
 GEORGES MÉLIÈS



Cinema will perhaps have to wait centuries more before finding another genius whose childlike soul will, like Méliès, make light of its phantasmagorias¹.

Henri Langlois

Henri Langlois and Georges Franju met Georges Méliès in 1935. Langlois would devote all his energy to locating traces of his vanished universe and to preserving his work. This body of work that 'was destroyed by him,' pointed out Langlois during an homage paid in 1956, as by a desperate child when he discovers the nastiness of men, a body of work that is perhaps the cruellest testimony against our time, which has destroyed the purity of childhood in us.' In 1937, Langlois asked Méliès to make several drawings from memory of his magical sets and projected, in his presence, the prints of *A Trip to the Moon* and *An Impossible Voyage* at Le Cercle du Cinéma. He organized a number of projections and exhibitions, in particular abroad, in order to allow the public to rediscover and bring his work back to life.

Georges Méliès is one of those who will forever personify the Belle Époque. In Paris, he walked along the Grand Boulevards with his wife and mistresses; but in the former family property in Montreuil-sous-Bois, where he built the world's first film studio in 1896, it was the child who was born again. In his films, the member of the upper-middle class disappears, and it was the whole universe of gilt-edged books from prize-giving days that came alive; a universe of fairytales given new treatment by the magic lantern, that of the world tour, of famous tightrope walkers and illusionism, of fake Gothic furniture in plush with fringe.

Georges Méliès knew it well, and although he was the genius who managed to conjure cinematographic art out of nothing, transforming a machine intended for recording reality into a box of magic from which gushed the impossible; although he was the first to lay the foundations of film production and to discover and develop the technical means for shooting and film direction, it was because, up until his death in 1938, he managed to preserve his childlike spirit, nurtured by elves, this spirit that, beyond the algebra of the impossible that were the first fantastic shots (The Magician, The Fat and the Lean Wrestling Match, The Four Troublesome Heads, etc.), made him a Jules Verne staged by Offenbach (A Trip to the Moon, The Paris-Monte-Carlo Rally, An Impossible Voyage) and a storyteller (Bluebeard, The Kingdom of Fairies, Cinderella, The Knight of the Snow).

In his childhood and adolescence, he knew the gentle way of life and the weight of prejudices that almost shattered his artist's vocation. Then he discovered the joy of being himself, creating and giving life, not only to works but to a whole industry. Then he saw Charles Pathé tear from him the spectre of the film industry whilst, with the evolution of the public, his creation escaped him. Then came, as for how many others, the difficulties of life and, finally, when he was no more than a marvellous grandfather, the Great Méliès revealed himself – in 1929 – to the admiration of a whole youth, thereby returned to the tranquillity of daily life by his peers in the industry and film production.

The father of cinema, the delicate clockmaker of so many subtle mechanisms, the inventor of all the special effects and processes, fascinated by extravaganzas and miraculously freed from the laws of gravity, was a marvellous draughtsman and an admirable colourist (opposite: Méliès painting a canvas in his studio).



¹ Henri Langlois, *Écrits de cinéma*, texts collected by Bernard Benoiel and Bernard Eisenschitz, Ed. Flammarion/Cinémathèque française, 2014

THE FILMS OF THE SHOWING « GEORGE MELIES »

Running time : 54 min.

Après le bal, le tub

France, 1897 – 1 minute

L'illusionniste fin de siècle

France, 1899 – 1 minute 30

La Chrysalide et le papillon d'or

France, 1900 – 2 minutes 30

Le Royaume des fées

France, 1903 – 17 minutes

Le Merveilleux éventail vivant

France, 1904 – 5 minutes

Le Raid de Paris-Monte-Carlo en automobile

France, 1905 – 11 minutes

Le Bourreau turc

France, 1904 – 3 minutes

La Fée carabosse

France, 1906 – 12 minutes

The films come from private collections and those of Madeleine Malthête-Méliès, who had the generosity to donate his nitrate films. The hand-painted films were restored by La Cinémathèque française in 2013 with the Éclair Group.



Le Raid Paris-Monte-Carlo en automobile



L'illusionniste fin de siècle