

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Williams College Museum of Art Presents
*Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880-
1910*

July 16 –December 11, 2005

Williamstown, MA—Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) presents “Moving Pictures” an exhibition that explores the relationship between American art and the new medium of film at the beginning of the 20th century in the most ambitious exhibition organized by WCMA to date. Showcasing approximately 100 paintings and 50 films, “Moving Pictures” installs art and film side by side, examining the complex relationship between these two media at the turn of the last century. The dynamic relationship between American art and early film not only resulted in new subjects but also new poses, facial expressions, and constructions of space, challenging old assumptions about what was real.

The exhibition will open at the Williams College Museum of Art on July 16 with a turn of the 20th-century-style, all American festival in the museum courtyard from 4:00-8:00 pm and will be on view at WCMA through December 11, 2005; it will then travel to the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, NC (March 24-July 16, 2006), the Grey Art Gallery of New York University (September 13-December 9, 2006), and the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC (February 17-May 20, 2007).

“Both paintings and films emphasize movement,” says Curator Nancy Mowll Mathews, “which was crucial to the illusion of lifelikeness in both media. In recreating the modern experience of fragmentation and spectacle both art and film explore issues of human perception and understanding of reality that were part of the intellectual climate of their day.”

The films are drawn primarily from the Edison, Lumière, and American Mutoscope and Biograph companies; the paintings are by American masters such as George Bellows, Thomas Eakins, Childe Hassam, Maurice Prendergast, William Merritt Chase, George Luks, and John Sloan.

The experiments of motion photographers of the 1880s, such as Eadward Muybridge and Etienne Jules Marey, were eagerly studied by American artists and were inspired in turn by them. When technology was perfected to show the photographs in motion in the 1890s, these early films quite naturally echoed established currents in American art. By 1900, the influence was going both ways, with American painting echoing the new view of the world offered by moving pictures.

Exhibition Overview:

The exhibition will be designed in four sections: The introductory section will present parallels between the first American films and the popular American artistic traditions of rural genre, landscape, and marine painting. The second section examines the rise of motion photography by Muybridge, Marey, and Eakins and its influence on the concept of the body in art and film in the 1890s. The third section addresses urban motion as it grows out of a cosmopolitan, Impressionist vision and evolves into realist imagery after 1900. The exhibition concludes with the mutual fascination between film and the visual arts in the early days of the new medium.

A catalogue, published by Hudson Hills Press, with accompanying compact disk featuring the films, will include contributions by thirteen art and film historians and include essays focusing on the interrelationship of still and moving pictures.

"Moving Pictures" is curated by Nancy Mowl Mathews, Eugénie Prendergast Senior Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art, and is part of "American Traditions," an array of programming countywide at cultural, arts, and historical venues based on America's rich and varied heritage. Coordinated with the help of the Berkshire Visitors Bureau, the spring and summer 2005 festival features performances, dance, artwork and exhibitions highlighting a vast range of historical and contemporary aspects of America. For information on "American Traditions" in the Berkshires, visit www.berkshiresarts.org.

This exhibition was funded in part by The Henry Luce Foundation, the Eugénie Prendergast Trust, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Williams College Center for Technology in the Arts & Humanities (CTAH), H.H. Powers Fund, and the Orrin Simons Fund.

Related Events:

Moving Pictures Opening Festival

Saturday, July 16, 2005

4:00–8:00 pm

Celebrating the opening day of “Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880–1910,” an all-American country fair will held on the museum lawn. Featuring Coney Island food, street performers, period music and dancing. The museum will be open throughout the Festival. Fun for children of all ages!

Summer Camp 2005: “Moving Pictures”

Tuesday, July 19–Friday, July 22, 2005

10:00 am–12:30 pm

Participants will learn to create art in motion; activities include making optical illusions, performance art, and video animation. \$75 fee for materials; pre-registration required. Space is limited to 12 participants, ages 8–12.

The Magic Lantern Show

Saturday, August 6, 2005

3:00 pm

David Brooke, former director of of the Clark Art Institute, will present a magic lantern slide show with his Victorian stereopticon. A gallery tour of “Moving Pictures” with Mr. Brooke and Curator Nancy Mowl Mathews will follow.

“Take Your Girlie to the Movies”

Wednesday, September 21, 2005

7:00 pm

Michael Lasser, well-known lecturer, broadcaster, writer, teacher, and host of the Peabody-Award-winning public radio program “Fascinatin’ Rhythm,” will play and discuss recordings of American music from the 1880s through the 1910s.

“Moving Pictures” Symposium

Friday, October 21 and Saturday, October 22, 2005

A public symposium, in which the essayists will discuss their contributions to the exhibition catalogue, will be held at Williams College. For more information on this and other programs related to “Moving Pictures,” please contact the museum or visit our website <www.wcma.org>.

Publicity Images Available

Publicity images for *Moving Pictures* and other current exhibitions are available for use. Please contact [Suzanne Augugliaro, Public Relations Coordinator](#), to request a disk with images.