

SPRING MEETING OF THE MAGIC LANTERN SOCIETY

MUSEU DEL CINEMA, GIRONA, CATALONIA

Saturday and Sunday 5-6 April 2025

Over 50 MLS members from 11 different countries came to the historic city of Girona in April and made their way to the wonderful Museu del Cinema for our MLS Spring Meeting. **Jordi Pons**, Director of the museum, began the meeting by recalling the last MLS event there in 2002 and by emphasising the importance of the work and research on the magic lantern and its place in media history done through the Society. **Richard Feltham** thanked everyone involved in organising the meeting before Jordi outlined the schedule.

First on the agenda was a tour of this amazing museum, based on the personal collection of Tomàs Mallol. You are taken on a journey through time, with beautifully displayed exhibits of shadows, magic lanterns, optical devices, magic lantern slides and cinema. Along the way there are some hands-on exhibits, imaginatively displayed optical effects and projections, and some very rare pieces, such as the Fantoscope (see *TML* 12). We urge any members who missed the meeting to visit the museum if they can.

The first presentation was by **Cèlia Cuenca**, an art historian who has researched the museum's collection,



Jordi Pons and Richard Feltham (left), the Museu del Cinema (above) and exhibits in the museum (below)



Jordi and Montse Puigdevall (above)



identifying the origins and history of its Barcelona optical views – the subject of her talk – as well as other exhibits. The museum has an unusually complete set of 11 out of the 12 views by local artist Onofre Alsamore (1810-80), recognised for his expertise in perspective. The views were made between 1846 and 1851 and extensive research has enabled accurate restoration using published versions of the images. The artist's contemporary, Francesc Delmau, ran a shop in Barcelona selling optical devices where you could not only buy but also look at the optical views and their lighting effects. The scenes highlight historic buildings to be preserved and new sights in the city, such as the theatre and promenades, together with two views outside the city. All focus on the people and daily life.



Cèlia Cuenca (top) and one of the optical views of Barcelona (above)

Next **Bernd Scholze** projected some rare long slides that he had bought in the area many years ago. These dated from around 1800 or possibly earlier and showed a Corpus Christi street procession. First Jordi explained the history of this procession, established by Pope Urban IV in 1264, its significance and the participants. The procession was particularly important in Barcelona and, using an engraving, he showed the strict order followed by those taking part – religious leaders and representatives (some carrying banners and relics), municipal authorities, trades guilds, imaginary creatures such as giants and the Barcelona eagle, the blessed sacrament, nobility, military, citizens and children, and finally musicians. Bernd's eight slides, almost certainly from a larger set, contain 250 people in total and show clear links to the region, starting with the Catalan flag.

After lunch, following a high-volume introduction by **Dominique Santens**, a deep-sea diver stepped forward to give the next presentation – **Jeremy Brooker** as Salvador Dalí, as seen in his famous 1936 lecture ("the weirdest lecture ever shown to a London audience"). This was the culmination of a series of magic lantern lectures given by

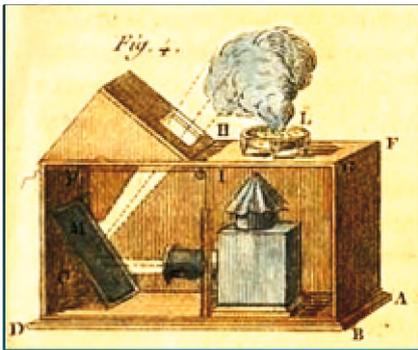


Bernd Scholze (far right) and some of the Corpus Christi parade participants





Jeremy Brooker in Salvador Dalí mode (photo: Anastasia Kerameos)



Ramón Mayrata (above) and Guyot's 'misty' lantern (top)

The final talk of the day was given by Ramón Mayrata, a writer, anthropologist and historian of the art of illusionism, translated by his wife Ana Martínez de Aguilar. Ramón considered the magic lantern from the perspective of a magician. Beginning with the invention of the magic lantern and its new visual culture, opening up an unknown world of paradise, hell and spectra. By playing with the eyes and senses it could be considered a device of magic, and it did appear in early magic shows. Ramón explored the fragile separation between science and magic in the 18th century, covering leading figures such as Guyot with his concealed lantern projecting apparitions on smoke, Schröpfer summoning spirits in masonic circles and Cagliostro adding wheels to the lantern for more spectral effects. Moving forward in time we heard about Robertson in revolutionary Paris with his

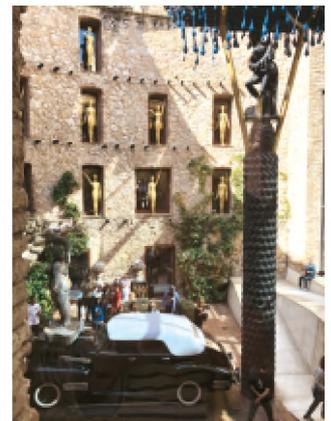
Dalí. Contemporary newspaper accounts describe images from works of Hans Holbein and Lewis Carroll, and Greta Garbo pursued by journalists. Starting in the USA, Dalí developed his public persona through these lantern lectures and by the time he arrived in London expectations were high. The audience was not disappointed. With heavy metal boots and no air in the diving suit Dalí nearly died; the lantern show was forgotten but his fame was established. Jeremy also discussed the case for Dalí the humorist and his kinship with English eccentrics. Dalí was familiar with and fascinated by optical effects from an early age (probably starting with a *vue d'optique*) and, for example, zoetrope-type strips appear in his art (as we saw in the Dalí museum the following day). But the upside-down world of the magic lantern led to more profound thought and images of roles reversed. The finish, of course, was a melting clock sequence.

Anna Carpena from the museum's Educational Department talked about their work with students of all ages but particularly secondary school age children. They run both guided tours and various workshops – thematic proposals, exploration and cinema workshops (including looking at magic lanterns). Anna showed a short film of a group trying out all the hands-on exhibits including projected shadows, the giant zoetrope and peepshows before making their own film. During the tours they explain the importance of magic lanterns and Anna reminded us that their fantascopie was originally used for educational purposes. In one workshop they devise a story to perform, draw and make their slides, and are encouraged to think like a lanternist. This was shown in a second short film that ended with the children each telling part of the story while their lovely hand-painted slides were projected.



The diaphanorama in the museum

Montse Puigdevall, Curator of the Museu del Cinema and Director of its Studies Institute, then brought us the diaphanorama, a very rare precursor to 3-D. The example in the museum is Dutch, attributed to the workshop of Andries Vermeulen, and dates from about 1780. It shows skaters on a frozen river and is painted on three separated glass plates that slot into a wooden frame to give the 3-D effect. The top plate is more brightly coloured and shows the foreground; the second plate is more muted, with the middle ground including the windmill; and the rear plate, again muted, with the background and sky. The plates are illuminated from the back and designed to be viewed in a concave mirror. During restoration they found that the glasses were painted on both sides. Montse showed other examples and discussed known information about the device, including from Helmut Wälde's article in *NMLJ* (vol. 11, no. 9), Wagenaar/Duller research in *Dutch Perspectives* (MLS, 2014) and *TML* 10. She finished with two examples of diaphanorama made in 1932 and 1934 by Salvador Dalí who was always intrigued by optical illusions.



The courtyard in the Dalí Museum

fantascopie and articulated skeleton, and Philidor (Philipsthal) with his phantasmagoria show. Ramón ended with the 19th-century Catalan magician Partagás again combining magic and magic lanterns.

After this we went to the Casa de Cultura for Sergi Buka's spectacular one-man show *The Image Hunter*, co-written by Ramón. This was open to the public and featured not only magic, spectacular shadows and magic lantern slides but also Sergi directing laser beams with his hands and many other spectacular effects (see p. 14).

The following day we went by coach to Figueres and the Dalí Museum. This is like no other museum and full of surprises but perhaps no more than we expected after Saturday's programme. And was that Jeremy on the balcony above the entrance – or Dalí? (p. 2)

THE MAGIC LANTERN is edited, designed and produced by Mary Ann Auckland and Gwen Sebus, assisted by Richard Crangle and George Auckland.

Letters to the Editors can be sent by email to: editor@magiclantern.org.uk

Material from this publication may not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of the Editors.

Printed by Stormpress, Exeter – www.stormpress.co.uk

Published by:
The Magic Lantern Society
17 Dean Street
Exeter EX2 4HH, UK

www.magiclantern.org.uk

© 2025 The Magic Lantern Society

ISSN 2057-3723

