



Introduction to Symposium on

Set Construction and Special Effects

SMPTE Spring Convention at Los Angeles, 1962

HERBERT MEYER, *Topic Chairman*

THE TIME when our major studios were actually producing 40 to 60 features annually is now history. This period brought into existence a substantial group of craftsmen specifically capable by skill, experience and artistic conception of delivering the breathtaking sets, remarkable props and the astonishing effects which the director, producer and cameraman daily demanded.

Television, with its small viewing screens and highly commercialized direction, does not need such perfection and originality, and vetoes the high cost which is necessarily the price for exemplary artcraft.

The danger is, therefore, quite real that this group of craftsmen and its technological "know-how" will gradually cease to exist since it has lost its functional necessity. On the other hand, it may be that the great number of fresh films required should "pay television" become a reality, or, that a new trend away from the present patterns which television follows will bring

about a new interest in the potential greatness and beauty of artcraft creations.

In any case, this Symposium of seven papers, each dealing with an important phase of this interesting field, should find a place in our *Journal*. While not necessarily related to the photographic, electronic and other picture and sound recording and reproducing technics with which this industry and the Society are primarily concerned and identified, set construction and mechanical effects play significant parts in the production of theater and television motion pictures and, accordingly, should find proper recognition in their technical aspects in our annals.

The authors of these papers have been selected as outstanding representatives of their respective fields. Much of what they tell us is unique, of absorbing interest and expressed from a vastly different point of view than is usually associated with engineering papers. The writer has been privileged to be associated with many of these craftsmen and their activities and has sincerely enjoyed his assignment as chairman of this session

Art Direction: The Technical Approach to Design and Construction

By E. PRESTON AMES

The Art Director's role and qualifications are outlined. Preproduction phases of art direction for motion pictures and television require choice of picture aspect ratio, color or black-and-white photography, and location or studio operation. Methods of creating environment in the studio by use of backings, back projection, traveling mattes or matte shots are outlined.

IT HAS OFTEN been said that an Art Director is one who makes the blueprints and puts up some walls and gives his spare time to designing homes for the executives—rather a sad description. It is true, however, that there are very few people in the industry who have a clear idea that the function of the Art Director is to serve as the architect of the picture.

Presented on May 1, 1962, at the Society's Convention in Los Angeles by E. Preston Ames, M-G-M Studios, 10202 Washington Blvd., Culver City, Calif.
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The Art Director is expected to be fairly well versed in the fine arts, the graphic arts, including photography, and the decorative arts. The Art Director relies on good construction and painting, landscaping and decoration; on good modeling and staff work; and upon scenic artists who appreciate the problems of making motion pictures, miniature and matte painting, the proper use of back projection and traveling mattes.

The Art Director must be a dreamer, but at the same time he must have technical knowledge to make his dreams

come true. The success of the final execution of his ideas, the picture set, relies a great deal on his general experience, his use of research and on his ability to communicate to others by sketches and drawings.

As the architect of the picture, the Art Director must be able to sit with director, writer and producer, take their words and their ideas and give them concrete dimensions. Perhaps, due to a lack of visual conception, they have not written in detail what they wish to express and they need the help of models or sketches, or both. Perhaps there is an area where a floor plan is necessary for writing a sequence.

The Art Director does not write their story, he illustrates it. When a sequence has been written he is asked, as a rule, to break this down in such a way as to get the best visual results. He does this with