
SHORT FILMS PROGRAMME 2

During the first six months of 1953, Henri Langlois presented 77 showings of shorts at a rate of three per day. This unprecedented principle of programming consisted of showing cinema as a 'whole', creating a link between films without any obvious connection in order to give rise to a new vision in the spectator.

As of the founding of Le Cercle du Cinéma in 1935, Henri Langlois favoured programming experimental and avant-garde films, a habit that he would perpetuate at La Cinémathèque française.

*Exceptionally beautiful, free and inventive, they [the two Malespine films: *Jeux arborescents* and *Jeux d'ombres*] refer to 'games'. That goes to show the humility and lack of seriousness of the crew surrounding Malespine (his family?), having fun in *Jeux arborescents*. The relations between the stained-glass rose windows and the floral forms, between the architectural geometry and the random geometry of tree branches (hence 'arborescence'), between the grid figures and circles, between positive and negative, freely alternating, and between the blurred and defined make up a dazzling catalogue of an era's visual obsessions¹.*

In his writings, Henri Langlois integrated Alfred Sandy into the Surrealistic trend of French avant-garde cinema represented by *Entr'acte* and *The Seashell and the Clergyman*: 'These two films [*Light and Shadow* and *Cinematographic Essays*] belong to the vision of René Clair and Germaine Dulac and are only the cinematographic transposition of the Surrealistic arguments imagined by Picabia and an Artaud script [...].'

Langlois praised René Clair highly, describing him as the 'spiritual son of Méliès and Lumière'. He had boundless admiration for *Paris Asleep* (aka *The Crazy Ray*) as well as for all his output and invited the filmmaker to join the board of La Cinémathèque française in 1938.

René Clair made *The Eiffel Tower* – 'the great iron girl I've always been in love with' – in 1922 for the producer Alexandre Kamenka, who would entrust all his archives to Langlois.

Henri Langlois was subjugated by the projection of *Ballet mécanique* and wrote a rave text, concluding: 'I wonder, so much do I find this little film revolutionary, so much do I see it outside the ordinary conception of philosophy and the current way of thinking, whether the author himself knows what he has done. The work is linked to the future to such an extent that I feel it, but it is impossible for me to turn it to advantage. Only in fifty years perhaps will this film take on its real explosive sense. Thus it is still truly an avant-garde work since its message is not yet a commonplace.' In 1961, he related '... I dreamt of making a film when I was young. One day, I went into the Ciné-Club 32 and saw Léger's *Le Ballet mécanique*. It was exactly what I had wanted to achieve. So I told myself: "it's not worth starting over what already exists"; first, I'm going to gather information.'

A print of Man Ray's *The Starfish* was deposited at La Cinémathèque by the producer Pierre Braunberger. As for the starfish, strictly speaking, bought by Robert Desnos from a second-hand goods dealer on the Rue des Rosiers [in Paris], it was given to Langlois and would have pride of place in his cabinet of curiosities before being put into the museum.

At the time of his death, Langlois was working on a tribute to Henri Storck. *For your Beautiful Eyes* was made in 1929 in a pure Surrealistic spirit. This film, long feared lost, and of which only a fragment survives, is a marvel of invention in which eroticism is linked to the bizarre, madness and social criticism.

¹ Dominique Païni, in *Jeune, dure et pure, Une histoire du cinéma d'avant-garde et expérimental en France*, under the direction of Nicole Brenez and Christian Lebrat, Ed. Cinémathèque Française /Mazzota, 2001)

THE FILMS OF THE SHOWING « SHORT FILMS PROGRAMME 2 »

Running time : 56 min.

Arborescent Games / Jeux arborescents

France, 1931 – 5 minutes

Direction : *Émile Malespine*

Arborescent Games, fugue in minor. Adapted after the Fugue in A minor by J.S. Bach, and Scarlatti's Sonata No. 9. **Rediscovered and preserved in 1997 after an original release print.**

Light and Shadow / Lumière et ombre

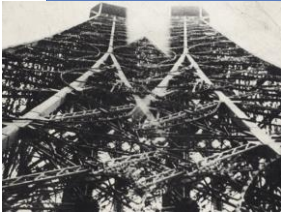
France, 1928 – 5 minutes

Direction: *Alfred Sandy*

'Cinegraphic' essay: geometric forms move about in an abstract atmosphere.
Film rediscovered in 1999, following the preservation of a picture negative.

The Tower / La Tour

France, 1928 – 12 minutes



Direction and editing: René Clair

Production: *Albatros*

Photography: *Georges Périnal, Nicolas Roudakoff*

Evocation of the foundations of the Eiffel Tower, from top to bottom, metallic mysteries. **Preserved in 1995 from preservation material made in 1964 by Langlois.**

Le Ballet mécanique

France, 1924 – 15 minutes



Direction and script: *Fernand Léger*

Assistant director and photography: *Dudley Murphy*

Cast: *Kiki, Katerine Murphy*

'Pictorial error is the subject. The error of cinema is the script. Freed of this negative weight, cinema can become the gigantic microscope of things never seen and never felt.' (Fernand Léger)

In 1986, La Cinémathèque française acquired a colour print of the version preserved at the Nederlands Filmmuseum, a print made by the Haghefilm laboratory, using the Desmetcolor process.

The Starfish / L'Étoile de mer

France, 1928 – 15 minutes



Direction: *Man Ray*

From a poem by Robert Desnos

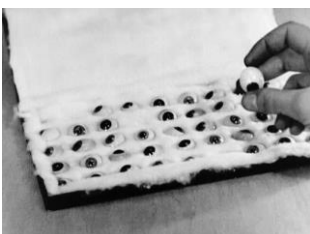
Cast : *Robert Desnos, Kiki, André de la Rivière*

Poem by Robert Desnos. As seen by Man Ray.

The Starfish was safeguarded in 1949 and a print duplicated in 1965.

For your Beautiful Eyes (fragment) / Pour vos beaux yeux (fragment)

Belgium, 1929 – 4 minutes



Direction and photography: *Henri Storck*

Script: *Félix Labisse*

Cast: *Alfred Courmes, Félix and Ninette Labisse, Henry Van Vyve*

A young man is unable to get rid of a glass eye. **The unique print of this film has been mislaid. However, a fragment on nitrate support was found in 2006 and preserved.**