

The first Hungarian language book on film, *The Moving Picture*, which was edited by movie theater owner Sándor Kozma at Kaposvár in May, 1911 and whose beautiful cover and graphic design were the work of Lajos Kozma, can be used by quickly flipping its pages, thus showing a galloping horse in motion. In the upper right hand corner of every page there is the phase photo of a horse and its rider, and this picture, along with those that follow, make up a pocket-size cinematograph.

There are no such phase-photos in the corners of this book. We would nevertheless like the reader to treat it as if it were his very own domestic cinematograph: not with the fast flipping of its pages, but by looking at its photographs time and time again. Though these are "merely" stills, they are not identical with the compositions one usually associates with photo albums. Supplemented with the movies of our memories, they can start moving again and bring to life the action compressed here into a single photograph. But we wish to do more than animate the stories of various films with the assistance of the reader; we would also like to recall the adventurous history of the Hungarian cinema, born over eighty years ago. This picture book is not a substitute for a thorough history of the Hungarian cinema; its "phase-photos" capture only the most important stations in its development.

What do we see on these pictures?

The answer seems obvious enough. Nevertheless, it is worth some contemplation.

Informative communication?

Factual orientation: so and so at such and such a time in this or that film?

A picture chronicle?

Photography as art?

And if so, who is the artist? The film is the creation of the director, the roles are interpreted by the actors, who are also visible; the picture is created by a photographer called a cinematographer (according to Mór Ballagi's 19th century dictionary, an *art-maker*), and a lighting camera-man, but the photographs that appear in display windows and magazines are not made by them, but by the studio photographer who, after a scene is shot, records what he sees using his own independent means.

Or, is what the reader sees as he peruses this book merely a reminder?

All of the above, and none of the above.

For thousands and thousands of years, the picture was not considered as a faithful representation of reality. In other words, it did not play the role we would expect of it in the age of TV news, magazines and collections of documentary photographs.

The picture was a sign that initiated a series of thoughts—no wonder that *letters* were born of such pictographs. After all, even the paintings on the walls of medieval cathedrals served this purpose.

If we look into Johann Amos Comenius's school book, which was first published in Brasov in 1675, and which was republished in Budapest in 1970 under the title, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, that is, *The Visible World*, we are awed by the beautiful baroque woodcuts which communicate abstract concepts for ten year olds with refined simplicity. These illustrations do not represent the actual, natural reality which the child experiences day after day, but the *essence* of that reality. The *Humanitas* illustration, for example, which appears on page 246, depicts two men embracing in a friendly greeting in the foreground, while in the background, Cain slays Abel, and two other men are engaged in a duel. The accompanying text is as follows: "Men have been created for mutual benefit and good, so be they full of the milk of human kindness." The child supplements this text with the illustration, and, uniting the two in a dialectic, he comes to understand the basic conception. From then on, illustration and text live on as one for him: neither is of full value by itself.

As a result of the discovery of photography and of the proliferation of the rotary-press-produced newspaper, this meaning of pictures has changed. Since the illustrations in the mass media have become a means of communicating information, the newspaper readers have come to expect photographs to provide them with accurate information. Even art photos strove for accuracy; we know of many portrait painters who, in the last century, joined the camp of photographers, thinking that in this way they could provide a more accurate portrait of their subjects. We also know that the first moving pictures were considered to be the most faithful—because mechanical—representations of reality, so much so that as a result, some critics disputed film's claim to art. It is not so well known that the film, despite the above, very soon made this kind of representation of the natural *indirect*; feature films presented made up stories shot at specially chosen locations or sets, in artificial light, and with actors who *played* or *performed*—in other words, who transmitted the essence like Comenius's *Visible World*.

If we now think back on any one of our often-seen, favorite films, we can recount its story; its visual world, too, comes alive before our inner eye, but it is very rarely that we can remember any of its specific angles or short sequences, however important. Thus, even in the case of film it is not the pictures we remember; rather, the subjective and intellectual memory of what we have seen is transformed within us, and it is this which is *transformed back into* a series of pictures. All this is true in reverse as well: the pictures taken by the staff photographer

during the shooting are not faithful documentaries of any scene in the film, but only more or less accurate illustrations to help our memories. This is how we must approach the illustrations of this picture book, too,—which, by the way, offers selections *only from feature films*. I call them illustrations advisedly. For although these photographs are indisputably documentary, timeless relics of former situations, happenings, scenes, even though the actors we see on them performed among the sets we see, these pictures are still no more than illustrations to remind us of the *essence* of the films. At the same time, however, in seeming contradiction to the above, without any in-depth study, we can see and feel that almost every picture in this book is a carefully thought out *composition*, in the art-historical sense of the word. The position of the figures within the frame, the emotions we see on the faces give us something of value which has an aesthetic *raison d'être* all its own, and gives us much joy.

This is the reason we have allotted more space than is usual to posters, which provide an indispensable link between the film and its audience. The poster not only informs the public about the story and message of a film, it also reflects the opinion of the artist who made it; what is more, it is often a valuable work of art by itself, and just as often, a document of the age.

Naturally, none of this can substitute for the experience of seeing pictures come to life by quickly flipping the pages of a picture book like *The Moving Picture*, but perhaps it will bring back memories, and with the memories, the experience of identification with the wonderful world of the Hungarian cinema.

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