

# THE TRAVELLING LANTERN

A symposium on mobility and migration in the practice of the magic lantern

Antwerp M HKA – Museum of Contemporary Art

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On 18 May an international symposium on the magic lantern was organised by the Research Centre for Visual Poetics (University of Antwerp) in collaboration with the research project *A Million Pictures* (JPI – Cultural Heritage). It was the first public meeting of the recently-launched project *B-Magic*, a large-scale research endeavour studying the cultural impact of the magic lantern as a visual mass medium in Belgium and beyond, between 1830 (Belgium's independence) and 1940. A consortium of five universities, a school of arts as well as museums and holders of collections in Belgium will write the, as yet, unwritten story of the magic lantern in Belgium and contribute to international media historiography.



Funding was granted for four years by the new Excellence of Science (EOS) programme supported by both the Flemish (FWO) and the French (FNRS) speaking communities of Belgium. The Antwerp symposium was the first in a series of biannual workshops and was framed within a two-day meeting of former *A Million Pictures* (AMP) collaborators, new *B-Magic* researchers, Belgian collectors, lanternists, illusionists, amateurs and international interdisciplinary scholars.

The guided tour of the Vrielynck collection by Sabine Lenk turned out to be an ideal remedy for those suffering jet lag. This collection is a fascinating ensemble of pre-cinema – so called media archeology – and early cinema devices and artefacts, including magic lanterns, compiled by the Belgian solicitor Robert Vrielynck (1933–2006). The closing meeting of the AMP project and a fine Belgian dinner were the best preparation for the symposium on the following day.

## THE MILLION PICTURES PROJECT

After three years of intense work the *Million Pictures Project* ended on 30 May. This was a collaborative research project between researchers from Utrecht University, University of Exeter, University of Antwerp, University of Girona and University of Salamanca as well as 20 associated partners. In order to celebrate the work done by all the researchers collectively and to maintain the contacts and acquaintances made, the participants came together for a last meeting on 17 May 2018 in Antwerp. All can reflect on delivering a very successful project that included meetings in several countries, a very interesting conference in Utrecht, 15 newsletters, and so on. At this last meeting congratulations and compliments flowed. Later in the evening there were also gifts for **Sarah Dellmann** (Utrecht University) who – as we say in Dutch – trok de kar ('took the upper hand') in the *Million Pictures Project*. The project website will stay online.



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From the start, the Antwerp symposium at the Museum for Contemporary Art was the stage for a reunion of old friends and colleagues. During the coffee breaks and lunch in the sunny rooftop bar of the museum, both memories and latest discoveries were exchanged and new contacts were made in an informal ambience. In addition, international academics shared their latest research on the magic lantern in a full day's agenda.

Keynote speakers and three panels presented a broad and international perspective of research on and approaches to mobility and migration in the practice of the magic lantern. The first keynote speaker, Martyn Jolly (Australian National University School of Art and Design), who leads the magic lantern project *Heritage in the Limelight: The magic lantern in Australia and the world*, shed light on the magic lantern as a medium to answer homesickness and devotion in the Australian colonial period and its ability to speed up mobility and connection between images and people. In the first panel, Sarah Dellmann (Utrecht University) presented on various aspects of magic lantern research, with a focus on research structures and heuristic tools. Richard Crangle (MLS and Lucerna) continued this route with an overview of the history of magic lantern studies through three generations of scholars. Daniel Pitarch (University of Girona) presented his latest research results on the acquisition of optical devices such as magic lanterns, polyoramas and microscopes in Spanish and Latin American high schools.

In the afternoon, Machiko Kusahara (Graduate School of Art, Nihon University) explored the Japanese relationship with the magic lantern, its cultural metaphors, interaction with live actors and propaganda issues. In the second panel, the practice of the magic lantern in Slovenia was revealed and discussed by Špela Čizman (Slovenian Cinémathèque), while Mathilde Leduc Grimaldi (Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium) looked in depth at the production and reception of magic lantern lectures by Henry M. Stanley in the US and Canada (see also p.1). In the third and last panel, independent researcher Roger Gonin told the exciting story of the late 18th-century 'savoyards' and their travels with a beautifully animated presentation. Finally, Ine Van Dooren (Screen Archive South East, University of Brighton) presented an eloquent and imaginative account of her experiences with the magic lantern.



The intensive afternoon ended with closing remarks from Erkki Huhtamo (University of California, Los Angeles) who drew attention to the bigger picture of magic lantern culture emphasising the importance of cultural anthropology and interdisciplinary practices. Finally, the screening of the film *Saving Brinton* (Tommy Haines and Andrew Sherburne, 2017), stirred up the passion of the collector and the conservator, completing a full day of magic lantern enthusiasm.

*B-Magic* will organize similar events in the future. The next one will take place on 13 November 2018 in the Mundaneum, Mons (Belgium). Stay tuned for more information and subscribe to the *B-Magic* newsletter at [www.B-magic.eu](http://www.B-magic.eu).