



ILLUSIONISM XIX

Miguel Herrero Herrero

Illusionism XIX is a special magic show that I have performed in Spain since 2019 with my partner, the Russian-Bulgarian pianist and mentalist Tsvetelina Lyubanova Avramova. In the show we recreate a programme of magic from the late 19th century based on acts of the time. For this I thoroughly researched the illusionists, their biographies, programmes, tricks, etc., which in turn was key to being able to write my book *Alucine: Magia, ilusionismo y cine* (2019) (see p. 15).

I became more and more aware that the magic lantern was in common use by these illusionists. Some were also lanternists and gave magic lantern performances. They performed shows or phantasmagoria spectacles as well as including the magic lantern as part of their programme. Several also used it in secret to perform other tricks. Some of the most relevant were: the masters of phantasmagoria shows such as the German pioneer Paul Philidor (Paul Philipsthal) (died c.1829) and the renowned Belgian physics professor and balloonist Étienne-Gaspard Robert (Robertson) (1763-1837), the American Jewish magician Jacob Meyer (Philadelphus Philadelphia) (1735-1795 approximately), the French Nicolas-Philippe Ledru (Comus) (1731-1807), Louis Comte (1788-1859), Henri Joseph Donckele (Henri Robin) (1811-1874) and the father of modern magic Jean-Eugène Robert (Robert-Houdin) (1805-1871), the Austrian Ludwig Leopold Döbler (1801-1864), the German Wjälba Frikell (1816-1903), the Spanish Joaquim Partagás (1848-1931), the French Jean-Auguste Faugeras (Jean Caroly) (1868-1955), founder and director of the first magazine on French illusionism *L'Ilusionniste* (1902), and the versatile pioneer of cinema Georges Méliès (1861-1938).



Miguel Herrero Herrero and Tsvetelina Lyubanova Avramova



The familiar figure of Napoleon. Carpenter & Westley slide



Our show, lasting more than an hour and a half, is based on the shows of these illusionists and we recreate several of their tricks. They are mostly classic tricks, although very little seen today. We have also created some new illusions inspired by or based on that era. Our programme includes card magic, pre-mentalism tricks, memory displays, recreational physics effects, a magic lantern session, the projection of several short films of tricks by film pioneers such as Georges Méliès, the Spanish Segundo de Chomón, etc. During this we use original artefacts and some reproductions of 19th-century objects from my collection.

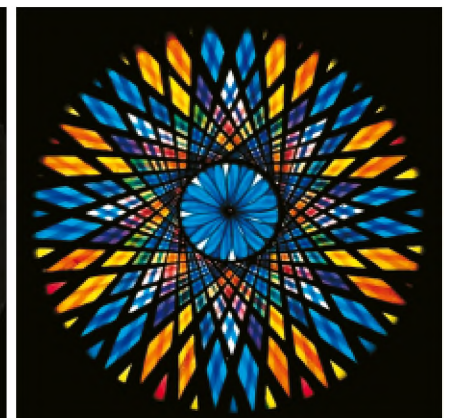
Before the main show we have a session of 'recreational physics' using optical devices, as Robertson did before his phantasmagoria show. We use translucent views, anamorphic images, flipbooks, zoetropes, praxinoscopes, etc. Similar arrays of optical phenomena were to be found in the Théâtre Robert-Houdin in Paris – which was acquired by Georges Méliès – in the Egyptian Hall in London, both meccas of magic in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and in El Rey de la Magia de Partagás in Barcelona, which Partagás created to imitate the Théâtre Robert-Houdin.



W.C. Hughes magic lantern, 1890



Slide with movement



Chromatrope

As we have commented, the magic lantern is one of the special featured numbers in our programme. For the magic lantern session I usually use a W.C. Hughes lantern from London made in 1890. At the start, I usually introduce the public to the magic lantern by briefly telling its story and reciting some words from lanternists of the time. We prefer that most of the session is accompanied by music, leaving some space to narrate, with the pianist playing classic themes of the time that we combine with various sound effects using small percussion instruments. We use magic lantern welcome slides in various languages and include the appearance of some historical figures such as Napoleon



whom the public can easily identify and recognise. The fact that the magic lantern slides can be combined with others and they can include moving parts – the eyes, for example – always surprises the audience since they are totally unaware of the possibilities of the magic lantern. We usually progress from the introduction to a more fantastical and phantasmagorical atmosphere with slides on this theme. Then we move onto a more evocative sequence of popular science: astronomy through slides of the orbits of the planets, lunar cycles and eclipses, and a chemical tank using dyes, chemicals and (plastic) insects. We finish, as Georges Méliès described in his memoirs, with several chromatropes. At high speed some of these are capable of generating a fascinating three-dimensional effect. Usually, we do a short demonstration, of about 15 minutes, of the possibilities of the magic lantern. The public is often fascinated and finds it hard to believe that we use an authentic magic lantern that is so old. Although the viewers have changed, the lantern is still very magical in the 21st century.



The illusionist Caroly presenting the magic lantern to film pioneer and magician Méliès (L'illusionniste, January 1905)

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ALUCINE: MAGIA, ILUSIONISMO Y CINE

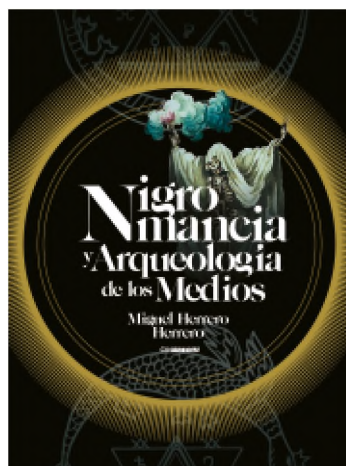
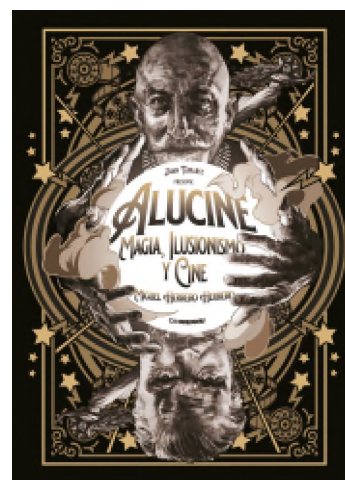
Cinestesia, 2019

ISBN: 978-8-412-04960-2, € 28.60

448 pages, with more than 200 colour images

Text in Spanish

Alucine is an essay, an investigation, on the precursors of cinema and their relationship with magic and illusionism. We intend to rescue from oblivion and reclaim historical characters who were key in the development of the seventh art. Many of them were magicians, like Georges Méliès, who saw the possibilities of the new medium, becoming pioneers. The book investigates the gadgets and methods that were used in ancient times to create the illusion of moving images. Machines such as the magic lantern, the projector before cinema, and other optical objects that were common in cabinets of curiosities. The book contains artefacts that were used to fascinate, entertain, disseminate and investigate; mind-blowing stories; mysteries that are solved and others that remain to be revealed. From the practices of necromancy to the phantasmagoria shows of Philidor and Robertson, through the secrets of great illusions to the lives of the main magicians: Robert-Houdin, Maskelyne, Devant, Houdini, etc. Finally we reach filmmakers and illusionists who use magic as a theme in their works: Orson Welles, Woody Allen, etc. The book finishes with a selection of the most relevant films in history about magic and illusionism.



NIGROMANCIA Y ARQUEOLOGÍA DE LOS MEDIOS

Cinestesia, 2020

ISBN: 978-8-412-04964-0, € 29.95

472 pages, with colour illustrations

Text in Spanish

Necromancy is an ancient belief and practice – a method of divination through the invocation of spirits and demons. Necromancy is black magic, demonic, forbidden and persecuted for centuries, which has no validity but which, nevertheless, hides revealing historical facts. Certain people accused of necromancy used pre-cinematographic methods and devices such as the camera obscura, mirrors and the magic lantern to create the illusion, as a magical effect, of invoking a spirit, a deceased person or a demon. These types of necromancy sessions were the germ of the phantasmagoria shows that became popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The book sheds light on dark and fascinating facts, documents, testimonies, and stories, linked to the occult, magic, illusionism, secret societies, phantasmagoria and spiritualism. All this is illustrated with more than 400 unusual images from prehistoric times to the dawn of the 21st century.

All slides illustrated are from the author's collection. For more information go to www.cinestesia.es