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Federal Grants Help 36 Archives Save Orphan Films

A 1973 documentary on the construction of the World Trade Center, the earliest motion pictures by a native Alaskan filmmaker, profiles of artist Jean Tinguely and Nikki de Saint Phalle, a 1919 promotional short for the pioneering all-girl Camp Widoho, home movies by the Ansel Adams family in New Mexico in 1929, Harold Lloyd’s 1918 comedy The Tip, a backstage view of opera baritone Richard Bonelli, the Ethel Barrymore melodrama The Call of Her People (1917), and avant-garde works by John and James Whitney, Stan Brakhage, Taylor Mead, and Robert Beavers—are among the 68 films that will be preserved through the 2002 National Film Preservation Foundation federal grant program.

In its third year, the program welcomes proposals from nonprofit and public organizations throughout the United States. Universities, libraries, state archives, historical societies, folklore collections, medical research centers, and museums of art, history, transportation, agriculture, and natural history are now using NFPF grants to save culturally and historically significant films in their collections. The NFPF awards target American orphan films that are unlikely to survive without public support.

“We need to help libraries and museums save as many of these treasures as we can,” said Richard Wesley (Writers Guild of America, East), who served on the spring grant panel. More than half of the NFPF’s program participants were able to begin their organization’s first film preservation project through NFPF support.

The federally authorized program is made possible through funding provided by The National Film Preservation Foundation Act of 1996 and secured through the Library of Congress. Awards support the creation of preservation masters and access copies for the public. The NFPF pays all costs of managing the program from matching funds donated by private sources.

In late September the NFPF will distribute grants of services donated by commercial laboratories and postproduction houses. For a full list of the public-spirited laboratories and storage providers supporting our programs, visit www.filmpreservation.org.

Out of the Archive: Preservation Goes Public

Since 1998 the NFPF has supported the preservation of more than 470 films and footage collections from 77 archives across 30 states and the District of Columbia. Many of the works are now reaching the public and building new audiences for documentaries, newsreels, avant-garde works, home movies, industrial films, and silent-era features and shorts. The following examples suggest how organizations are sharing their NFPF-funded preservation work here and abroad.

Harry Smith’s avant-garde epic Mahagonny, preserved by the Harry Smith Archives, was the subject of a 2002 Getty Research Institute symposium. The four-screen portrait of the New York art scene in late-20th-century art.

During World War II studio photographer Toyo Miyatake clandestinely shot movies while confined in the Japanese American detention center at Manzanar. The Japanese American National Museum preserved his footage through the NFPF’s Treasures of America Film Archives project and used it in a new documentary on the artist.

With NFPF support the Minnesota Historical Society preserved documentaries on the Ojibwe people made by ethnologist Monroe Killy. The society released video copies, along with a study guide, through the state’s tribal education system. Learn how their ancestors lived and worked.

Northeast Historic Film exhibits on the Internet excerpts of Marine Winem Industry (1942) and other films preserved through the NFPF. Users can purchase reference tapes or borrow them by mail.

At its 2002 Festival of Preservation, the UCLA Film and Television Archive screened 20 shorts and features preserved with NFPF support, including Sidney Lawrence’s Multiple Sidney (1970), a droll trick film selected for the National Film Registry, and Charles Burnett’s Second Best (1969), a portrait of African American life in South Central Los Angeles.

The Whitney Museum of American Art’s recent exhibition Into the Light showcased a newly preserved copy of Paul Sharits’s shutter Interface (1975) as part of its exploration of the projected image in 20th-century art.

Le Girocote del Cinema Muto, Italy’s famed silent film festival, made the NFPF’s Saving the Silents project centerpiece last year and is hosting a second three-program salute in October 2002. Contributing newly preserved shorts and features are the George Eastman House, the Museum of Modern Art, and the UCLA Film and Television Archive.