of objects related to Méliès. *Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film* will be complemented by a large new programme of parallel activities, including screenings of films accompanied by live music and hands-on sessions at which visitors can make their own films, taking their inspiration from the tricks devised by this master of the Seventh Art.

---

**Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film. Dates:** 5 April - 24 June 2013. **Place:** CaixaForum Barcelona (Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8). **Organised and produced by:** "la Caixa" Foundation, in cooperation with the Cinémathèque française. **Curator:** Laurent Mannoni, scientific director of heritage and director of the Conservatory of Techniques at the Cinémathèque française.

---

**Barcelona, 4 April 2013.** This evening, Elisa Durán, assistant general manager of "la Caixa" Foundation, and Laurent Mannoni, scientific director of heritage and director of the Conservatory of Techniques at the Cinémathèque française, will officially open the exhibition *Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film*, which pays tribute to a figure considered film's first illusionist.

In its cultural programme, "la Caixa" Foundation focuses particularly on artistic manifestations that have played key roles in shaping the contemporary sensibility. This line of action features exhibitions devoted to the world of film, which, with photography, is amongst the most characteristic artistic genres of the 20th century. Accordingly, the Foundation has organised retrospectives devoted to such great names in cinema history as Charles Chaplin and Federico Fellini, as well as promoting such projects as *The Cinema Effect. Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image*, linking the work of film pioneers to that of contemporary artists and taking Méliès, precisely, as its starting point.

For the work of Georges Méliès (1861-1938) remains relevant even today, particularly in the productions of Hollywood's leading creative artists. This is because, as the French film-maker himself said in 1933, "Who can live without *féerie*, without a little fantasy?" Recently, the film *Hugo* (2011), Martin Scorsese's heartfelt tribute, brought the life and work of Georges Méliès into the limelight once more.

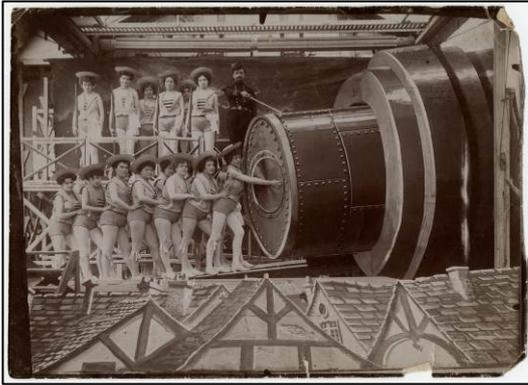


*Vers les étoiles* [To the Stars], 1906.  
© La Cinémathèque française. Photo: Stéphane Dabrowski.

The son of a footwear entrepreneur, Georges Méliès (1861-1938) was a draftsman, magician, builder of artefacts, theatre director, actor, set designer and technician, as well as producing, directing and distributing more than 500 films from 1896 to 1912. He was the undisputed master of the fantasy genre and cinematic trick effects for nearly twenty years, making a fundamental contribution to the Seventh Art: he introduced dream, magic and fiction to film when the cinema was just emerging and was devoted exclusively to the documentary genre.

Striking out a different path from the documentary films of the Lumière brothers, Méliès' first action was to combine the universe of Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, the father of modern magic, with the cinematography of Marey. In short, Méliès gave decided impulse to the concept of film as entertainment.

A wizard of special effects, Méliès applied techniques associated with the art of illusion and magic lanterns to film – everything from pyrotechnics and optical effects to horizontal and vertical wipes, stop motion, dissolving views, multiple exposure, montage and colour effects... It is as if this technical virtuoso had invented and used every trick in the film repertoire.



*Voyage dans la Lune* [A Trip to the Moon], 1902.  
Tableau 6: Loading the cannon.  
© La Cinémathèque française. Photo: Stéphane Dabrowski.

Méliès enjoyed a golden period that lasted for several years during which he was extraordinarily popular and which culminated with the release, in 1902, of *A Trip to the Moon*, a masterpiece seen by millions of spectators. Unfortunately, however, the expansion of the film industry and the appearance of large companies like Pathé and Gaumont caused Méliès to fall into ruin and oblivion. In 1923, completely ruined, he destroyed the negatives of all his films. He ended up selling toys at

Montparnasse station in Paris and even found refuge in a nursing home in Orly. Years after his heyday, the journalist Léon Druhot recognised Méliès at the station, and from that moment on his work began to be appreciated and revived once more.

### **More than 400 objects to relive the magic of Méliès' films**

---

Where did Méliès come from? How did he fashion his extraordinary universe? What were his sources of inspiration? This show answers all these questions, showing that the genesis of Méliès' world is to be found in the very origins of cinema itself: shadow play, magic lanterns, phantasmagoria, time-lapse photography, magic and fantasy.

Exploring Méliès' cultural, aesthetic and technical roots, the exhibition is divided into three broad sections. The first of these links his concept of the cinema to its historic antecedents (shadow theatre, phantasmagorias and magic lanterns) and introduces us to his creative universe.

Méliès understood film as a total work and, accordingly, the second section shows how he turned the genre into a means of personal expression, designing the sets and costumes and writing the scripts, as well as playing the roles of actor, camera operator and editor, not to mention producer, distributor and impresario. One of the main attractions of this exhibition is the chance it

provides of understanding how some of his films took shape by seeing all the material conserved from their production, including the original costumes for *A Trip to the Moon*. Moreover, visitors can enjoy recreations of the sensation caused by the first screenings of these films, using equipment from the period and unique objects, such as, for example, Méliès' first camera.

Finally, the third section in the exhibition focuses on how Méliès was forgotten by the industry, only for his life and work to be revived years later. This section emphasises his key role in the evolution of cinema history, a message brought home even today by Scorsese's film *Hugo*, which closes the show.

*Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film* was made possible thanks to the cooperation of the Cinémathèque française. Established in 1936, this French film institute conserves one of the most important collections of drawings, films, equipment, costumes and objects made by Georges Méliès in the world, as well as a large and valuable holdings of objects and images related to the early days of the cinema.

The exhibition features a total of 418 pieces, including 21 original films by the French film-maker, some of them restored and digitised especially for this show. The exhibition is completed by 67 photographs (including both period originals and modern copies), as well as drawings, engravings, posters, etc., and a selection of original equipment (magic lanterns, praxinoscopes, the cinematograph invented by the Lumière brothers, a time-lapse camera and so on) and replicas that visitors can handle, discovering the effects that these artefacts produce. Finally, the objects featured also include original costumes, models, documentation, correspondence, etc.



James Pettibone, Magic lantern slide reel with aluminium slide holders and electric arc lamp, Cincinnati, Ohio, c. 1888.  
© La Cinémathèque française. Photo: Stéphane Dabrowski

*Georges Méliès. The Magic of Film* is complemented by the publication of a catalogue for the exhibition, an in-depth study that fills the void that has existed to date with regard to bibliography on Georges Méliès in our country.

As usual, moreover, "la Caixa" Foundation has prepared a full and varied programme of activities related to the exhibition. Besides the traditional inaugural lecture, given on this occasion by the show's curator, Laurent

Mannoni, and a season of talks devoted to the life and work of the French filmmaker, the programme also includes two sessions at which films made by Méliès will be shown, accompanied by live music. In the first case, the soundtrack will be provided by the electronic music of Logical Disorder and Adyo; in the second, the accompaniment will be contemporary music by Mamut Cinema. These activities are completed by a film season, a new family show produced by "la Caixa" Foundation, activities for senior citizens and the usual programme of guided tours and dramatised visits.

Finally, in order to encourage active public participation, a competition, [Participa Méliès](#), has also been launched. This "Participate Méliès" is open to all those with devices to record their own videos based on some of the typical tricks that Méliès himself used in his films.

## EXHIBITION SECTIONS

### 1. ORIGINS OF THE CINEMA OF GEORGES MÉLIÈS: THE ART OF DECEIT

Chinese shadows, magic lanterns, phantasmagoria, optical illusions, stroboscopic discs, stop-motion photography: "the scripture of movement", first sought in prehistoric caves, has been a key focus of interest since the 17th century. The moving iconography of the "art of deceit", full of devils and restless monsters, seen by day or at night, engendered a strange cosmogony that deeply influenced the work of Méliès the magician.

As for the cinematograph, which was, in reality, the combination of techniques invented by others (Étienne-Jules Marey, Thomas Edison, Émile Reynaud), Méliès immediately made it his own in order to create a new phantasmagoria, one that was made more dynamic by the invention of tricks, now known as "special effects". This is how Méliès created not only cinema entertainment, but also the special effects film and the fictional movie.

#### ★ *Chinese shadows*

Georges Méliès loved shadow play and frequented several Parisian cabarets that produced such shows frequently in the late-19th century. The idea of using the hands to create moving shadows or cutting out and joining together the parts of figures, placing them before a light source and a white screen to project their silhouettes, provides one of the first direct connections between movement, light and theatrical production. In France, Dominique Séraphin's Chinese shadow plays had attracted thousands of spectators since 1784. The culminating moment for this

performing art came in 1886, with the shows of Caran d'Ache and Henri Rivière at Le Chat Noir cabaret, which created an atmosphere at once poet and eccentric that exercised an enormous influence on Méliès.

### ★ Perspective

Although perspective was discovered during the Renaissance period, it was not until the 18th century that instruments were invented to enable its effects to be appreciated. These included the optical box, the camera obscura, etc. The feeling of time passing, a typically cinematographic effect, was transmitted by using daytime and night time views, reality was distorted by anamorphosis created using mirrors and, in the second half of the 18th century, Martin Engelbrecht achieved the first relief effects with his wonderful perspective boxes or dioramas. Georges Méliès framed his films in the same way as Engelbrecht, using successive, at times moving, sets.

### ★ Magic lanterns

These optical instruments, introduced by the Dutch astronomer Christiaan Huygens in the mid-17th century, enabled fixed or moving images to be projected onto a screen in a darkened room. The images, which were painted on glass, were animated using ingenious mechanisms. Magic lanterns were hugely popular until the appearance of the cinema. Divided between two tendencies – as the cinema would be later on (on the one hand recreating life, on the other, projecting the most amazing views) – this genre generated a specific, often strange iconography, and this was something that provided Méliès (who was also a “lanternist”) with one of his earliest sources of inspiration. In 1903, Méliès paid homage to those light projections in his film *La Lanterne magique* (The Magic Lantern), in which tiny dancing girls escape from this optical device.



Lapierre (Manufacture d'optique), magic lantern in the shape of the Eiffel Tower, Paris, 1889. © La cinémathèque française. Photo: Stéphane Dabrowski.

### ★ Phantasmagoria

In the 1790s, inspired by the “dark romanticism”, that was causing such furore in painting (Goya, Heinrich Füssli, William Blake) and literature (Mary Shelley, Goethe, Matthew Lewis), physicists and magicians came up with the idea for a new light show, known as phantasmagoria. These shows, first produced in 1792, in France, Germany, Britain and Spain, involved light-filled moving colour images, accompanied by sound. The mechanisms used became more and more elaborate:

objects projected behind the screen or onto smoke; moving images with volume that were made larger or smaller as the lantern was moved along rails, like film travelling shots, etc. Luminous animated characters crossed the screen in all directions, or appeared at the back of the room, moving towards the spectators at surprising speed before suddenly disappearing. These frightening visions were usually accompanied by music, pyrotechnic effects and magic tricks. Phantasmagoria, the precursor of the horror film, provided Méliès with another great source of inspiration for his work. Accordingly, death became a frequent theme in his films, although, being jovial by nature, the French artist finally used his ingenuity to transform this gloomy genre into “happy phantasmagoria”.

★ **The stroboscope**

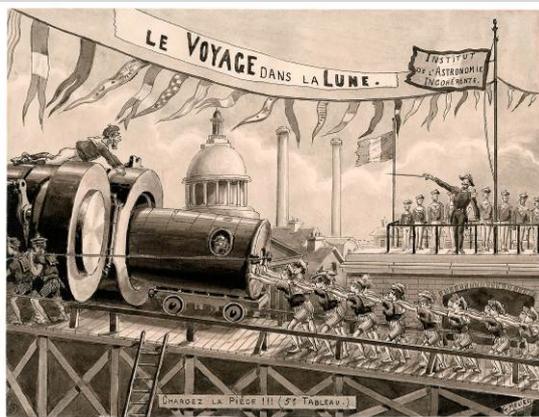
The phenakistoscope or stroboscopic disk, which was simultaneously developed in 1832 by two scientists, the Belgian Joseph Plateau and the Austrian Simon Stampfer, demonstrated the phenomenon of the persistence of light impressions in the eye and brain. The stroboscope provided the basis for the cinematographic technique. The imagery generated by stroboscopic disks was entertaining, dynamic and modern. Some of these absurd and extraordinary images presaged the universe of Georges Méliès. For its part, the praxinoscope, invented by Émile Reynaud in 1876 and patented in 1877, used stationary images to create the illusion of movement. With an improved version of a praxinoscope, converted into “optical theatre”, Reynaud was able to produce the first public showings of animated cartoons to a paying audience.

★ **The stereoscope**

The principle of the stereoscope was discovered by the English scientist Charles Wheatstone even before the appearance of the daguerreotype. At first, two similar pictures, located slightly off to the side of one another, were observed through two lenses. Later, this system was applied to photographs, creating a new world of images in relief. This is the same principle that enables us to enjoy films in 3D today.

★ **Motion picture projection**

Photographing movement was, with stereoscope, one of the great obsessions of the late-19th century. An English photographer, Edward Muybridge, took a series of photographs that demonstrated a horse's gallop. At around the same time, in 1882, the French scientist Étienne-Jules Marey, having explored movement through the graphic method, used the first time-lapse camera, a modern invention, to record a series of sequential images on a single sensitive glass plate. In 1889, Marey obtained the first series of images on celluloid film, the decisive invention that enabled the birth of the cinema as art, technology and industry. Marey was also the



ERROR: stackunderflow  
OFFENDING COMMAND: ~

STACK: