

Project Gallery

Dreaming in Color
A gift from the
Museum of Contemporary Art

Dreaming in Color

The Davide Turconi Collection of Early Cinema



Early cinema was a costly experiment, necessitated by the excitement of discovering a new medium. The exhibition is dedicated to a collection of more than 25,000 original nitrate film strips of 35mm film dating from around 1895 to 1915.

One of the world's leading experts in the history of silent cinema, Davide Turconi (1911-2008) gathered these rare film strips in the 1960s from a large collection amassed by Jean-Philippe Lodeux (1912-1978) in the early 1950s, who began collecting film and recording silent movies in his home in France. After he left France in 1951, the film collection was transferred to the Musée de la Ville de Paris.

In the early 1970s, Turconi discovered the prints were in various stages of chemical decay. Working with a specialist, he restored a small portion of these precious films. Turconi and his colleagues eventually met in Rome (Italy) and established the Turconi Foundation in 1980, which preserved and made available to the public the collection used as the beginning of the exhibition today.

Today, the Turconi archive continues to be a precious resource. The remaining complete sets in the film collection were eventually shelved in the Grand Palais. The Turconi collection was restored by the George Eastman Museum in the 1990s, and a massive digitization project was completed after several years of painstaking work.

Additionally, we funded films and restored them, organized a complete inventory of the original prints such as reels, titles, and film strips, and created aspects including film marks, exposure, and color, and the images used to create the film. The restoration process was a complex one, but they were able to restore many of the original prints. The project was a major step in the history of early cinema, and the Turconi collection is now a valuable resource for the study of early cinema. The project was a major step in the history of early cinema, and the Turconi collection is now a valuable resource for the study of early cinema.

All works in this presentation are digital reproductions of items held in the collection of the George Eastman Museum.

For more information, visit www.earlycinema.org
or contact the curator, Davide Turconi, at info@earlycinema.org
or call 1-800-828-6888.
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www.earlycinema.org

WORK IN GALLERY

Dr. ...
Sub ...
Mic ...

Dreaming in Color

The Davide Turconi Collection of Early Cinema



Early cinema was visually inventive, marked by the excitement of discovering a new medium. This exhibition is dedicated to a collection of more than 23,000 original nitrate clippings of 35mm films dating from around 1897 to 1915.

One of the world's leading experts in the history of silent cinema, Davide Turconi (1911–2005) gathered these rare frames in the 1960s from a large collection amassed by Jesuit priest Josef-Alexis Joye (1852–1919). In the early 1900s, Joye began to collect films and incorporate them into his lessons in Basel, Switzerland. After he left Basel in 1911, the films remained—until Turconi found the collection decades later.

At the time of Turconi's discovery, the prints were in various stages of chemical decay. Fearing that eventually no trace would remain of these precious films, Turconi took brief clips (typically two or three frames) from each, thus preserving invaluable documentation of the color techniques used at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Today, the Turconi and Joye collections are a primary source for study. The remaining complete films in the Joye collection were eventually preserved at the British Film Institute. The Turconi collection was acquired by the George Eastman Museum in the 1990s, and a massive digitization project was completed after twelve years of painstaking work.

Approximately six hundred frames are reproduced here, organized into eight themes examining different aspects of the material: genres such as travelogues, fairy tales, and magic tricks; technical aspects including splice marks, intertitles, and color; and the sometimes beautiful decay found in certain clippings. The motion pictures that they derive from have largely been forgotten since their original circulation more than a century ago. Yet the frames tell us much about the visual culture of their time, as well as the archival fate of film over the past century. The immersive visual experience showcases these stunning examples of the colorful and dreamlike wonders of early cinema.

All works in this exhibition are digital reproductions of objects held in the collection of the George Eastman Museum.

Themes

Moving Color



These hand-drawn color charts are a visual language of color. They are arranged in a grid, with each square containing a different color. The colors are arranged in a way that suggests movement or a sequence, as if they are being moved or changed over time.

Splices



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Language



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Decomposition



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The Body



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Voyage



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Magic



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Filles de Bretagne (Julia Trevis, 1900)



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Themes

Moving Color



Color has long been a major component of film's delights. During the silent era, color was often applied by hand with brush, stencil, tint, and tone onto the emulsion of film prints. As these frames reveal, this work transformed the earliest moving images from black-and-white shadows to fantastic celebrations of color in motion.

Splices



When working with the Joye film prints, Turconi often cut out his frames over the edits between shots in the original film prints. This meant that the prints could be spliced back together with little loss, as these frames amounted only to fractions of a second. As a result, Turconi's clippings contain many original splices that showcase the editing techniques used during early cinema.

Magic



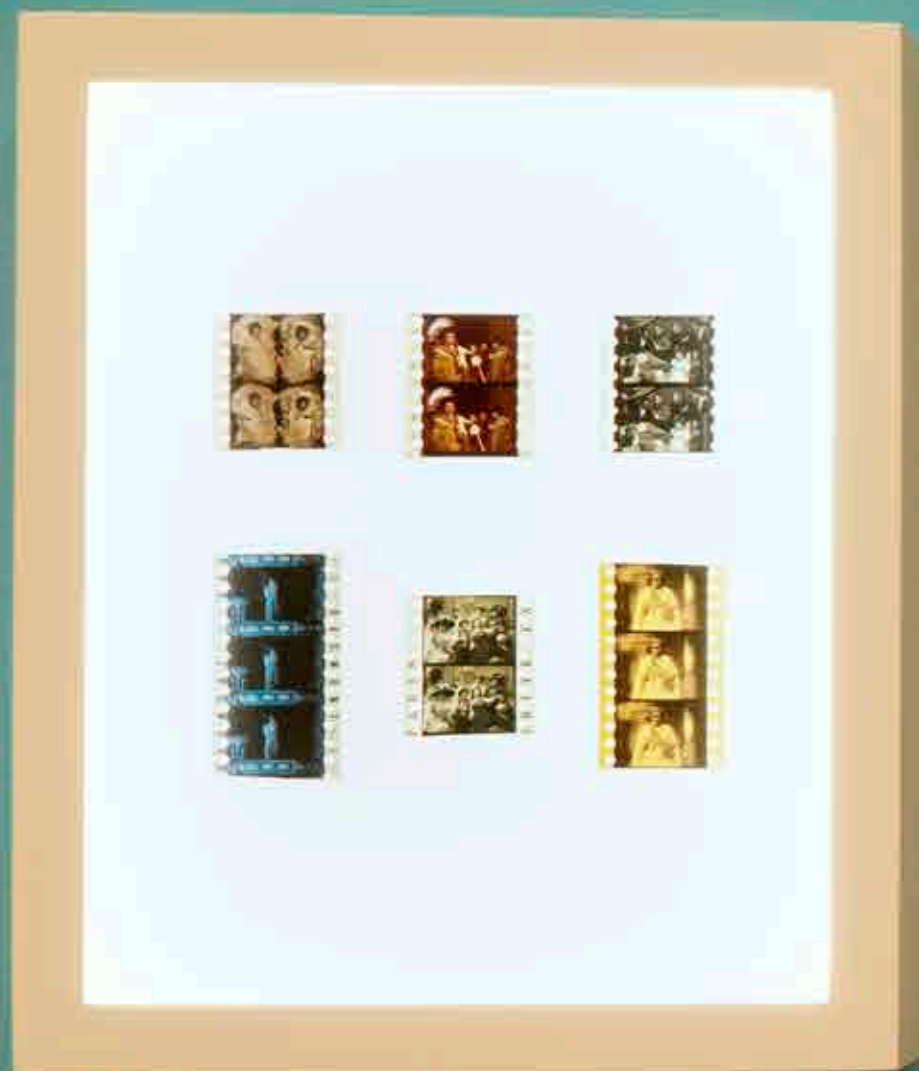
Some of the most wondrous early films were about magic and fairy-tale worlds. They showed people appearing out of thin air or transforming into statues or creatures, often in dazzling color.

Fillettes de Bretagne (Pathé Frères, 1909)



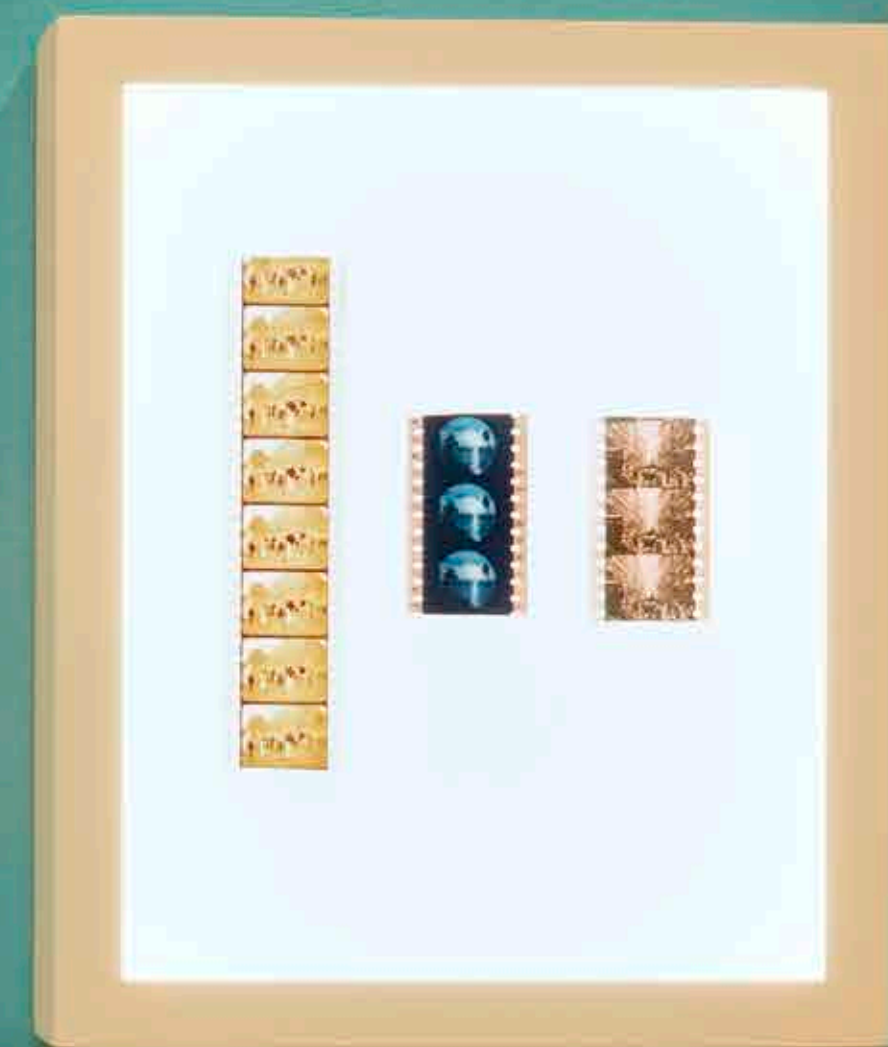
This French nonfiction film was described by its producers as “a delightful series of animated pictures, in which young, plump, and pink children of Brittany are nurtured in their picturesque costumes by the refreshing salty air.” This projection includes all of the frames from this film that exist in the Turconi collection.

The Body



Cinema brought about a new way of presenting the human form, captured in motion yet frozen in time. Distilled to the photographic base of the film frame, these images show us bodies in various states—laughing, weeping, jumping, and dying.

Voyage



From its origins, the moving image was celebrated for its ability to transport viewers into new worlds of experience. As the German writer Walter Benjamin explained:

Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.

Language



Early film has often been thought of as a silent language of images, yet it was also a new world of animated texts. Words appeared on-screen through intertitles, which provided dialogue and narrative and descriptive information for the moving images. Most of the intertitles represented here are in German, as Josef Joye obtained most of his films from the secondhand market of Germany.

Decomposition



Images blasted, weathered, and hauntingly resilient—these frames are in various stages of decomposition. Nitrate, the film base used throughout the first several decades of cinema, can have a long shelf life with proper storage, outlasting any digital format we have today. But it is still organic, and it breaks down over time—at times beautifully.

Composition

The Body



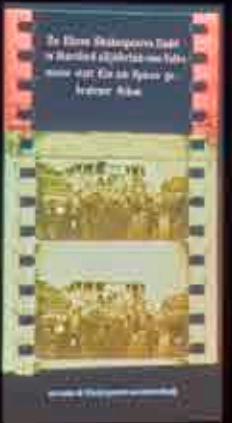
Dreami

The Davide Turconi



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 of the Giorgio Strehler Museum





The Wreckers of the Limited Express (Lubin, US 1906)



Photogramme de la Seine (1907)



Le moulin de la Seine (1907)



Le moulin de la Seine (1907)

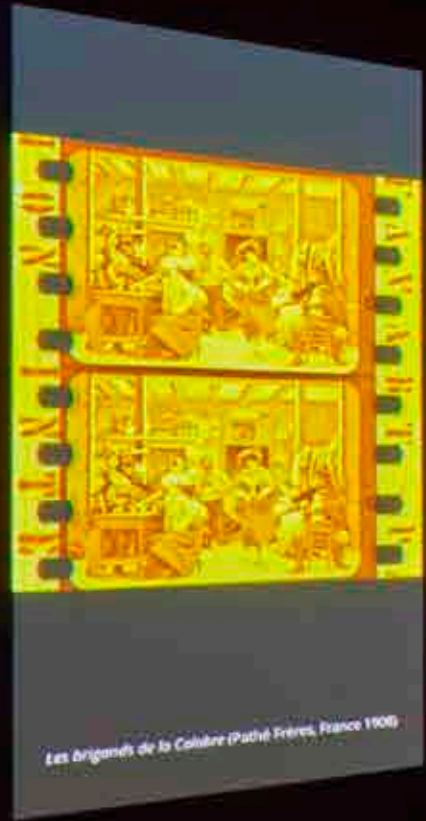


Le moulin de la Seine (1907)



*Dahli grande ville de Haute Assemblée
Orléans, France 1909*

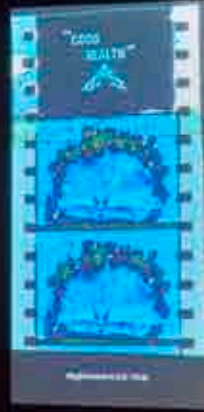




Les Origines de la Colonne (Paté Frères, France 1900)



Portrait of a Woman (Lumière, France 1895)



Regiment at Sea (Lumière, France 1895)



Scène de Comédie (Lumière, France 1895)



Portrait of a Woman (Lumière, France 1895)



Il y en a pour tout le monde (Charles Armstrong, USA 1900)



