

*For the Magic Lantern*

## **LANTERNS AT THE FAIRGROUND**

**A two-day event organised by the B-magic Project with the MLS**

5 and 6 April, Brussels

Around 100 people from the Magic Lantern Society and the B-magic Project, some from both, gathered at the 'fairground' – the Cinematek in Brussels – for magic lantern shows, updates on research, keynote addresses and multi-media presentations (see *TML* 17 and 18). Before the main event started Karin Bienek and Ludwig Vogl-Bienek ran a research seminar based on the art of projection and the vision for *eLaterna* (see *TML* 18, p.7). This research platform will enable in-depth analysis of slide sets and individual slides, including views from every angle to show labelling, mechanisms and different editions. Examples were Bamforth's *Ora Pro Nobis* set and a double panoramic slide with eccentric mechanism from the *Emigrant Ship* set – with the turn of one handle the waves moved and the ship sailed away from the harbour. Without needing a screwdriver you can see this mechanism exposed in a video clip on the website. *eLaterna* gives a narrow but deep view while *Lucerna* is broad and shallow. They posed some philosophical questions about the nature of performance and validity of studying slides in isolation as the experience is a combination of the projected image, the performance and overall context. Their definition of experimental media-archeology? Digging up slides from Lester Smith's bargain box – with your eyes shut!

In the afternoon Kurt Vanhoutte (B-magic), Jeremy Brooker (MLS Chairman) and Nele Wynants (B-magic/MLS/organiser) welcomed participants and set the scene. Originating as trade fairs, by the 1850s entertainment had gradually replaced trade at the local fairs although world trade fairs, starting in London in 1851, did give the concept a boost. Vanessa Toulmin took up the theme, explaining the legal and social origins of fairs and fairgrounds in the UK. Entertainment, such as high-wire acts and peepshows, did not begin until trading stopped. Fairs were in decline by the 19th century although mechanisation gave them a boost enabling steam-powered roundabouts, etc. Vanessa had found little evidence of magic lantern shows in these fairs. Guido Convents expanded the theme to open-air magic lantern projections in fairs and elsewhere, made possible by improved illuminants and culminating in open-air cinemas. Bernd Scholze then took us to the lantern shows of Friedrich Boettcher in 1870s Berlin, projecting the original large-format hand-painted slides from his collection. Boettcher gave many performances in the Königliche Schauspielhaus. Perhaps the Royal Family went on the same exquisite trip around Egypt that Bernd conducted for us.

After tea, the B-magic researchers stepped onto a 'carousel' and each gave us a ten-minute sneak preview of their research projects, ranging from scenes of creation and volcanoes to 'unacceptable' images on socio-political grounds and temperance uses. The Cinematek programme finished for the day with a rare treat when Helmut Wälde projected images from around 1800 using the projector they were made for (see p.XX).

For Jeremy and Carolyn Brooker's *Frankenstein Phantasmagoria* show, inspired by Mary Shelley's story, we walked up the Rue Royale to the truly atmospheric venue. This was a somewhat derelict late 19th century building constructed for the Jesuits with the long-abandoned chapel providing the perfect Robertson-esque setting for the show. Adding to the ambience two musicians – Jules Arthur and Timothy Didymus – provided live music including Timothy's remote-controlled glass harmonica. No slides relating to the Frankenstein story are known but the eclectic mix of slides from across the ages, including some of Jeremy's own making and others projected on a skull at the climax of the show, were designed to evoke what phantasmagoria meant for contemporary audiences. This was altogether an extraordinary experience. An exhibition, *Blackout*, using Kodak carousel slide projectors was set up in the cellars of the venue.

Day Two began with David Jones tracing the story of erotic slides and images – from the boudoir to the street (and fairground) and eventually back again via mass photography and cinema. The erotic theme could already be found in the slides made by Musschenbroek in the 18th century and the Duc d'Orléan's orgy in 1720 included a magic lantern show with erotic slides. When the images became more widely accessible the sexual messages were often portrayed in a complex array of visual codes to evade censorship and disapproval. Ine Van Dooren then donned a number of hats (both literally and metaphorically – “when in doubt wear a hat”) to bring us some fairground atmosphere and spectacle using images from *Lucerna*. The final magic lantern show was given by Ludwig Vogl-Bienek and Karin Bienek using a beautiful biunial and projecting a selection of colourful characters from stage, history and hell, including William Tell, Napoleon Bonaparte and Fuseli's *Nightmare*. These were all from their Illuminago collection, hand-painted and dated from the first half of the 19th century.

The event concluded with a second trip on the research carousel with subjects ranging from geographical and social mapping to follow fairs and shows, to luminous fountains in rackwork slides and the changing depictions of the story of Damon and Pythias from the 14th century to the slides of Joseph Boggs Beale – “everything in life should be seen as a metaphor”. A showing of Sarah Vanagt's film *Divinations* followed. Inspired by the magic lantern, she took children from Brussels, Athens and Sarajevo to collect ‘pieces’ of the city using sticky tape. While projecting these collages the children were asked to foretell something about the future. Event participants then exchanged reflections, browsed through the market stalls and left, enriched and inspired.