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Art School Cinema: Rex Ingram and the Lessons of the Studio

ABSTRACT: In the early 1920s, Rex Ingram stood out in critical and commercial publicity, not simply as a visual stylist but as a sculptor working in the medium of film. This reputation can be traced from his arts education at Yale, through his early acting jobs, to his career as a director. The discussion and promotion of Ingram's early films at Metro, particularly *Scaramouche* (1923), reveal how his public relationships with the visual arts and visual artists helped to create a special status for his stylized films among critics, educators, and institutions that sought to define a type of art cinema. As an addendum, this essay also reprints and examines a page from a student's notes taken during an early Vachel Lindsay lecture at the New York School of Art.

KEYWORDS: Rex Ingram, art film, aesthetic education, pictorialism, Exceptional Photoplays

In the early 1920s, the National Board of Review formed the Exceptional Photoplays Committee to oversee publication of a monthly bulletin that would serve as a mouthpiece for the organization. As the board members refined their mission to replace the moral evaluation of films with aesthetic evaluation, they held up Rex Ingram's *Scaramouche* for special consideration. More than a simple example of an exceptional film, *Scaramouche*'s release in September 1923 inspired a discussion of the standards and aesthetic traditions on which the committee members based their evaluations. The author of the lead article for the Fall-Summer 1923 issue of *Exceptional Photoplays* took the occasion of the film's release to break with the traditional review format, to risk being "distressing to the reader who wants to know what the story is about and who are the actors," and to discuss what might make a film exceptional in the aesthetic sense. The article begins, "If the art of the motion picture is the art of composition . . . then the mechanics of effect must always be paramount in the use of the photoplay medium." It declares Ingram's films essential to a cinema of vibrant, composed pictures,

which is the exact reverse of what is commonly thought to be the nature of pictures in motion. . . . [*Scaramouche*] becomes something other than [“mere narration”] through that art of composition first mentioned which Mr. Ingram really understands—through a knowledge of technique which is born of a feeling for beauty. *Scaramouche* is nearly always beautiful—is primarily aimed at being beautiful—and achieved [*sic*] beauty most often because its unfolding motion crystalizes [*sic*] into periods of signifying and revealing stillness.¹

I begin with this assessment of Rex Ingram’s cinema, a type of art cinema, as a way to open up the question of the value of art education in early Hollywood. Fused here to this passage’s flowery rhetoric of beauty—a mainstay in writing on artistic films—is a notion of composition carried over from art education in the lecture hall and the university. The article starts by defining the art of cinema generally as composition, and it recalls psychological, pictorial aesthetics with its reference to “effect.” Art lecturers of the time sought out the vital effects of aesthetic composition on the psychology of the beholder.² Applied to cinema, this living, engaging composition competes with other vitalities of the medium, such as cinema’s mechanical capacity to move and its capacity to tell stories in sequence. It is this less-examined vitality of motion pictures, the argument goes, that distinguishes common motion pictures from a kind of art film.³ Directors like Ingram constituted a privileged minority because they were able to do the work required to compose scenes in this way. While, to many, this work seemed at odds with (or even the exact reverse of) the nature of moving pictures, to the Exceptional Photoplays Committee, composition offered cinema the promise of mobility into other spheres.

Ingram seemed made for the project of defining aesthetically ambitious cinema because, as nearly every reviewer of his films noted, he did, in fact, train in sculpture and painting. Affinities like these, in which cinema not only borrows from the other arts but announces its borrowings, form an essential component of art cinema as a tentative category of early Hollywood filmmaking. The task with a director like Ingram is to figure out exactly how this kinship with the other arts functioned at various stages in his career. One way to address this question would be to follow a primarily formal line of inquiry and highlight Ingram’s borrowed painterly and sculptural techniques as instances of early Hollywood’s ability to absorb visual styles.⁴ A related but not identical approach—the one I am pursuing here—puts intellectual networks and institutional publicity in the foreground. It focuses on how critics and educators helped to create a critical niche for Ingram’s stylistic experimentation. In other

words, Ingram's public affinities with the other arts allowed for an array of pictorially stylized techniques (many devised by his cinematographer, John F. Seitz) to classify the director as exceptional. Framing Ingram's films in this way not only connects art cinema to educational institutions previously overlooked. It also highlights how the compositions of directors like Ingram differed from early Los Angeles-based peripheral filmmakers, such as those mapped by David James in his 2005 book *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*. One could certainly trace significant stylistic similarities between, for example, Dudley Murphy's *Soul of the Cypress* (1921) and several of Ingram's films. But shared influences notwithstanding, Ingram resists classification as a "minor" filmmaker in the way that James uses the term to describe Murphy's work in the early 1920s: the type of art cinema that Ingram represented positioned itself as exceptional but not marginal or peripheral.⁵

Ingram was neither the first nor the only director of this generation to compose beautiful pictures onscreen, but he stood out in critical publicity as well as promotional material. His releases were perennial favorites in publications devoted to "better films." These publications traded in his reputation, much of which he fashioned himself, as a visual artist working in the medium of film. I take this self-fashioning seriously here by situating it within an intellectual history not typically associated with motion pictures. By considering parallel movements in aesthetic education, it becomes possible to understand how Ingram contributed to a definition of art cinema beyond his adoption of techniques of pictorial composition. What made these techniques not appear inchoate and haphazard—indeed, what made them appear to define cinema's aesthetic maturity—were the parallel efforts to make sense of Ingram as a director who worked like a sculptor or a painter in an art studio. His myths of origin and his contact with other arts institutions affected the way his films could look, the way they could be discussed, and how they could be seen. This frame was just as important in the exchange between cinema and studio art as the pedigree of Ingram's film techniques.

CRAFT AND PICTURE IN THE STUDIO

Before discussing Ingram's career, let me take a moment to map out the conjunction of two main concepts in my understanding of Ingram's importance as a figure for early art cinema: craft and picture. Even broadly conceived to include commercial extensions and educational programs, American craft traditions—including the Arts and Crafts movement most prominently among them—are not typically understood to have had a major influence on early Hollywood. A direct influence can be found among some art directors and designers of publicity material. But even here, if we consider only the borrowing of styles in, say,

Hugo Ballin's production design for Goldwyn in the late 1910s, Arts and Crafts remained more or less a minor mode. And yet, the aesthetic questions posed by craft practitioners and educators often resurface among American filmmakers and film critics. Lanternists drew from craft rhetoric to sell the magic lantern as a tool for producing composed transitions and handmade movement over mechanized motion pictures.⁶ The *Craftsman* magazine ran articles about the craftsmanship of pictures by photographer/filmmaker Edward Curtis. Film advertisers used Arts and Crafts design clichés even when the films themselves bore none of the traces of this style. Critical writing on motion pictures mobilized discourse on craft beginning with early articles in *Moving Picture World* by Louis Reeves Harrison. This tendency reached a high point in the 1910s and early 1920s with book-length manuals with titles like *Screencraft*, *The Technique of the Photoplay*, and *Cinema Craftsmanship* by (respectively) Harrison, Epes Winthrop Sargent, and Frances Taylor Patterson.⁷ These authors' aesthetic prescriptions varied, but it is significant that they each evoke an idea of craft. The instances of employing ideas of craft in this period, whether for critical or promotional ends, share a history. By shifting our focus from the borrowing of film styles to intellectual history, the influence of craft traditions becomes much more visible. This approach is only fair when considering that even the Arts and Crafts movement, strictly defined, provided more than a battery of recognizable styles. Its practitioners posed philosophical questions about the role of aesthetics in democracy and the function of craft labor in modernity. In other words, craft traditions influenced film promotion, education, and criticism more than they influenced film style. Beyond a specific set of stylistic traits, they provided an intellectual frame for mediating a range of stylized films.

There was something intuitive in the colloquial sense of the word *craft* for thinking about film as an everyday vernacular medium. But this application was also problematic. Craft redefined labor in response to an industrial age by emphasizing the knowledge of processes and technologies specific to a medium. Such a model suited moving pictures' search for a medium identity but had to contend with the fact that film technology exemplified, to many people, the destruction of that very knowledge. The work of the moving-image maker, as work, was a vexed issue in part because of film's connection to the very mechanization of art that craft movements rejected. Thus, the discourse of craft in moving pictures had the paradoxical task of defining aesthetic work within a medium that threatened to take it away. To do this, it turned not to the question of cinema's radical newness, but instead to cinema's intermedial connections to the work of other artists and artisans. Ideas of craft established one set of coordinates whereby cinematic technologies could fit into longer histories of printing technologies or education in design. Moving pictures could make a

claim for a medium identity expressed like other craft media: in terms of effort, executed through mastered processes, over time.

The themes of intermediality and craft in early Hollywood converge around the intellectual history of picture composition. Composition was on many art educators' minds at the turn of the century and had distinct advantages for early attempts to define artistic cinema. First, anchoring education in the fundamentals of pictorial design facilitated interchange among media. Pictorial traditions linked together otherwise divergent styles of theater, tableau performance, illustration, painting, photography, and the cinema in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pictures had a common set of formal cues, temporalities, and modes of address that were translatable across a variety of media. Historians of American art education such as Peter Smith and Mary Ann Stankiewicz have provided detailed maps of the tradition that became known as "picture study," in which educators often made a point of showing the same principles of composition at work in objects as unrelated as antique guitars, ancient frescoes, and modern shop window displays.⁸ From here, critics interested in the aesthetics of cinema could extend the multimedia ambitions of picture study to their medium. If storytelling offered one means of exchange between cinema and the other arts, picture composition offered a viable, art-school-friendly alternative.

The second, equally beneficial advantage of composition for moving pictures was that it maintained a sense of art as applied skill. Composition still registered as the execution of skilled labor, even as it abstracted art education from the muscle memory of apprentices carving models or grinding pigments. It is no coincidence that slides of artists in the workshop proliferated in lectures on aesthetic composition, or that art educators like William Merritt Chase, founding instructor at the school that became Parsons, or John Ferguson Weir, founding director of the School of Fine Arts at Yale, counted the artist's studio among their favorite scenes to paint. There was usually a pedagogical dimension to these images of the studio. Painters of studio scenes attempted, alongside mythologies of the artists, to make the work of painting and sculpture visible. The link between picture composition and craft is particularly strong in theories of picture study as it energized American art education at the turn of the century. Picture study integrated ideas of picture and craft as a means of breaking down some of the aesthetic hierarchies carried over from nineteenth-century schools. As Stankiewicz shows, picture-study lectures in the United States had since the 1880s appropriated John Ruskin's and William Morris's principles of craft labor.⁹

Picture study and theories of composition, as a kind of abstracted craft labor, streamlined art education. Their influence in the United States ranged

from university art schools like the program at Harvard, to secondary education training programs like Columbia University's Teachers College, to public lectures at civic institutions. Pictorial composition offered a model by which educational institutions could effectively cooperate, by which lantern art slide collections could be put to work predictably, and by which (even its more conservative proponents had to admit) art education remained open to new media technologies.¹⁰ For motion pictures, the cross-media reach of these theories also anchored the new medium in art history. It might not seem unusual to describe the advent of motion pictures as a moment in which traditions of representation were radically cast aside, but the more fine-grained work of silent-film historians often reveals that it is hard to disentangle aesthetic rupture from aesthetic continuity. This is certainly the case here, where centuries-long pictorial traditions energized motion pictures. Nineteenth-century notions of craft, pictorial contemplation, empathy, and the picturesque intertwined with the dynamic energy of the medium.¹¹

The early interest in aesthetic cinema had multiple sources. It linked several groups, including critics, educators, publicity departments, and filmmakers. And when these diverse cross-media groups interested in art cinema faced the challenge of finding common ground, they often turned to discourses of turn-of-the-century pictorial and craft traditions. The events surrounding the release of *Scaramouche*, placed in context with Ingram's rise as a prestige director, are particularly rich in this regard because the film became the centerpiece of a discussion among major figures from these various groups. Since no one could deny Ingram's bonds with the art studio, his biography provided a very direct way to link cinema with the other arts. It allowed the advocate of early art cinema to imagine the film set as somehow analogous to the artist's workshop.¹² The director's pictorial work could easily resonate with the aesthetic craft of molding clay, turning wood, or mixing pigments in the studios of previous generations.

RETURN TO THE ARTIST'S STUDIO: SHAPING MYTHS OF ORIGIN

Ingram's position between cinema and the other arts was built on exceptional myths of origin. Known in the press as a "sculptor of the screen," his work in film always managed to point back to the 1912–13 academic year that he spent studying sculpture at Yale. This training proved valuable in a number of ways. There were potential financial advantages to Ingram's association with the first university art school in the nation.¹³ A critic could read strategy, for both Yale and Metro, in Ingram's statement that, "As time went on I began to realize how valuable my training in the art school was going to prove."¹⁴ Film producers could benefit from a director with an Ivy League art education, and

college administrators could benefit from alumni in Hollywood. Some evidence supports this position. Yale awarded Ingram a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1921, with one year of completed course work (three years was the requirement), only after he had become a famous director. Ingram, along with several of his celebrators to be discussed in the section on *Scaramouche*, maintained, of course, that the value of his association with Yale was in his formal training: “I had gained an understanding of the laws that govern perspective, composition, balance, construction, form and the distribution of light and shade, thanks to repeated lectures on these subjects.”¹⁵ Rather than seeing these two interpretations as being at odds with one another, it is important to see how both aspects of Ingram’s association with Yale’s art school were intertwined. Knowledge of light and shade may be useful, but not in itself. Producers and critics had to find ways to frame film techniques so that they registered for audiences as part of film’s kinship with the other arts. And even an interpretation of his arts training as a cynical marketing strategy would be lacking if it did not account for how his publicity accessed a tradition of representing the artist’s work space and a specific language of composition. In either case, Ingram’s myths of origin helped frame the labor of art so that it would include cinema.

While these efforts reached a high point in the early 1920s, they were present at every stage of his career. Ingram often cited a New Haven screening of the Vitagraph quality adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1911) as his inspiration to enter motion pictures: “I brought several friends of mine, most of them either students of the art school, or members of the Yale Dramatic association, the following day to see the picture. . . . All of us decided thereupon to enter the motion picture field.”¹⁶ This anecdote served him well, as Vitagraph was his first steady employer, and his interest in promoting himself as a sculptor of the screen began there, years before he had the opportunity to direct his art films for Universal’s Bluebird brand and then for Metro. This early identity as an artist of the screen was conveyed onscreen rather than behind the camera. He seemed to have been seeking out opportunities to show his knowledge of an artist’s studio. He gravitated toward artist roles (usually sculptors) in Vitagraph films including *The Artist’s Great Madonna* (1913), *The Spirit and the Clay* (1914), and *Eve’s Daughter* (1914) (fig. 1). Whether he chose these roles or they were chosen for him because of his experience, Ingram’s study of fine arts provided an uncommon point of entry into cinema.¹⁷ His early work in front of the camera shows the link between the artist stereotypes in fictional illustration and a more material fascination with the trappings and processes of the studio in educational material. Films with aesthetic ambitions made use of both of these popular types of studio imagery. Ingram was not singular among directors in this regard, but he was exceptional in the extent of his familiarity with the artist’s studio.



Fig. 1: Rex Ingram plays a sculptor in *The Spirit and the Clay* (1914).

Just as exceptional was Ingram's connection to the craft traditions to which several critics and early art-film directors paid some degree of deference. Fresh out of art school and eager to combine work in decorative and fine arts, he followed the teachings of Arts and Crafts educators in an exemplary fashion. In addition to drawing and sculpting, he studied the decorative arts and Persian poetry. Although never published, he spent some time in the mid-1910s tinkering with his own translation of Omar Khayamm's *Rubaiyat*, an aesthete staple. In a 1915 letter to his aunt in Ireland, after describing his experiences working at Vitagraph, Ingram expresses his great ambitions to found his own Arts and Crafts colony. "I'm going to buy an old castle on the West Coast—I have a number of talented friends—and I would like to start a place like William Morris where artists, sculptors, writers, designers, interior decorators could turn out really fine works with the commercial interest—while in good hands—being of second importance."¹⁸ He framed this as a desire to help bring the Arts and Crafts traditions of Morris and Ruskin to the United States, but the movement was already deeply influencing the art departments at American universities. He was just as likely to have encountered Morris's work at Yale than anywhere else. His real contribution would, of course, be to Hollywood and not to the Arts and Crafts movement, but this early formulation of what constitutes an arts community still benefitted him in the industry.

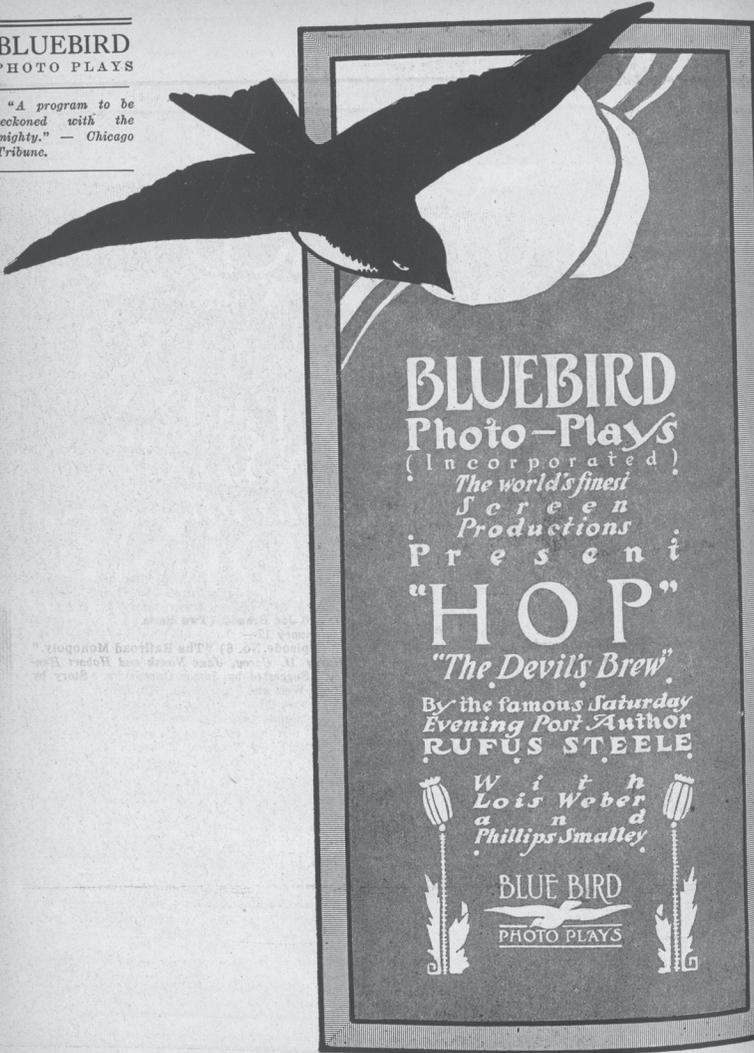
Film studio interest in craft movements was minor, but some silent film companies incorporated traces of recognizable styles or paid lip service to aesthetic workmanship as a marker of prestige. These traces are evident in the work of art directors, in suggestive company names like Artcraft, and in the design of promotional material.¹⁹ Universal made use of the potential of Arts and Crafts design for branding groups of films. As part of his analysis of Universal's prestige labels, Mark Cooper notes that Bluebird's brand identity took priority over other elements of its films.²⁰ Bluebird advertisements avoided pictures of stars and described film plots only telegraphically. If the Bluebird label sought to distinguish itself by diverging from standard pictorial publicity, its choice of design is revealing. Its style clearly draws on American Arts and Crafts graphics that were taught around the country. The Bluebird logo is prominent in the print ads, but so are the flat, monochromatic clouds and backgrounds sometimes printed in the rich yellows and blues common among Arts and Crafts groups like the Roycrofters. The layout of the ads often seems to replicate the decorative cover designs of the little magazines, which were important venues for the transatlantic circulation of the movement's designs. The Bluebird ad for *Hop, the Devil's Brew* (1916), singled out by Cooper for its distinctive labeling, includes an Arts and Crafts typeface flanked by ornamental poppy seed pods, which were almost clichés of Arts and Crafts design (fig. 2). The designers of Universal's Bluebird ads did not simply differentiate this publicity from the usual trade-paper copy with more decoration. They appropriated some of the Arts and Crafts movement's most recognizable iconography. As Universal increased its institutional reach and industrial organization, it sought to brand some of its films as craft products. By promoting himself as a student of the movement, Ingram fit this brand perfectly and became one of Bluebird's regular directors. In this way, albeit perhaps not the way he had originally intended, Ingram did help to bring William Morris's influence to a castle on the West Coast.

As he gained recognition as a director, Ingram actively framed his film work through his apprenticeship in an artist's workshop. He had spent his most valued time at Yale studying with and later assisting Lee Lawrie, the only professor of sculpture and modeling in the department.²¹ As an architectural sculptor who would be remembered primarily for his art-deco figure of Atlas outside Rockefeller Center, Lawrie offered a model of aesthetic craft labor. Ingram made frequent reference to his mentorship with Lawrie, beginning with his discussions with producers at Bluebird and Metro. The press really began to talk about Ingram's mentorship under Lawrie during the production of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921). Before the release, journals commissioned artists to review the film, like San Francisco sculptor Edgar Walters, who described why he would have known that *Four Horsemen* was made by a trained sculptor even

2 — THE MOVING PICTURE WEEKLY —

BLUEBIRD
PHOTO PLAYS

"A program to be reckoned with the mighty." — *Chicago Tribune.*



BLUEBIRD
Photo-Plays
(Incorporated)
The world's finest
Screen
Productions
Present
"HOP"
"The Devil's Brew"
By the famous *Saturday*
Evening Post Author
RUFUS STEELE
With
Lois Weber
and
Phillips Smalley

BLUE BIRD
PHOTO PLAYS

Fig. 2: Advertisement for *Hop, The Devil's Brew* (1916). From *Moving Picture Weekly*, January 29, 1916. (Courtesy Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences)

if he had not known who had made the film.²² Reviews like these served as a preamble to an elaborate integration of artist's studio and set.

The film represented a significant investment by Metro, and it would quickly become Ingram's most successful film. Adding to the fanfare of a Lyric Theater premiere, Metro requested not only that Lawrie participate, but also that he create a specially commissioned sculpture of the Four Horsemen for the lobby display.²³ The company printed photographs of Lawrie's "Four Horsemen" on the invitations and later used it in publicity material for the film (fig. 3). The public fanfare continued when Ingram presented the sculpture as a gift to Vicente Blasco Ibañez, who wrote the novel adapted by June Mathis for Ingram (and for Rudolph Valentino).²⁴ Lawrie also designed cutout lobby displays for *The Four Horsemen*. Images of his sculpture circulated, as did publicity stills of Ingram showing Valentino how to look natural in an artist's studio. Ingram was a sculptor working in film, he featured sculptures in his films, and he exhibited sculpture at his film premieres—all to help convince his audience that he made films with a sculptor's sense of form in a space that worked like a fine-arts studio.

If Lawrie's cardboard cutout display suggests the value of his sculptural labor in motion-picture publicity stunts, it is important to remember that the benefits of this connection worked both ways. The publicity surrounding *Four Horsemen* produced not just an air of artiness for films of a certain type of ambition. It also produced an actual degree for Ingram, a BFA from the oldest and most established university arts program in the country. Yale administrators made clear that this was not an honorary degree. They voted to recognize Ingram's film as work appropriate toward a degree in art.²⁵ In framing the degree in this way, the Yale art program could go beyond claiming a celebrity alumnus (and the donations that they rightly assumed would result from this recognition) and toward a systematic recognition of aesthetic cinema. The local paper agreed: "In conferring the degree of bachelor of fine arts on Mr. Ingram Yale comes forward as the first university to officially recognize artistic achievement in the art of the silent drama."²⁶ The release of *Four Horsemen* staged a moment of institutional contact in which a film studio and a studio art program looked to each other in search of an expanded aesthetic remit.

Again, this is not to say that Ingram's schooling and mentorship did not have the effect on his visual style that he claimed. Yale had a great art school, and the thirty-year correspondence between Lawrie and Ingram in Lawrie's papers does reveal a wealth of discussion about art. The correspondence includes sustained discussions of their aesthetic inclinations and of particular artworks as they exchanged photographs of these works taken during their travels.²⁷ Ingram did not fabricate his aesthetic training and interest in art history. But

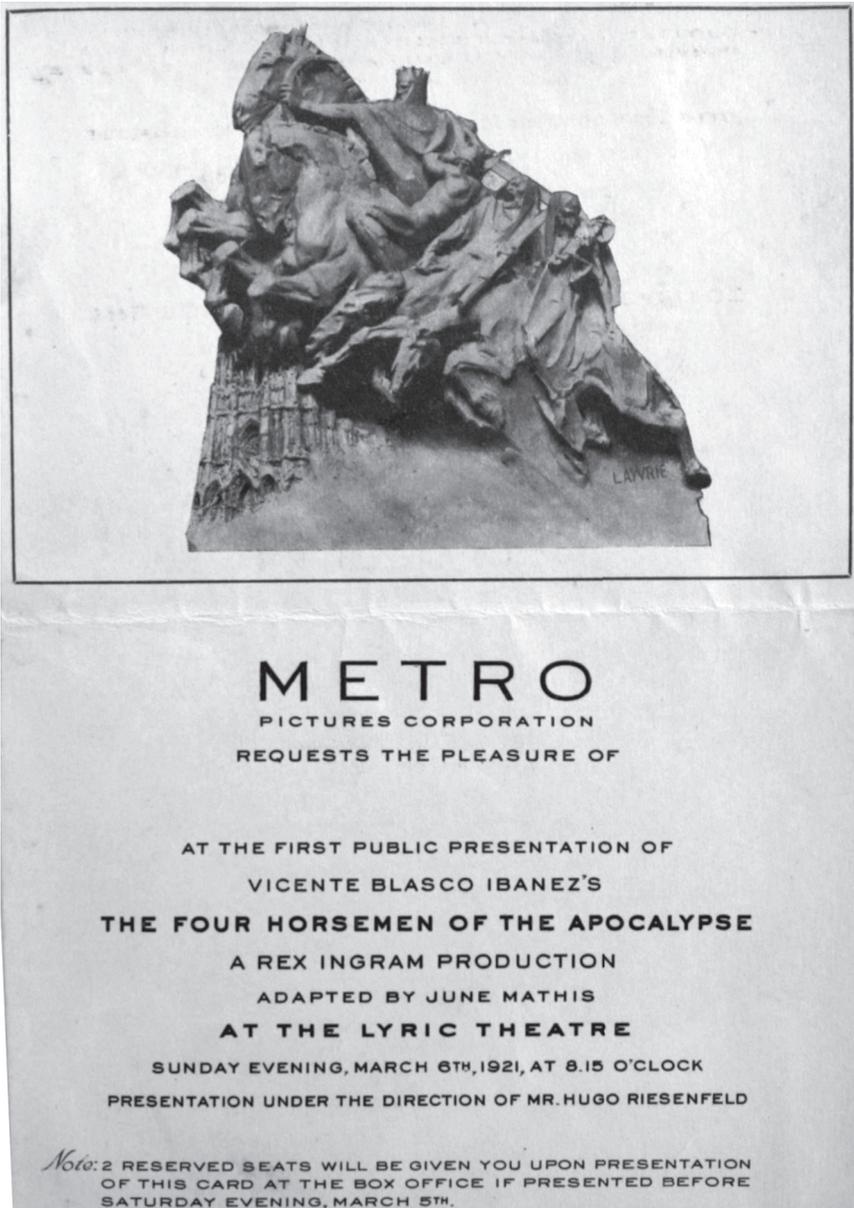


Fig. 3: Invitation to the New York premiere of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921). Lee Lawrie created the sculpture featured here and in the publicity material for the film.

this training was not training in film technique, and even his most stylized cinema compositions, while referencing painting, borrow more directly from media with a closer material proximity: from the stage, from photography, and even from popular illustration. No matter how much Ingram argued to the contrary, art school was still not a practical first step toward learning the craft of a director. It certainly could be for an art director who worked with paint on set. The fantastic set designer Ben Carré trained as a painter before taking his first film studio job at Éclair, as did Hugo Ballin and Cedric Gibbons, who both attended the Art Students League of New York before they went to work for Goldwyn. But there was little technical advantage for Ingram to begin making films with this schooling.

When critics, former mentors, and the director himself mythologized Ingram's formative work as a visual artist, they helped to guide products of the filmmaking profession toward traditions of pictorial appreciation in American universities, lyceums, and art institutes. These strategies became increasingly thorough as Ingram took on higher-profile positions at Universal and Metro. The general importance of his background emerged alongside the viability of its exploitation. This publicity generally benefitted most of the films he made during this time of growth for his career. But each film had its own idiosyncrasies in its cross-media promotion. The next two sections offer examples of Ingram's filmmaking techniques and a case study of an uncommon film promotion to demonstrate in finer detail the kinds of cultural exchange enabled by someone positioned as a studio artist at work in early Hollywood.

FROM EXCEPTIONAL STYLE TO CROSS-MEDIA APPRECIATION

As a director working within a frame of art cinema, Ingram depended on a collection of techniques that encouraged viewers and critics to make analogies with painting and sculpture. From his early work in the 1910s on, he included a particularly dense concentration of pictorial techniques that stood out as compositions. He paced films slowly and arranged actors pictorially, in tableaux. When actors moved, he directed their movements less as actions than as composed, moving lines. When he staged scenes in depth, he usually layered their compositions to create an effect, not so much of unified depth but of overlapping picture planes. These compositions yielded strong foregrounds, which served as pictorial framing devices, arching over the central image in the distance. The lighting choices in Ingram's films further separated these planes and the lavish décor that filled them. He lit from the sides and from below a figure, and often used beams of light from lamps and windows to offset parts of the composition. While these techniques may not have formed a foundation for a stylized art-film movement, in Ingram's case they reinforced the larger mythology of the

artist-turned-director and allowed some writers of the time to position his films within the discursive field of art appreciation.²⁸

Ingram could not really claim priority or ownership for these techniques, as they were in circulation within many European film studios. All the better to compare his work with the imports from Germany and Scandinavia that competed for space in better-films publications. These techniques also circulated within prestige divisions of film companies in the United States. A description of his *mise-en-scène* techniques for *Bluebird* might just as easily describe Cecil B. DeMille's Paramount-Artcraft films. Ingram's battery of techniques parallels and most certainly responds to the success of productions like *Carmen* (1915), one of many films DeMille made in collaboration with cinematographer Alvin Wyckoff and art director Wilfred Buckland. The strong shadows and pointed light in Ingram's *Bluebirds* only gain significance alongside DeMille's self-promotions, in which he claimed (like the long line of art photographers before him) to have singlehandedly brought artificial film lighting to the level of Rembrandt. Ingram's recently rediscovered *Bluebird* production *Chalice of Sorrow* (1916) bears evidence of this cross-pollination of techniques among art filmmakers. It is perhaps not so much influenced by the techniques imported from the stage by Lasky-Paramount as it is a borrowing of ideas about how to package these techniques. *Chalice* was released a year after *Carmen*, the same year that Charlie Chaplin piggybacked on the DeMille film's notoriety with his *Burlesque on Carmen*. Not only did Ingram adapt a similar opera of a diva's tragic death—in this case, *Tosca*—into a screen melodrama, but he also transposed Puccini's story from Italy to Mexico, which allowed him to create scenes that came closer to DeMille's interpretation of Bizet's settings in *Carmen*. Ingram's penchant for shooting *Tosca* framed in archways and staging the performances in depth could be generally said to mirror some of the stylistic choices in *Carmen*. But more directly, certain scenes like those shot on a sloped, arid hill with a low horizon line, or those in which the diva stands with soldiers in front of a crumbling colonial wall, verge on obvious citation of the Lasky *Carmen*. These were the same iconic locations that Chaplin burlesqued, even poking fun at the film's pictorial style in the process. Whether for satire or for art-film recognition, each film plays with the same network of references.²⁹

Ingram developed close and long-lasting working relationships with famous art directors and cinematographers who reinforced the conception of him as an artist of the screen while they shaped what would become known as the director's exceptional style. If DeMille had Buckland and Wyckoff, Ingram had the editor Grant Whytcock at Universal and the cinematographer John F. Seitz at the beginning of his tenure at Metro. The prestige picture departments in which Ingram began his career encouraged collaborative teams involving

people like Seitz. And while these collaborators' public reputations as screen painters did not reach the same level as the director's—their discussions of the idea of the art film did not circulate much beyond the trade press—Seitz clearly influenced the ways these films addressed the public as fine-art films. In an interview, Seitz described his compatibility with Ingram, the trained artist, as instantaneous: "He liked the way that I worked and the form and modeling he saw in the lighting—as you know he was a sculptor."³⁰ Seitz goes on to describe their early acquaintance as a process of looking through hundreds of stills from their previous films and discussing what makes a strong composition. In the films they made together, they favored strong contrasts and side lighting to give dimensionality to sets and faces. This emphasis on modeling—a lighting technique named in analogy to sculpture—superseded other priorities, like showcasing the star. Other directors and cinematographers were more likely to use shadowy close-ups for villains or the supernatural. Ingram and Seitz used them to light leading actors like Ramon Novarro and Alice Terry. They traded lush and flattering star lighting for compositional interest and reference to the other arts. This tradeoff did not escape the notice of other technicians on set. The convention-bound still photographers often corrected Ingram's and Seitz's pictorial excesses. They shot the actors in the tableaux from the films but, more often than Seitz's setups for the actual scenes, they bathed the stars' faces in even light.³¹

In his study of the development of Hollywood lighting, Patrick Keating identifies Seitz, particularly during the time he worked with Ingram, as a central figure in what he calls the "mechanics-to-artists" narrative that transformed the cinematographer's profession in the late 1910s and early 1920s.³² Seitz had become one of the most famous cinematographers in the world by the early 1920s, and this success helped mark a point of divergence from the older "technicians" toward the rhetoric of artistry in cinematography. Moreover, Seitz stakes this distinction between artist and technician on a hierarchy of genre: "The Cinematographer in the dramatic field is more of a photographer and less of a cinematographer than the comedy cameraman[;] his action contains less of the physical and more of the mental[;] consequently he is concerned less with motion and more with lighting and tone. . . . [P]erfection can only be attained by men who, through long, patient experience, have gained that fine sensitiveness so necessary to produce the exact tone and quality needed, and this is the cinematographic art."³³ In this address to his colleagues, Seitz explicitly favored the drama over other genres like comedy or the actuality, and he implicitly favored the prestige features through which he and Ingram had established themselves in the industry.³⁴ Seitz's distinction should be qualified here since, as Hilde D'haeyere demonstrates, several cameramen behind Mack Sennett

Comedies helped to form the American Society of Cinematographers and thus played an essential role in professionalizing the craft of cinematography.³⁵ The generic distinction between comedy cinematographers and dramatic ones may only have worked for Seitz as a way to mark his professional turf. But whether or not he was successful in moving his favored genre to the top of the professional hierarchy, his strategy for doing so fell in line with the art-film campaigns that endorsed stylized scenes composed in relation to the other (static) pictorial arts. Seitz's evocation of tone over motion was not so different from the *Exceptional Photoplays* review cited earlier. To promote art cinematography, Seitz recalled (pictorial) photography, which further recalled the techniques and themes of the paintings circulating in institutions of art education.

My aim in isolating these recycled painterly and sculptural techniques is less to trace how they became established practice and more to show how they helped figure a certain relationship between cinema and art at this time. Considered together, Ingram and his collaborators' battery of techniques seem scattered at best. They resist coherent aesthetic pedigrees. Here is where the intellectual history of composition, as a kind of craft, reveals the work it could do for cinema. Composition offered a common language, a set of principles that were flexible enough to frame eclectic techniques and irregular institutional collaborations. This language moved freely from art education to film education to Ingram's own words. In his 1922 essay on "Motion Picture Directing," Ingram uses illustrations of Lawrie's sculptures, including his piece for the *Four Horsemen* premiere, as examples of the properties of composition. Artists like Lawrie, Gustave Doré, and John Singer Sargent demonstrate, Ingram suggests, those principles of modeling, line, light, and shade that he claimed to translate from clay and paint to film. The essay's conclusions are useful but not necessarily in a direct way. Ingram's essay recalls the cinema composition manuals of educators and critics, and like those manuals, his essay seems to move in two directions at once. He ostensibly advises prospective film workers about "how to qualify for positions in the film industry's many branches."³⁶ But at the same time, he offers an idealized craft-based notion of design appreciation, more or less useless from a practical perspective. The essay's publication history also reflects its crossed purposes. Ingram published the essay twice in 1922: once in a magazine for art appreciation and again under the auspices of the Bureau of Vocational Guidance.³⁷ The art magazine gave the lie to the manual. Like art educator Arthur Dow's drawing manuals and film educator Victor Freeburg's film "manual" compiled from his Columbia University lectures on pictorial beauty on the screen, practical guidance functioned better as a ruse for cultivating aesthetic appreciation of workmanship than as a primer for attaining work in the medium. If Ingram's essay had a practical effect, it was with appreciators

of cinema. Not only did Ingram make an effort to speak the language of the picture study tradition in art education, but he also made an effort to enter the debates that sought to link this tradition to cinema. His essay on directing is addressed more to participants in these debates (like Freeburg) than to ambitious production assistants. The following year, after the release of *Scaramouche*, Ingram wrote a brief piece for Freeburg himself, to be used as a prefatory note to the latter's *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen* (1923).³⁸ The aesthetic of composition carried real promise for filmmaker and critic alike. With its intermedial reach, composition theory aided early art-film discourse much in the same way that it aided design education. It suited the reputation of a modern sculptor at work in Metro's studios.

SCARAMOUCHE, OR CONVERGENCE

By the 1920s, the trajectory of the art film that had launched Ingram's career in the 1910s began to connect very different kinds of institutions. From the perspective of the industry, film companies were increasingly moving from local stunt promotion to a more networked and synchronized form of publicity. The move to the kind of publicity seen, for example, in the tie-in stories that newspapers ran in synchronization with film serials affected prestige films as well. Successful newspaper tie-ins did not escape the notice of book publishers eager to promote other tie-ins, like photo-illustrated novels. Mass-marketed films with aesthetic credentials could respond to the challenges of some of the earlier, more rigid attempts to market quality films. But pressure was also coming from another direction. From the perspective of educational and evaluative organizations, an aesthetic approach was gaining momentum. Organizations like the National Board of Review (NBR) saw it as their mission to combat censorship in favor of a model of democracy building through aesthetic education. Again, when these diverse cross-media interests came together and formed committees, they often found a common language in the aesthetics of composition.

Aesthetic reform was a thorny issue for organizations that sought to speak for big films and mainstream tastes. The NBR's motto was "aesthetic, not moralistic censorship." "For pictures have not sinned morally, as the proponents of censorship would have us think. They have sinned aesthetically." In making such statements, the NBR had to be careful to define its approach to aesthetics as "healthy" and "vigorous." As this article from the NBR's 1921 *Exceptional Photoplays* newsletter clarifies, "the trouble is that when the word 'aesthetic' is used, it is popularly supposed that one means a quality of pale pink unwholesomeness, or else that one is palely pink and unwholesome for using the word."³⁹ The author euphemistically refers to mauve, the color most clearly associated with late-Victorian decadence, a strain of British aestheticism that

had a strong influence on American artists like Richard Hovey and F. Holland Day. Here *mauve* is a phobic term that refers to a certain type of art, as well as to those who would appreciate it. The NBR and *Exceptional Photoplays* sought to keep their aesthetic principles distinct from decadence and its perceived links with epicureanism, excess, and same-sex desire.

In this context, a film could prove viable if it could appeal to these two forces that helped define and market the idea of the art film in the early 1920s: to certain organizations formed to market art films as well as to those organizations formed to evaluate better films. *Scaramouche*, it turned out, satisfied these often-conflicted interests better than any of Ingram's other films at Metro. The film does not really stand out as either the most profitable or the "mauve" of his Metro productions; *The Four Horsemen* secured better returns, and in *Trifling Women* (1922), the *New York Times* observed, "Mr. Ingram has surely let his pictorial fancy run free."⁴⁰ But *Scaramouche* created its own kind of sensation. It became a lightning rod for debate, a result of having become a finalist for a \$10,000 prize in Adolph Zukor's new legitimacy campaign. Zukor had invited a number of well-known writers and visual artists that summer to participate in the Motion Picture Arts Congress, a symposium on the artistic development of the motion picture. He had been promoting the conference for several months in the popular and trade press, and in these promotions he made gestures to the Royal Academy of the Arts in London. The conference would represent, in Zukor's revision of Matthew Arnold's maxim, "the best in American thought and American taste."⁴¹ The conference predated the formation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) by a few years and, although there are more direct precursors to AMPAS in the mid-1920s, Zukor's efforts did respond to a similar need.⁴²

The press covered some of the conference proceedings, including audience polls at Paramount theaters, outreach programs that accompanied the official judging, and the search for delegates from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia.⁴³ But journalists focused their attention on Zukor's \$10,000 cash prize for best literary adaptation. Zukor appointed a committee of judges out of several conference participants, including the illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, the novelist Mary Roberts Reinhardt, and *Life* magazine film critic Robert Emmet Sherwood. Their task was to apply the principles discussed at the conference to the year's releases and select one film adapted from a novel. The novelist, not the director, would then receive the \$10,000 award. *Scaramouche* eventually won, and Zukor held a prize ceremony for the source novel's author, Rafael Sabatini. In the competition for recognition that ensued, Nicholas Schenck, president of Metro, immediately downplayed Sabatini's role and claimed credit for his company. Upon announcement of the prize, Schenck wrote Zukor to

thank him for speaking “so highly of Mr. Ingram’s Metro-Goldwyn production of ‘Scaramouche,’ which won the award for Mr. Sabatini. We are exceedingly proud of the honor you personally and the judges who acted on your behalf conferred to Mr. Ingram’s picture.”⁴⁴

Conditions of the prize seem oddly planned for a company with such an established history of publicity stunts and appeals to esteemed cultural institutions like Columbia University. The prize was evidently not meant to encourage directors or scenario writers, as the money was given to Sabatini, but neither did it encourage novelists to write with the screen in mind. As film educator and NBR member Frances Patterson complained in the *New York Times*, Sabatini’s *Scaramouche* had no real connection to the screen, and the prize did not foster these possible connections for up-and-coming authors: “Mr. Zukor realizes that the true photoplay medium is not wordcraft but picturecraft. . . . Here, then was a rare opportunity for the judges to show their appreciation of actual creative effort on the screen . . . ‘but,’ say the judges, ‘the prize is to go to a storyteller.’”⁴⁵ Moreover, in Sabatini’s personal correspondence with Zukor, he admitted (rather arrogantly) to complete ignorance of the fact that his *Scaramouche* was a finalist until he read that he had won the prize in a Paris newspaper.⁴⁶ If there was some small potential for coaxing novelists toward the screen, Zukor did not exploit it. The literary community seems to have been left out of the loop. It was an award for a film, posing as an award for a novel. Sabatini received the prize money, but Patterson gave Ingram the credit, as the value of the film, she maintained, “has derived from the beauty of composition and the grace of rhythm that marks all the work of Rex Ingram.”⁴⁷

Zukor’s motivation for configuring the award as he did can be explained in part by his increased interest in book publicity in the early 1920s. In a response to antitrust pressure from the Federal Trade Commission (also discussed in Mark Lynn Anderson’s contribution to this issue), Paramount had moved from distribution strategies like its “Star Series” form of block booking to a pricing system based purely on the popularity of individual titles, and Zukor and Lasky pursued avenues whereby this title recognition could be established in advance. Zukor announced several tie-in strategies to famous novels in trade journals. A publicized award to a popular novelist could be seen as simply one of these strategies. This tie-in strategy worked for exhibitors and booksellers, too. Beginning in the 1910s, several book publishers partnered with film production companies to run novel editions illustrated with production stills from their film adaptations. At the height of this phenomenon in the mid-1920s, nearly every possibility for tying a major production to a “photoplay edition” release was exploited. The publishing company of Grossett and Dunlap led this effort by a large margin (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Tie-in book display for *Scaramouche* (1923) at the Fremont Theatre in Ohio. (*Moving Picture World*, March 15, 1924)

Sabatini's novels were exceptionally well suited to promotions like Zukor's, which "celebrate," Vachel Lindsay only half-complained, "cooperation between vigorous novel writing, good film production and hearty bookstore cooperation."⁴⁸ Sabatini's novels worked in this context because they were able to serve both commercial and educational constituencies. They were solid bestsellers, but just as importantly, the novels found their way onto the reading lists for high school classes across the United States, diversifying their reader demographics.⁴⁹ *Scaramouche* contributed to high school and community lessons in the history of the French Revolution, which no doubt put to good pedagogical use the novel's

often-ponderous historical details and French idiomatic expressions. As a result, *Scaramouche* ranked among the most successful of Grossett and Dunlap's photoplay editions. It was the only novel (out of the hundreds on the series lists) that Grossett and Dunlap released in two different editions, each with its own set of illustrations taken from the film production.⁵⁰ The display of these editions accompanied the exhibition of the film. Bookstores set up displays with production stills from the film, and many offered free tickets to see the film with a purchase of the novel. Likewise, theater lobbies advertised the film with gigantic display books. In 1923–24, *Moving Picture World* documented these book-themed lobby displays at cinemas from Victoria, British Columbia, to Rio de Janeiro.

Zukor's conference and prize also sustained the attention of the National Board of Review. An editorial in the 1923 Fall-Summer issue of *Exceptional Photoplays* entitled "What Will Be the Result?" aligned the conference with the goals of the NBR to foster intellectual discussion of the cinema.⁵¹ The article expressed some cynicism about the prize's relation to common publicity stunts, but it also recognized how a productive discussion of film aesthetics could happen by way of this particular stunt. The author noted that the "brisk exchange of ideas overshadowed the publicity aspects of the congress" and concluded that Zukor's prize could work as an experiment to determine the result of some of these ideas on institutions of filmmaking and film criticism. The editors knew, after all, that the mandates of their journal and of Zukor's prize remained in close step with one another—so close that the same issue that ended with the editorial on the Zukor prize also began with the featured review of *Scaramouche*, not entirely coincidentally. The *Scaramouche* review not only predicted the winner of Zukor's competition; it also prefigured the general direction of the prize's critical reception, or "the result," in its insistence that film art is located in the work of pictorial composition.

The members of the NBR were far from alone in their assessment of Ingram's picture craft. Film critics in New York and across the country ensured that Ingram received the bulk of the publicity surrounding the prize, and they did so by continually returning to his fine-arts background and his principles of pictorial composition. Even Robert Emmet Sherwood, who headed the committee that selected *Scaramouche* for Zukor's prize, made several references in his reviews to Ingram's skill at crafting pictures. He said that any still taken from his films "would be worthy of praise for its pictorial qualities alone."⁵² In Sherwood's book *The Best Moving Pictures of 1922–23*, he offered a similar assessment of Ingram's *Prisoner of Zenda* (1922), noted the director's fine-arts credentials, and lamented that *Scaramouche* came out too late for inclusion in the book.⁵³ In privileging the film's pictures over its story, Sherwood betrayed the complicated motivations involved in offering the prize to Sabatini.



Fig. 5: Slavko Vorkapich's slow turn of the head as Napoleon in *Scaramouche* (1923). Ingram and Seitz used the sculptural metaphor of modeling to describe their close-ups of faces.

The critical reception of *Scaramouche*, as seen in the work of Sherwood, Patterson, Freeburg, and the Exceptional Photoplays Committee, supports my claim that pictorial composition and references to the works and work spaces of fine artists went hand in hand. A *Los Angeles Times* review of *Scaramouche* moved beyond Ingram's background and drew associations to other artists, noting that the film's "attraction is not that of drama but of beautiful and glorious pictures. Individual photographed shots recall the work of dozens of painters and sculptors."⁵⁴ Ingram's films and writings about film art directly reference several painters and sculptors, including Sargent's *Frieze of the Prophets* (1895) and Edouard Manet's *Woman with Parrot* (1866). The films "recalled," for many critics, the work of dozens more. *Scaramouche* benefited in this respect from the rich history of painting and sculpture about the French Revolution. These images were familiar among those whom Metro wanted to court, and at whom Zukor aimed his Motion Picture Arts Congress. Given this pictorial milieu, Ingram could easily steer pictorial techniques in close-ups and long shots toward traditions of painting and sculpture. The modeling in the film's star close-ups already gestured toward sculpture but not as directly as the brief cameo close-ups that had no anchor in developing characters. Ingram



Fig. 6: Battle scene from *Scaramouche* (1923)

and Seitz shot the young avant-gardist Slavko Vorkapich as Napoleon in this way. They dressed and positioned him to reference the well-known illustrations of Napoleon as a young officer, reprinted in his biographies (fig. 5). He slowly turns his head into the light in a gesture that resembles a contemplative pose from a screen test, bizarrely placed in the middle of a crowded, violent battle sequence. They essentially turn Vorkapich into a modeled bust of a historical figure whose likeness was well-known, particularly in the form of busts. Many of the crowd sequences, too, feature Ingram's favored gestures to the other arts. For references to painting, they use dark foregrounds, center lighting, and smoke in the background (fig. 6). Reviewers made connections from here to the smoke, lighting, and foregrounds in famous paintings by artists like Eugène Delacroix and Jacques-Louis David depicting the storming of the Bastille, the executions, and the National Assembly.

But to work as an adaptation of a Sabatini novel, and thus to maintain a distance from associations with epicurean decadence, *Scaramouche* also needed to register as an adventure film. Sabatini wrote action stories, subtitling this one "a romance of the French revolution." Sabatini's source material seemed to be the only major rival to Douglas Fairbanks's ubiquity in the adventure genre.⁵⁵



Fig. 7: Climactic duel staged within a pictorial frame and photographed from a distance in *Scaramouche* (1923)

Beyond *Scaramouche*, Sabatini had also provided the source novels for *The Sea Hawk* (1924) and *Captain Blood* (1924), and when the trade papers promoted the “picture values” of Sabatini’s novels, they were mainly referring to their action plots.⁵⁶ They affirmed that the author’s generic preferences happened to lean, as was true of Hollywood at this time, toward swashbuckling scenes that were exciting to watch. But the swashbuckler (one of the least “mauve” genres) and pictorialism were not necessarily considered mutually exclusive. For early film theorists and filmmakers with a sustained interest in the pictorial aspect of cinema, the composition of the moving body onscreen ranked among the most important concerns in their work.⁵⁷ This was certainly the case with Vachel Lindsay, for whom Fairbanks represented a type of filmmaking that spoke directly to these concerns. Following the announcement of *Scaramouche* as the winner of the prize, Lindsay began his second book of film criticism, from a hotel room in Spokane, as an open letter to Zukor and Sherwood and a song of praise to Douglas Fairbanks.

Ingram never made a film with Fairbanks, but in this adaptation of a Sabatini story, he comes closer to Lindsay’s pictorial requirements than the Fairbanks-focused Lindsay would admit. He carefully overlays pictorial

composition with active physical performance, but he does so in a way that likely disappointed Lindsay's fetish for the individual star's body. Ingram and Seitz shoot the climactic revenge swordfight in *Scaramouche* in a wide shot through two nested archways of a gothic cathedral (fig. 7). They place the camera even further away than in the opening fight which sets up the revenge plot. Instead of using frequent cut-ins, they enclose the duel within a pronounced, static frame, highlighting Ramon Novarro's action by having him step back through the archway, into the path of the light, as he dodges each lunge. Ingram and Seitz would repeat this fight-scene staging and lighting in later films like *Mare Nostrum* (1926). In each case, the films attempt to merge climactic, athletic performance with conspicuous style into a kind of strenuous pictorial composition. It is this approach to composition that made *Scaramouche* the focus of the *Exceptional Photoplays* article mentioned at the start of this essay. The reviewer claimed that each film "becomes something gripping beyond mere narration, . . . other than 'drama' melted down to glycerine tears and 'action' that blows up in frenzy."⁵⁸

Not exactly Lindsay's prescription. Ingram and Seitz's approach is much closer to Victor Freeburg's theory of cinema composition. By putting the action within—and as part of—the pictorial composition, by not relegating composition to the status of ornament, it is as if they were directly responding to Freeburg's rather impractical hope that great art films would eventually synchronize their climactic moments with their most artfully composed scenes. Freeburg thought that DeMille's *Carmen* left this hope unfulfilled. He wanted *Carmen*'s dramatic denouement to have been staged as a long-shot composition rather than as a series of edited medium shots. Ingram's films showed that Freeburg's prescription was possible. It does not seem surprising, then, that Freeburg mentions Ingram's films in his *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen* more frequently than any other director's, nor that Ingram wrote the prefatory note for Freeburg's book, in which the director reminds readers of the imperative "pictorial qualifications, such as form, composition, and a proper distribution of light and shade."⁵⁹ Ingram's work had influenced Freeburg's analysis, and it appears that Freeburg had some influence on him. While brief, the prefatory note does indicate at least some familiarity with Freeburg's work. The timing is right, too. Ingram completed his introductory note to *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen* on August 5, 1923. This was while he was completing *Scaramouche*, two months after the Motion Picture Arts Congress, just as the committee was beginning to deliberate on which films to consider for Zukor's prize.

Taken together, these diverse appropriations of Ingram's *Scaramouche* show that it is remarkable both for its conspicuous style and for the way it was introduced to the public. Or, more to the point, the film's inclusive pictorial style in many ways made its exceptional public debut possible. *Scaramouche*'s

style may have restricted its mass marketability in one sense. Its references to the pictorial history of the French Revolution, framed fight sequences, and crystallized “periods of signifying and revealing stillness” may have stifled the film’s blockbuster appeal. But these elements were precisely what made the film so productive within the networks of educators, critics, producers, committees, and bookstores that did celebrate it. It was a bulky swashbuckler only because it was such a rich intermedial film. How else could it have succeeded as a point of convergence for a spectrum of interests broad enough to include Patterson, Freeburg, Gibson, Sherwood, Lindsay, Zukor, Schenck, the NBR, and Grossett and Dunlap among others?⁶⁰ These representatives from such varied corners of American film culture needed a film that could adapt and move from one sphere to another. *Scaramouche*’s framing as a Rex Ingram art film made it adaptable and mobile.

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF EXCEPTIONAL FILMS

Ingram’s films staged a productive conversation between early Hollywood and art education, but this period of productivity did not last. He fared well for a while, but his career was marked by gradually souring relationships with the studios. After 1926, Ingram started his own studio in Nice, bringing stars and crew with him and continuing to distribute his films through MGM. While he clearly made an important break from Hollywood, and soon from filmmaking altogether, it would be inaccurate to characterize his pull away from Metro as a clash between an artist and his compromised employers. His often costly films, with their studied compositions and deliberate pacing, may have tested Metro’s bottom line, but to the extent that they were also testing the possibilities of prestige filmmaking they proved quite compatible with the wishes of studio executives. To insist on their incompatibility would obscure how their standout style, critical reputations, and company affiliation worked together in the years before many of the lasting institutions of prestige cinema had taken root.

While the films’ visual experiments and excesses were exceptional in the sense that they were not the norm for the companies in which Ingram worked, they were also exceptional in the NBR’s sense of “exceptional photoplays.” They stood out, but they were also somehow representative. The films hovered above nonexceptional films and thus avoided challenging their norms from the margins. The problem was never really that Ingram was minor or peripheral, but that his exceptional status as a master of picture craft—part of his authorial identity from his time making *Bluebirds* for Universal—gradually became less useful to the changing business models of the studios for whom he worked and which distributed his films. During the period encompassing exceptional films like *The Chalice of Sorrow* and *Scaramouche*, his art filmmaker status was productive

and useful. It was not resisted, but rather cultivated with the help of people like Seitz.⁶¹ He succeeded in Hollywood for over a decade not *despite* being a sculptor of the screen. Just the opposite—he remained relevant in Hollywood *as* a sculptor of the screen, if only for a time.

The body of work Ingram made before moving to Europe spans a period of possibility in American art cinema. His approach to filmmaking became possible during a moment when nineteenth-century visual art, including avant-garde traditions like French Symbolism and utopian aestheticist traditions like the Arts and Crafts movement, were thriving themes within the American press, in exhibits, lectures, and also in the studio-backed feature film. Cinema contributed, as only one medium among many, to this broader practice. Illustrators, advertisers, and theater producers recycled these aesthetic traditions alongside filmmakers. It is cinema's interaction with this milieu, not necessarily its direct borrowing from painting, that situates the films of Ingram and his colleagues. The history of Ingram's pictorial style, combined with the promotion of the pictorial aspects of his films in print, is part of the history of the American public reception of art. In this larger intermedial context, aesthetic influences circulate as dynamically as the balletic leaps of action stars in pictorial films.

To consider Ingram's films as early Hollywood art cinema is to search for a cultural apparatus that rendered their impurities productive. Ingram assembled his techniques from numerous sources, but he staked his films' ambitions on discourses of craft and picture. To stand out as an exceptional director in early Hollywood, he placed the motion-picture studio in conversation with 1890s artists. He linked his craft, his assortment of techniques, with aestheticist art studios of the past. More important than any direct imitation of painterly style, he fit within an aestheticist approach to form, which valued pictorial composition and its mechanics of effect above all else in art. It was this move that prompted critics of the National Board of Review to write about the vitality in his still compositions and to use his films as evidence of an underlying aesthetic quality that defined the "exceptional" in *Exceptional Photoplays*.

Notes

1. "Scaramouche," *Exceptional Photoplays*, Fall-Summer 1923.
2. I discuss several of the critics and art educators who wrote and lectured on picture composition and the psychology of the beholder in the next section and the section on *Scaramouche*. Three figures particularly worthy of note here, because of their influence and their connections to people who wrote about film, are Henry Rankin Poore, Ethel Puffer, and Vernon Lee (Violet Paget). Puffer's work on aesthetics came out of her work with Hugo Münsterberg, and Lee is one of the few aesthetic theorists cited in Victor Freeburg's early work on pictorial aesthetics in film. See Henry Rankin Poore, *Pictorial Composition and the Critical Judgment of Pictures: A Handbook for Students and Lovers*

- of Art (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1903); Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (New York: Putnam, 1913); and Victor Oscar Freeburg, *The Art of Photoplay Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1918).
3. Frances Taylor Patterson, who served on the Exceptional Photoplays Committee at the time this article was written, and who took over Freeburg's courses at Columbia University, knew this argument well. I return to her ideas about Ingram's work in the section on *Scaramouche*.
 4. This approach has been pursued brilliantly, for example, by Kristin Thompson in relation to some of Ingram's colleagues. See Kristin Thompson, "The Limits of Experimentation in Hollywood," in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); and Kristin Thompson, "The Sorrows of Satan," in *The Griffith Project*, vol. 10, *Films Produced in 1919–46*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai (London: BFI Publishing, 2006).
 5. For James, "minor" is not simply a question of film funding. He instead defines productive minor cinemas that typically counter the film industry but remain networked with the industry's resources and its geographies in greater Los Angeles. See David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
 6. For a famous how-to lantern manual, see Thomas Craddock Hepworth, *The Book of the Lantern* (London: Hazell, Watson, and Viney, 1899).
 7. Epes Winthrop Sargent, *Techniques of the Photoplay* (New York: Moving Picture World, 1913); Frances Taylor Patterson, *Cinema Craftsmanship* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1920); and Louis Reeves Harrison, *Screencraft* (New York: Chalmers, 1916).
 8. Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning about Art in American Schools* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996); Peter Smith, "The Ecology of Picture Study," *Art Education* 39, no. 5 (1986): 48–54; and Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "A Picture Age: Reproductions in Picture Study," *Studies in Art Education* 26, no. 2 (1985): 86–92. Arthur Efland has argued that the broad, synthetic claims of picture study may have been less effective in classroom practice, but even following this line of argument, synthetic theories of art education could still be useful in thinking about other media outside of the classroom. See Arthur Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1989).
 9. Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement," *Studies in Art Education* 33, no. 3 (1992): 165–73.
 10. This brief point summarizes a larger argument that extends beyond the focus here on Ingram. I discuss the historical trajectory of composition in art education and its key figures in greater depth in Kaveh Askari, "Picture Craft, Visual Education, and the Lantern: A Lecture Fantasy," in *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks, and Publics of Early Cinema*, ed. Marta Braun, Charles Keil, Rob King, Paul Moore, and Louis Pelletier (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, 2012); and in my book *Making Movies into Art: Picture Craft from the Magic Lantern to Early Hollywood* (London: BFI, forthcoming), from which this essay is excerpted.
 11. For example, the picturesque, as Giorgio Bertellini has shown, had a direct influence on shaping racialized depictions of Italy in American cinema. See Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape, and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

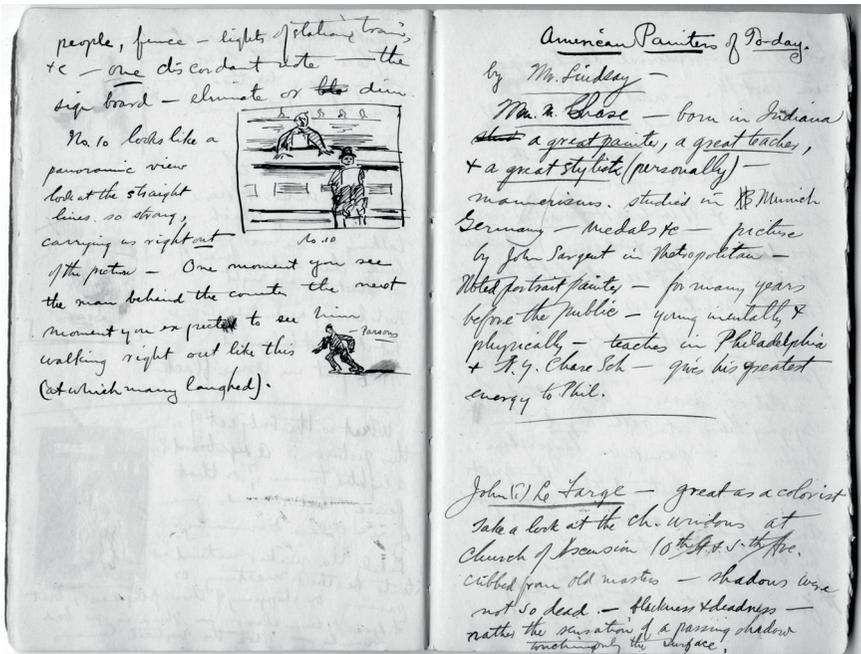
12. This was also the case with Maurice Tourneur, whose art training and early work with August Rodin and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes were well-known. Tourneur's background is a parallel case, and while his career extends beyond my scope here, it is worth pointing out that the introductory paragraphs of the *Exceptional Photoplays* review of *Scaramouche* devote equal attention to Tourneur and Ingram.
13. Ingram's association with Yale was a standard biographical note in articles about his films even after he left to make films in France. For local discussion of this association in the *New Haven Register* and the *New Haven Journal Courier*, see the clippings in box 1165, Alumni Files, University Archives, Yale University.
14. Cited in Richard Koszarski, *Hollywood Directors, 1914–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 87.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 86.
17. Later, he returned to this theme as a director, often including artist characters and studio scenes in films like *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *The Magician* (1926). His screen characters served as another venue for the cultivation of a cinema that referenced the plastic arts. I would like to thank Ruth Barton for her generosity and willingness to discuss all things Ingram as this project, and her forthcoming book on Ingram, were in process.
18. Cited in Liam O'Leary, *Rex Ingram: Master of the Silent Cinema* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1980), 31.
19. The list of suggestive film company names of the 1910s and 1920s also includes the Film Craft Corporation and the Cinema Arts and Crafts Corporation of San Francisco. Among art directors whose work bears traces of Arts and Crafts styles, Hugo Ballin stands out, but they can be found elsewhere. Lucy Fischer observes traces of these familiar styles as late as 1929 alongside the primarily art-deco style of Cedric Gibbons's sets for *The Kiss* (1929). See Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 106–13.
20. Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 104–6.
21. On the formation of the art school and the hiring of Lawrie, see Theodore Sizer, ed., *The Recollections of John Ferguson Weir: Director of the Yale School of the Fine Arts, 1869–1913* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1957), 67–91.
22. Walters was invited to the Metro studio to see the rushes of the film. His article applauds the attention to composition, saying that Ingram's art training was clear in the film. "Sculptor Praises Production," n.s., 26 March 1921, Alice Terry Scrapbook, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
23. Correspondence among Ingram, Lawrie, and Ibañez about this sculpture can be found in the Lee Lawrie Papers, Library of Congress.
24. The sculpture arrived at Ibañez's home in the late summer the following year. He wrote to Lawrie to tell him that he had placed the grouping by his work desk, "so that when I write, every time I lift my eyes, I see your wonderful work, and I think of you, marvelous sculptor and of my co-worker Rex Ingram." Ibañez to Lawrie, 2 September 1922, Lee Lawrie Papers, Library of Congress.

25. The alumni registrar at Yale even took on the task of correcting those who mistakenly referred to his degree: "The statement has been frequently made in the public press that the degree granted was an honorary one but this is not the case. Mr. Ingram was a student at Yale during 1912–13, but did not complete his work for the degree until 1921." Marion Phillips to Jason Easton, 14 December 1923, box 1165, Alumni Files, University Archives, Yale University.
26. "Yale First University to Recognize Art of Picture Screen," *New Haven Register*, 19 January 1922, box 1165, Alumni Files, University Archives, Yale University.
27. The biggest topics of discussion were art and the gifts (money and a growing collection of rare pipes) from Ingram to Lawrie. Lee Lawrie Papers, Library of Congress.
28. I am referring here in the most general sense to film critics, such as Robert Sherwood, who loved Ingram's films and used the language of pictorial beauty to define aesthetically important cinema. But the point can also be made more specifically. When Frances Patterson makes use of concepts of pictorial beauty derived from art educators in her film education texts, for instance, she turns to Ingram and Maurice Tourneur for examples. Victor Freeburg, who cites the field of aesthetic education in his book on pictorial beauty in the cinema (discussed at the end of this section), uses Ingram to frame the project, in addition to using his films as primary examples. See Frances Taylor Patterson, *Scenario and Screen* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1928), 120–21; and Victor Oscar Freeburg, *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), iii, vii, 46, 120–33.
29. DeMille was clearly another director with a strong investment in pictorial composition. And while a discussion of DeMille and his collaborators is outside the scope of this article, it is worth noting here, in addition to the point about Ingram not being alone in his use of these techniques, that DeMille introduced suspicion about how much attention a director should give to these techniques. His famous joke with Samuel Goldwyn about exhibitors paying double for "Rembrandt lighting" indicates some of this suspicion. Cecil B. DeMille and Donald Hayne, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Garland, 1985), 115. In an editorial illustrated with stills from Ingram's *Scaramouche*, DeMille singles out Ingram with a similar critique: "It is a pity that so many of our promising younger directors become so engrossed in creating individual charming pictures on the screen that they forget to create that clash of characters, that procession of situations, which is the sole and only thing that can hold the attention of an audience through a feature photoplay" (Cecil B. DeMille, "Pictures Secondary in Cinema Success," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1923, WF5). Thanks to Ruth Barton for bringing DeMille's criticism of Ingram to my attention.
30. Quoted in O'Leary, *Rex Ingram: Master of the Silent Cinema*, 65.
31. A selection of these images can be found in the collection of eight-by-ten-inch production stills at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
32. Patrick Keating, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 15–29.
33. John F. Seitz, "Can a School Teach Cinematography?," *American Cinematographer*, July 1923, 5.
34. O'Leary, *Rex Ingram: Master of the Silent Cinema*, 66.
35. Hilde D'haeyere, "Stopping the Show: Film Photography in Mack Sennett Slapstick Comedies (1917–1933)" (PhD diss., University College Ghent, 2012), 177–79.
36. Rex Ingram, "Directing the Motion Picture," in *Opportunities in the Motion Picture Industry* (Los Angeles: Photoplay Research Society, 1922), 27–33.

37. See note above, and also Rex Ingram, "Directing the Picture," *Art Review*, February 1922, 12–13 (clipping from Lee Lawrie Papers, Library of Congress).
38. Rex Ingram, prefatory note to Freeburg, *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen*, vii.
39. "Aesthetic vs. Moralistic Censorship," *Exceptional Photoplays*, June 1921, 8.
40. "The Screen: Pictorial Fancy Runs Free," *New York Times*, October 4, 1922, 20.
41. "Zukor Plans Big Conference to Consider Screen's Artistic Advance," *Moving Picture World*, February 24, 1923, 761.
42. For precursors to AMPAS, see Peter Decherney, *Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
43. "Motion Picture Arts Congress Called Here; Prizes for Development to Be Feature of Convention under Auspices of Author's League," *New York Times*, April 26, 1923, 22.
44. Nicholas Schenck to Adolph Zukor, 13 December 1924, Paramount Pictures Collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
45. Frances Taylor Patterson, "A Prize Paradox," *New York Times*, January 25, 1923, X5.
46. Rafael Sabatini to Adolph Zukor, 26 February 1925, Paramount Pictures Collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
47. Patterson, "A Prize Paradox." Ingram agreed to be one of the guest speakers in Patterson's Photoplay Composition course at Columbia University the following year.
48. Vachel Lindsay, *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies*, ed. Myron Lounsbury (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 158.
49. The National Council of Teachers of English frequently recommended the novel for English or history classes. See "News and Notes," *English Journal* 11, no. 7 (1922): 434–45.
50. See Arnie Davis, *Photoplay Editions and Other Movie Tie-In Books: The Golden Years, 1912–1969* (East Waterboro, ME: Mainely Books, 2002), 24–40.
51. "What Will Be the Result?" *Exceptional Photoplays*, Fall-Summer 1923, 5.
52. Robert Emmet Sherwood, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," *Life*, March 24, 1921, 432.
53. Robert Emmet Sherwood, *The Best Moving Pictures of 1922–1923* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1923), xix, 19–23. It is also worth noting that in the preface to this book (and throughout its sections), Sherwood echoes the sentiment of the *Exceptional Photoplays* review of *Scaramouche*: "The Motion Picture is just what its name implies. It is a pictorial rather than a literary form of expression. It makes its impression on the mind by way of the senses" (xi).
54. Clipping, n.d., Alice Terry scrapbook, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
55. Fairbanks and Sabatini were also sought out by educational publications. In 1925, the *World Review*, a Chicago-based scholastic publication for high school students, featured an adventure story by Sabatini in its first issue and an article by Fairbanks on physical fitness in the second. See "Publications for High School Pupils," *School Review* 33, no. 9 (1925): 647.
56. "Promotional Section," *Exhibitors Herald*, January 5, 1924, 19.
57. Examples of efforts to theorize the movements of the athletic or balletic body onscreen include Vachel Lindsay's discussion of "sculpture in motion" and Victor Freeburg's discussion of "pictorial motions" at "work," "rest," and "play." See Vachel Lindsay, *The*

Art of the Moving Picture (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 79–150; and Freeburg, *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen*, 97–160.

58. "Scaramouche," 1.
59. Quoted in Freeburg, *Pictorial Beauty on the Screen*, vii.
60. Even Buster Keaton references the film in *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924). Sweeping outside the cinema ticket booth, the silent film clown gestures to an art film about a stage clown from the *commedia dell'arte*. It also probably did not hurt that Keaton was working for Metro at the time.
61. It is also worthwhile to note here that Seitz experienced none of the career damage that befell Ingram. He stayed productive in Hollywood for decades as one of the most respected figures in his field.



Page from Roy Fleming Notebook, 1905–1906, Kellen Design Archives, Parsons The New School for Design

When film critics of the 1910s and 1920s wished to distinguish films that they found exceptional, they frequently borrowed language from painting or sculpture. These early aesthetic critics of cinema did not simply invent, by analogy, their notions of composition and moving picture craft. They imported these ideas, often from art educators who were increasingly working to make aesthetic education part of general education. In this sense, the institutional archives of art schools comprise part of the expanded archive of early Hollywood. They reveal connections otherwise overlooked between aesthetic educators and those critics who sought to define aesthetic cinema. This is clearly the case with Vachel Lindsay, whose painterly references in *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) are well-known but whose connections to institutions of art education could stand further exploration. The 1905–6 volume of the Fleming notebooks, containing notes taken by Ontario art educator Roy Fleming during his student years in New York, offers rare evidence of Lindsay's early efforts as a lecturer in the arts curriculum of the New York School of Art, the parent institution for Parsons The New School for Design.

Evanescent by nature, the lecture is a difficult form to locate in the archives. While some important art lectures from this period were collected or developed into books, these represent a small portion of the work of aesthetic education. Art education texts such as John LaFarge's *Considerations on Painting* (1895) and Arthur Wesley Dow's *Composition* (1900) derive from lectures, but taken alone they leave many questions unanswered about curriculum and the space of education. By contrast, the lecture records in the Kellen Design Archives document actual courses offered during the fledgling years of a major American art school. They expose spaces and networks of art education that cannot be found in the material that is more easily researchable from the published (and now digitized) works of art pedagogues. The Fleming notebooks in particular offer, from the perspective of one student, a glimpse of the lecture world at the time, of an emerging institution, and of the intellectual history of early film theory.

Fleming took notes from lectures by the school's founding instructors, including William Merritt Chase, Robert Henri, and Frank Alvah Parsons. The content of each lecture is revealing of what each instructor brought to the program. Henri's lectures seem polemical and practical. He used slides to illustrate what to do and what not to do, advocating for earnest painting in the Ashcan style over pleasing ornamental pictures. Chase took a more reflective turn, criticizing contemporary authors of books on modern art for their exclusion of women. Parsons brought the discipline of aesthetic theory to the curriculum with his lectures on psychological aesthetics.

We know that Vachel Lindsay trained in the visual arts and that he attended the New York School of Art in 1905. Lindsay's biographers have placed him under the guidance of Robert Henri who, the story goes, took a close look at his paintings and encouraged him to pursue his interests in poetry. Lindsay's aesthetic education may have provided an important supplement to his poetry, but it really returns in the 1910s when he begins to theorize the art of cinema in analogy with the visual arts. This brief record of his time among the students of Chase, Henri, and Parsons suggests that his involvement with the program went beyond that of an eager student of painting. It places him as a lecturer in the art appreciation classroom, and it shows how these lectures made use of local exhibitions of painting, sculpture, and decorative art.

The first mention of Lindsay in the notebook is from December 1, 1905, when Lindsay took a group to view Buddhist art at the Metropolitan Museum. His discussion appears to have focused on the craftsmanship, materials, and colors of Buddhist architecture and decorative art. It reflects the tendency to link the fine and decorative arts in the curricula of American art schools of the time. This cross-media approach dismantled traditional hierarchies of art appreciation, which helped to make space for the appreciation of moving images later. In his second lecture recorded in the notebook early in 1906, Lindsay took on the subject of contemporary American artists including James McNeill Whistler, William Merritt Chase, and John LaFarge. His discussion of LaFarge is particularly noteworthy as he points out formal elements of color and shading in LaFarge's work at the Church of the Ascension, a short walk from Chase's studio (the school's original location) and the later location of Parsons. Lindsay pointed out the traces of the old masters and the vitality of LaFarge's composition. He admired the way LaFarge's shadows did not appear "dead," but rather gave "the sensation of a passing shadow touching the surface." It is tempting to read an early interest in the moving image in these observations, but just as important here is the disciplinary context that Lindsay's comments provide. His interest in the phenomenological realism of LaFarge's shadows puts Lindsay in the community of art lecturers of his time. It helps to frame terms like *painting-in-motion* less as idiosyncratic analogies and more as part of an intellectual history that will yet be explored in the pages of *The Art of the Moving Picture*.

The Fleming notebook does not indicate whether Lindsay showed a slide of LaFarge's painting or—given Lindsay's love for the experiential—encouraged the class to visit the church as an extension of the lesson, but a sketch of the painting in the back of the notebook shows some work with the actual picture. It outlines the basic placement of the figures as well as the points of pictorial emphasis. The student's diagram of the compositions, noting groupings and shading, displays the interactive dimension of modern picture study.

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