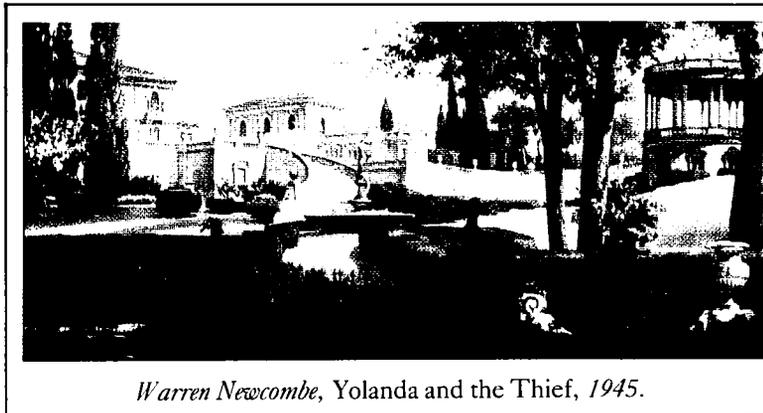


Designed for Film

The Hollywood Art Director

by Mary
Corliss and
Carlos Clarens

Think of a movie, and what do you see? Kane's Xanadu, Scarlett's Tara, Rebecca's Manderley—dream palaces, realms of the spirit transformed into velvet and steel, residences of our other, movie life where we can wander, and wonder at the splendid achievements of some of the cinema's most distinguished artists. Most distinguished, and least acknowledged—because these architects of illusion aren't the directors or writers or producers or cinematographers or editors or even costume designers, all of whom have been honored in monographs and museum retrospectives. At the very least, *their* names will be found among the thousand listed in *The New York Times Directory to the Film*. Not so with that most vital artist-craftsman, the



Warren Newcombe, *Yolanda and the Thief*, 1945.

art director.

Through its exhibition, "Designed for Film: The Hollywood Art Director," The Museum of Modern Art is recognizing the achievement of the art director. The exhibition, which is on display in the Museum's Auditorium Gallery from May 11 through September 26, focuses on several aspects of film design: 1) the creation of a visual style through the collaboration of director, producer, and art director (notably in films associated with David O. Selznick and Cecil B. De

Mille); 2) the creation of a studio style (Paramount Art Deco, Universal Gothic, MGM grand bourgeois), which was, more often than not, established by the studio's Supervising Art Director (Hans Dreier, Charles D. Hall, Cedric Gibbons); 3) the personal styles of independent art directors such as Robert Boyle (*The Birds*), Boris Leven (*West Side Story*), Dale Hennessy (*Young Frankenstein*), and George Jenkins (*All the President's Men*); and 4) the work of the matte artist, the painter-magician who creates, on glass, panoramas rich for wonder (*The Wizard of Oz*) or ripe for destruction (*The Birds*). The exhibit will not attempt to install the art director as this week's auteur, for the Hollywood film is the product of a corporate vision. The art director didn't do it all; he only made it all look glorious.

The veteran stage designer Boris Aronson once compared the sets for a

drama to paintings, and those for a musical to posters. Extending the comparison to the film, we can say that sets for a motion picture, whether dramatic or musical, relate to architecture: a dream-like architecture, entered and inhabited by the viewer through a subjective identification which is unique to the medium. In the theater, the audience remains usually behind the transparent fourth wall, a guest of the performers, eavesdropping on the action. But when we watch a film we are asked to participate as an invisible character thrust by

it's only of late that the notion of the set as background to the action has been challenged, among others, by Luca Ronconi in his *Orlando Furioso* (1969), or by Eugene and Franne Lee in their dynamic constructs for the Broadway revival of *Candide* (1974): in both cases, either the set is mobile or we, the audience, are. For two decades, roughly from its beginnings to 1912, the movies borrowed the flat backdrop from the stage. Early film studios were a modified version of the photographer's. There was overhead lighting; the action was staged

These caverns at the bottom of the ocean, these palaces and mosques, the North Pole, the Moon, the Underwater Channel, they still delight the eye with a mockery of both media; but in hands less nimble than those of a stage magician like Méliès, they slow down the progress of film, and film design.

Long before Norman Bel Geddes dispensed with the proscenium arch, movies began to break away from the stasis imposed by the privileged viewpoint of front row center. Out of doors, the frame seems to expand in search of space, the



Ed Graves, Prin

the camera into the action. A stage truism has it that no set is complete without the actor. This is not quite a *sine qua non* in the films, where the *viewer* is often the actor, moving through improbable landscapes and imaginary rooms, seeing them through the lens as concrete and real as the everyday. Rick's Casablanca bar, Mother Gin Sling's casino, the lonely mansion on the prairie in *Giant*, the Wizard's wonderful Oz . . . We know them well; we were there.

In traditional stage representation, the viewpoint remains unchanged and fixed;

frontally, the proscenium was replaced by the four sides of the frame, with the actors moving laterally within a space that remained inviolate to the passive spectator.

A sophisticated filmmaker like Georges Méliès could have some fun with his painfully detailed painted sets, derived from pantomime and the music hall, since what interests him is the time-warp element that the cinema introduces, the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't trickery that the camera can accomplish by switching it on and off.

camera follows the action with cranky but telling movements, and the visual guidelines soon become diagonal. In a primitive work like *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) there is a world of difference between indoor and outdoor scenes. When *La Dame aux Camélias* is photographed in Paris in 1912, the furniture in Camille's boudoir changes its arrangement subtly within the same scene to heighten the drama and, of course, offer a better look at Sarah Bernhardt. At this point it's still less of a trauma to move a sofa than the camera, but in his crude

way the filmmaker has scored a point for the motion picture and changed the spectator's viewpoint.

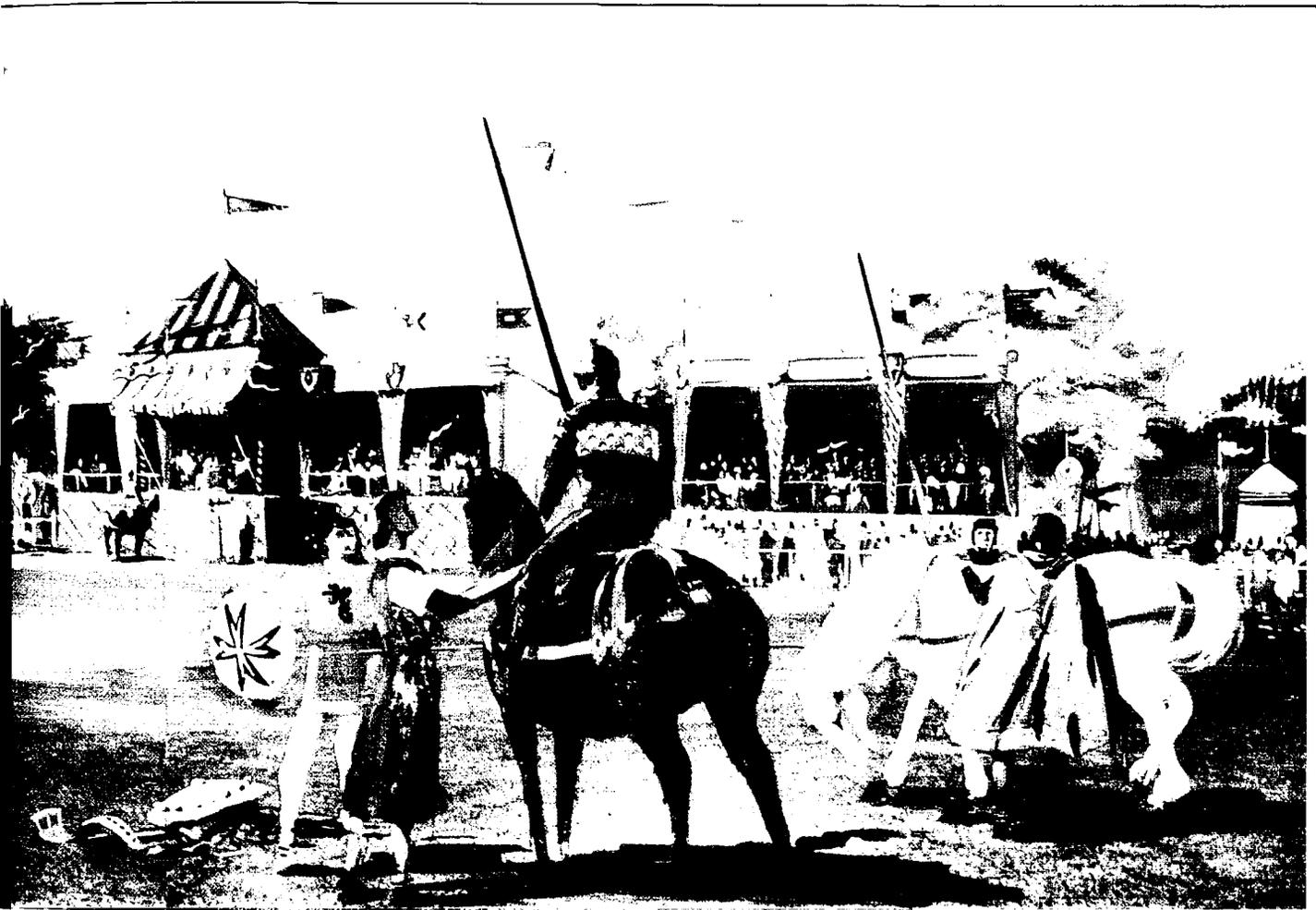
A series of small breakthroughs culminate in 1912, when the battle to secede from stage tradition is being fought on several fronts. In Italy, where the operatic tradition is strongest, sets become three-dimensional and monumental enough to rival those built at La Fenice or at La Scala, as in Giovanni Pastrone's epic *Cabiria* (1913). To get a closer look at the elaborate statuary and imitation-marble halls, the camera

Belasco's melodramas and the photographs of Jacob Riis.

Intolerance, Griffith's monumental essay on film time—and film design—was researched by one of his actors, Joseph Henabery, "designed" by the mysterious Walter L. Hall, and erected by Frank "Huck" Wortman; thus was Babylon raised on a vacant Hollywood lot. By this time (1916), film producers were luring stage designers away from Broadway, architects away from their practices, and illustrators away from books and magazines. Jesse L. Lasky ac-

The Blue Bird (both 1918). The actual director of these pictures, Maurice Tourneur, was henceforth regarded as the supreme visual stylist of the silent screen.

By now, stage and film design are following separate paths. The theater could not rival, for instance, the size and detail of William Cameron Menzies' stupendous castle for *Robin Hood* (1922)—not that it had to, when a simple backdrop by Maxfield Parrish should suffice. (In fact, Menzies' castle could have been designed by Parrish.) And the Bakst



Valiant, 1954.

breaks loose from its moorings and snoops about the sets, discovering new depth and perspective. Only then does the viewer catch his breath. This is *trompe l'oeil*: Rome and Carthage have truly been built in a day. In America, D.W. Griffith would advance the cause of art direction, along with all else pertaining to film, if only because of his envious resolve to outdo the Italians in size and splendor. At this point the American motion picture is still caught between an allegiance to the theatrical and an affinity for the realistic—between David

quired the movie rights to the Belasco plays and with the deal came Wilfred Buckland, Belasco's stage designer, who then became art director for Cecil B. De Mille. The Viennese Joseph Urban, designer for the Met and the Ziegfeld Follies, was signed by William Randolph Hearst for his Cosmopolitan Pictures, which usually starred Marion Davies. Ben Carré, who had painted scenery at the Paris Opera and the Pathé-Gaumont studios in Paris as early as 1900, was instrumental in bringing off the highly praised silhouette effects of *Prunella* and

décor for *Les Ballet Russes* obviously inspired Menzies' for *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924). But there is a cross-pollination at work between stage and screen, which continues to this day. J.B. Priestley, a man of the theater, specified that the single set for *An Inspector Calls* (1946) must be seen from three different viewpoints, according to each act. The use of projections is now common in stage representations—recently and wittily in the La Mama production of *CORFAX (Don't Ask)*, where slides were projected on actual sets. And stage lighting has

been healthily influenced by film realism. However, the most dreamlike effect in both media cannot be attributed to either: did the lap dissolve evolve from the scrim curtain, or vice versa?

Set design in Hollywood became closely linked to the studio system, which was established in the Teens and flourished for three decades after. Studios grew and art departments grew with them. When the art director starts to come into his own in the mid-Twenties, he'll define not just the visual style of an individual director but that of an entire studio. In California, space was not a problem, although set building was as budget-bound as everything else in the movies. A logical solution was to leave sets standing in the back lot, which after a few years began to look like a surreal agglomeration of geographies and architectures. Visual motifs were concentrated: a European street could do duty for a number of foreign countries with just a few props and some retouching. A collective memory was being fostered in the audience by the recognition of certain studio landmarks—a staircase, an alley, or a square—a *déjà vu* that inspired familiarity rather than contempt. Front-office interference could blur the style of a studio director but never, *never* that of the Art Department.

It was the department head who, until the mid-Thirties, took credit for the work of anonymous unit art directors, sketch artists, and blueprint boys. A dapper Irishman named Cedric Gibbons held artistic control of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for almost three decades. More of an executive than an actual creative force—the one film he actually designed, *In the Palace of the King* (1923), doesn't carry his name on the credits—Gibbons forged the Metro style in his

atelier, marshalling a squad of clashing talents and temperaments into creating the rich, unmistakable Metro look.

For all the faults imputed to Gibbons (foremost his remoteness and reluctance to share the credit), he was highly supportive of his staff in other areas as well as a major force in the evolution of art direction. A sketch artist could work at the Metro Art Department for months and never be as much as introduced to Gibbons, but every other studio in Hollywood followed his moves, improved their Art Departments, recruited talent where available, and worked hard on creating an individual look. The recent Universal retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art testifies to the paucity of the late Twenties when Carl Laemmle must have decided that, to become a major studio, Universal had to develop its own house style. Happily, Herman Rosse and Charles D. Hall complied.

Of all the studios, Metro had the richest, best-upholstered look, and also the most American, since Gibbons had resisted the influence that a generation of émigré directors and art directors introduced in Hollywood, especially at Universal (Rosse) and Warners (Anton Grot), and passed on to their American coworkers. You won't find many Expressionist volumes, distorted perspectives, or hand-painted shadows in a Metro movie. Gibbons believed in over-lighting a set so that the superb finish would show up in the film. Even in the Forties, a Metro *film noir* like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was more likely to be a *film gris*. MGM leaned more toward the penthouse of one's dreams, at least until such wonderful extravagance was somewhat curbed by, successively, the Depression, tact, censorship, the

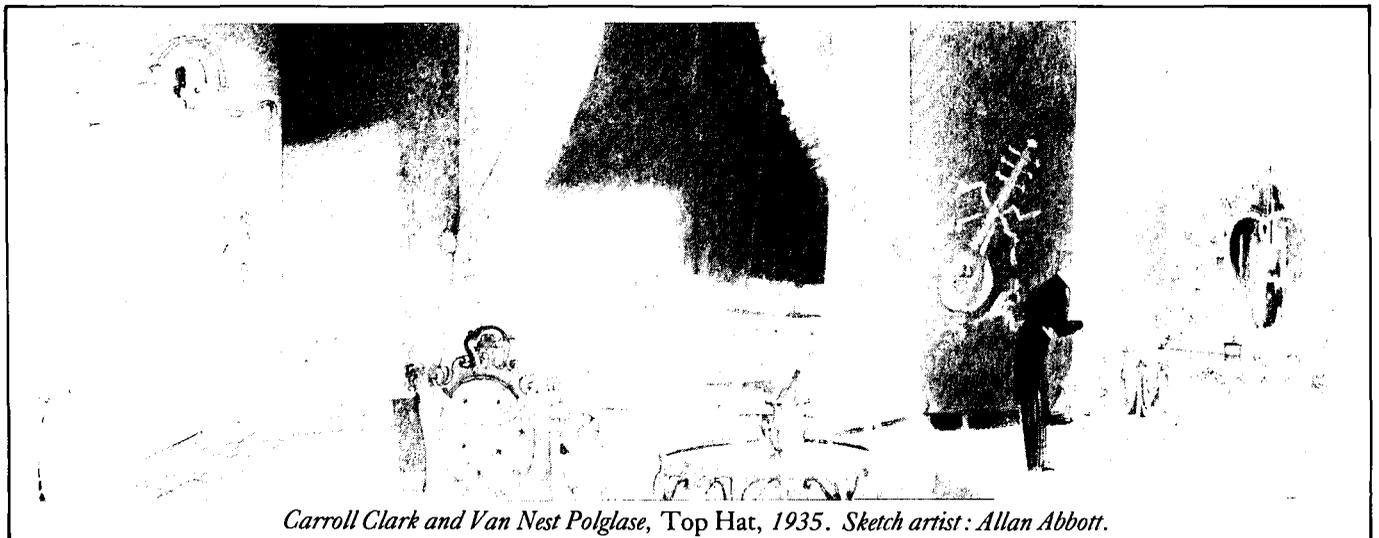


Mitchell Leisen, *Madame Satan*, 1930.

nuclear-family film, and an awareness of the real outside world. Then it settled on a less striking, cozier, but still expensive look.

Within the gates, the Metro style was being parodied by 1928 in comedies such as Marion Davies' *Show People*, which means Gibbons had a sense of humor about his work and a sense of passing fashions. Gibbons continued to refine the *moderne* (rarely referred to in Hollywood as Art Deco) until he achieved the gleaming all-white décor of *Dinner at Eight* (1933), which may not have existed in the best salons and boudoirs of Mayfair or Park Avenue but was certainly a state of mind within the state of mind that was Hollywood in the Thirties. Nonetheless, they survived in celluloid while their real-life counterparts proved much less durable. In like manner, fashions created by Adrian for Garbo, or by Orry Kelly for Kay Francis, survive on film to be recycled by Kenzo and Yves St. Laurent in the more consciously extravagant Seventies.

Gibbons' long tenure at Metro consolidated the studio look, which was highly distinctive regardless of genre, director, or cameraman. No other studio kept one art director at the helm for that long a period—not even Warner Brothers,

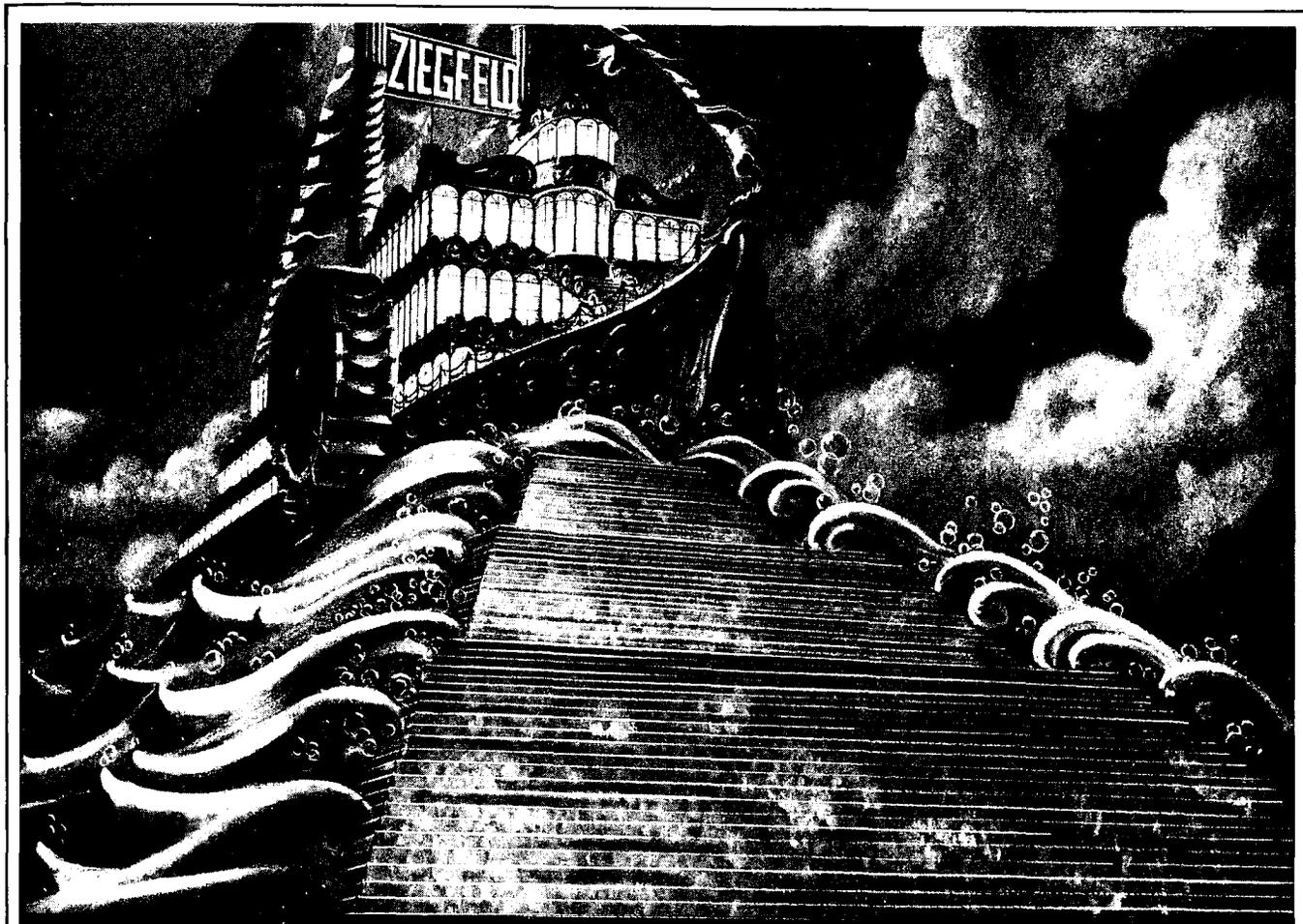


Carroll Clark and Van Nest Polglase, *Top Hat*, 1935. Sketch artist: Allan Abbott.

which profited from Anton Grot's influence throughout the Thirties and Forties, or Twentieth Century-Fox, which gave control to Lyle Wheeler from 1945 to 1960. In fact, the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood begins with a fateful reshuffling of art directors as the Thirties begin. Charles D. Hall left Chaplin, who only made a film every three or four years, to devote himself full time to Universal. Van Nest Polglase left Paramount for RKO-Radio, where he eventually

If the Bauhaus finally succeeded in infiltrating Hollywood, and if a touch of Le Corbusier's suburban villas can be detected in the airy, uncluttered sets of *Monte Carlo* (1930) and *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), it's in all probability due to the taste and sophistication of a German art director, Hans Dreier, imported in 1923. Both of these films were directed by another German import, Ernst Lubitsch. The celebrated Lubitsch "touch" was nonexistent in Berlin, and

saint of art directors, not just because he's the one art director to succeed spectacularly as a film director, but also because it's so evident that art direction and special effects play such an important role in a Hitchcock picture. Reducing each shot to its dramatic essence, Hitchcock is forced to rely completely on continuity sketches. He's the one director to demystify the actual process of committing to film what amounts to the complete film on paper.



Warren Newcombe, *The Great Ziegfeld*, 1936.

designed make-believe ballrooms for Astaire and Rogers to dance in; he succeeded Max Ree, and Hans Dreier took his post at Paramount. Anton Grot joined Jack Okley and Esdras Hartley at the recently merged Warner Brothers-First National. Grot, a Polish immigrant who worked exclusively in American films, made Warners the most Teutonic-looking of all studios. Fox went through a succession of department heads—notably William Darling and Richard Day—until Lyle Wheeler arrived, via Selznick and Korda, to establish the definitive Fox style, which we remember from films like *Laura* (1944) and *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946).

attenuated in his first American film, *Rosita* (1923); it finally blooms in all its picaresque splendor at Paramount, where Dreier held friendly sway surrounded by American architects like Wiard Ihnen, Robert Boyle, Walter Tyler, and Boris Leven. Compared to Paramount, the charming rococo of Lubitsch's Paris in *The Merry Widow* (1934), made at MGM, is so much Viennese pastry. Lubitsch used to say: "There is Paramount Paris, and Metro Paris, and of course the real Paris. But Paramount's is the most Parisian of all."

Which brings us to the delicate problem of who's responsible for the visual look of a picture. Hitchcock is the patron

But even Hitchcock is amenable to changing his style; he's not immune to the influence of a house style or an individual designer, like Lubitsch and other major directors. For the alert viewer, a new system of correspondences begins to appear among the films of one designer. Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) seems closer to Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) than to other Hitchcock films, for instance. Made at different studios four years apart, both derive from novels written by women and both feature the actress Judith Anderson. Could that be the reason? Or could it be that the other signature common to both is that of Lyle Wheeler, the art director?

A weak *mise-en-scène* can be dominated by strong art direction—seemingly a theoretical contradiction, but not in overly departmentalized Hollywood. A director could possibly resent a contribution that upset the balance of the picture, or stole the honors from him, or diminished his authority. He could retaliate by giving the designer a stomach ulcer, but a strong-willed designer could stand his ground, fight the director each foot of the film, and send him to the hospital with a heart attack. This is in fact the substance of the battle that raged between Walter Lang and production designer John De Cuir during the making of *The King and I* (1956). At one point, De Cuir had to win Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr over to his side by shooting a test reel using the controversial sets to demonstrate that a pink palace in no way detracted from the King's royalty and that a boldly stylized décor with a few Oriental props would

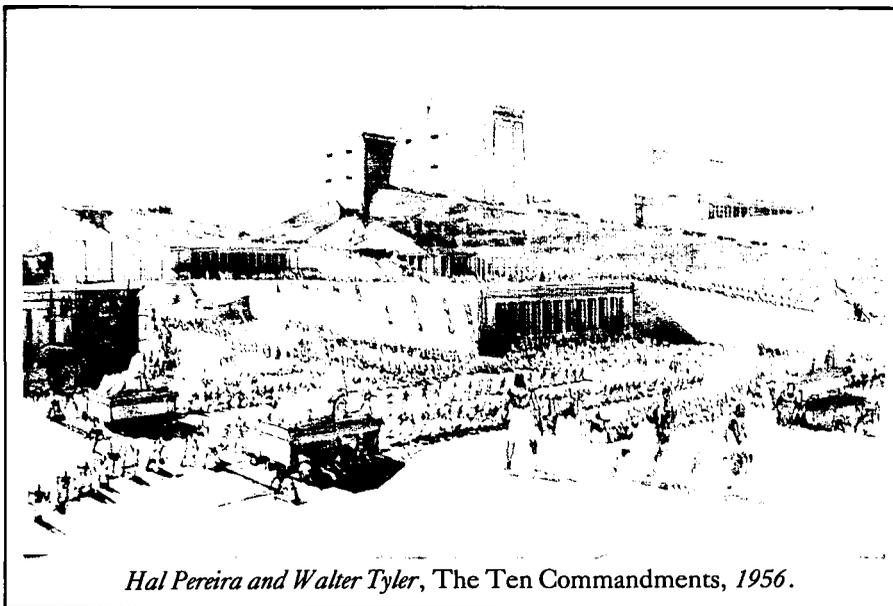
sand small, perfectly composed sketches for the camera to follow—every shot on paper, even to the light effect—and the various egos submitted to Menzies' vision.

The name of Menzies constantly recurs in our interviews with art directors. Like Gibbons, he was a somewhat legendary man; but whereas Gibbons was the executive who stayed put at Metro, Menzies was the ubiquitous artist, dominating the world of art direction in Hollywood through the Thirties and early Forties. Every major art director acknowledges a debt to Menzies, who not only elevated technicians to the category of contributing artists, but redefined their function for the general public. He was the first recipient of the Award for Best Art Direction, for *The Dove* in 1928, the first year that the Academy organized its prize-giving ceremony. (Gibbons won the second year, with *The Bridge of San*

egate some of his directorial duties to the production designer, who usually works (or should work) with the cameraman to select the best angle. Even the extravagant Cecil B. De Mille dreamed bigger on paper, as the sketches for *Madam Satan* (1930) reveal. Josef von Sternberg relied on Wiard Ihnen for the intelligent clutter of *Blonde Venus* (1932), and on Boris Leven for the circle-of-hell concept in *Shanghai Gesture* (1941). Alexander Golitzen knew of Monument Valley before John Ford did. And Hitchcock collaborated with Robert Boyle on the all-important look of *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964), and also with Albert Whitlock, the matte artist, who creates worlds painted on glass, complete to the last photographic detail and the last psychological nuance—as if a photograph had been taken of something that so far exists only in the director's mind.

The interviews that follow represent a blueprint of the art director's mind. Boris Leven tells us that the art director must be "a dreamer, a businessman, a diplomat"—a dreamer to bring his own vision to that of the script, a businessman to determine how that vision may be realized as practically as possible, and a diplomat to get the most out of a hundred colleagues, from the producer to the propmen. No wonder, then, that the men we spoke with were gracious and generous, and that they spoke of their craft as a series of challenges to the imagination, to be solved with intelligence and hard work. They are exceptionally modest within the credit-envious world of movies; we make claims for the art directors that they would never make for themselves.

The following monologues are dis-



Hal Pereira and Walter Tyler, *The Ten Commandments*, 1956.

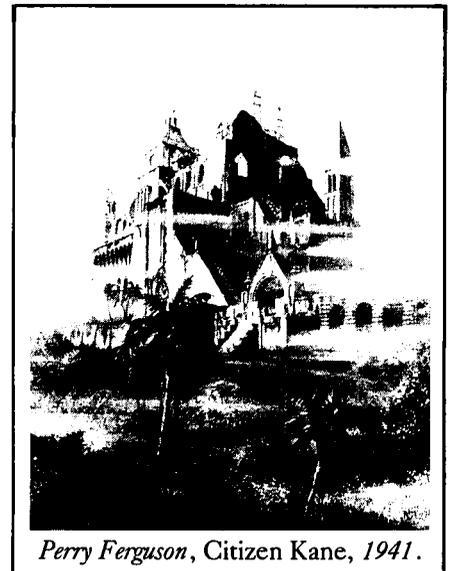
only enhance Anna's crinolines. Lang ended up with a heart attack. De Cuir ended up with an Academy Award—the ultimate vindication in the eyes of the industry

It was to appease the various directors involved in the making of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), including the musical director and the director of photography, not to mention several that went uncredited, that the producer, David O. Selznick, bestowed for the first time the title Production Designer on William Cameron Menzies. This quintessential Hollywood film was the result of the combined efforts from four major directors, half a dozen writers and cutters, an army of technicians. Visually it never falters because Menzies had drawn a thou-

Luis Rey.) From Menzies on, the production designer had a hand in the dynamics of filmmaking, as much as in the visuals.

Both Harry Horner and Ted Haworth remember Menzies as a man with a million movies in his head. The dozen or so he actually directed, alas, didn't live up to his vision. (*Things to Come*, which Menzies directed in England, is the most memorable.) As a child, Ted Haworth was told, Menzies already drew from a dramatic point of view that adults would envy.

If a film director is perceptive enough not to allow his ego to interfere, he can stimulate his art director to create in pencil and ink, on cardboard and wood, the inchoate images of his mind; he can del-



Perry Ferguson, *Citizen Kane*, 1941.



Perry Ferguson, *Citizen Kane*, 1941. Sketch artist: Claude Gillingwater.

tilled from hours of conversation with ten of these remarkable men. Space considerations prohibit printing the comments of other art directors with whom we spoke; and there are many more whose stories need to be recorded. But the exhibition and this Midsection allow some of these individuals, who have contributed so much to the cinema's achievement, to speak for themselves—through their words and their works; both are eloquent. They deserve, at least, this spotlighting of a visual experience that has passed through our minds and dreams in the dark at twenty-four frames per second. ❁

Robert J. Boyle

ROBERT BOYLE's credits include five films for the director he most reveres: Alfred Hitchcock (*Saboteur*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *North by Northwest*, *The Birds*, *Marnie*). It was a meeting of equals: the director who knew exactly what he wanted, and the art director who knew how to get it done.

I became an art director in 1941 with Alfred Hitchcock on *Saboteur*. No director I've worked with knew as much about films as he did. A lot of directors I

worked with knew a great deal, but they didn't have that technical skill. There have been filmmakers I've worked with who have been very demanding, but never with technical problems. I've been associated with many films that have been hard to design—some successful, some not—but no other director demands solutions to difficult problems, because no other director knows what to ask. Hitchcock is always trying to make the visual statement. Each shot must make its statement, it must relate to all the other shots, and there is no such thing as a throwaway shot. That was the major truth I learned from working with Hitchcock. He knew enough about how to get certain shots and the sort of effect he wanted to create, so that he could assign one to get it for him. It might cause you many sleepless nights trying to work it out, but he always knew what to ask for. He'd say, "This is what we want, we want to get this tiny figure way up there"—and you knew there was no way of getting that tiny figure up there without using a matte or a miniature or some trick shot. And he knew it too.

The Mount Rushmore sequence in *North By Northwest* I practically had to do alone. Hitchcock was in the middle of shooting, so I had to go up to Mount Rushmore and make all those stills which were later used for the Stereopticon slides. We weren't allowed to shoot on Mount Rushmore—that sequence had to be filmed on the stage—so the

Stereopticon slides were used as rear projection. The slides were used to gain an intensity of light. Essentially it's two light sources matched together on a rear-projection screen.

Hitchcock doesn't like to be on location. He has never felt comfortable with real locations, perhaps because he can't control them as finely. He'd even prefer to shoot in Grand Central Station. On *North By Northwest* we actually used Grand Central Station rather than reconstructing it on the set. The amount of light we poured into that station almost broke MGM. Sometimes we would use mattes just to improve the mood of the film. If the light wasn't right, it was better to have a matte shot and put in the right sky, the right coloring, etc. I don't believe that anyone knew that those were mattes. When the little boat crossed the bay in *The Birds*, that was a matte. It was often easier to "paint" a location on glass than to work on location.

It's harder to design a picture that's merely locations because then you're trying to find and piece together the subtleties of a pre-existing set which may not always exist. If you're going to build a set, you have some sense of it in your mind, and you build it. But when you have to find it, there are bits and pieces to find all over. You're trying to rediscover all the things that you preconceived when you read the script; you can't help it. You get an image and try to put that image into the reality of the loca-

tion. It also takes a lot more time to scout for and shoot on location. My difficulty is trying to find locations that are inherently controllable. To find the right one takes enormous time; and when you find it, maybe the light isn't right, too many conflicting situations may be present, millions of things are going on.

The younger filmmakers aren't used to all the tricks we used to work with, so they feel more comfortable with a real location. They feel that if they aren't really there, it isn't real. But they have considerably less control. It's the TV premise: just go out and shoot it. That's why I'm suspicious of people, no matter how talented, who come out of TV. After they're in it for a while, their attitude is: "Well, that's TV. It's only on a little screen, so let's shoot it. As long as it doesn't cost much, that's it."

The most difficult shot I ever worked on, because it involved so many different techniques, was the "seagulls' point of view" shot of the gas station explosion in *The Birds*. The sequence was very complicated: a man is attacked by birds as he is filling a gas tank of a car. In the attack, the pump falls to the ground, and gasoline rolls down the hill. Another man is just getting out of his car. He lights a cigar, throws the match down, and ev-

erything starts to burn. Meanwhile, the heroine is being attacked by birds in a phone booth. All of this required very close shooting. The girl in the phone booth was treated subjectively because Hitchcock wanted the audience to feel that they were Tippi Hedren being attacked. Hitchcock felt that what was needed was one shot to reorient the audi-

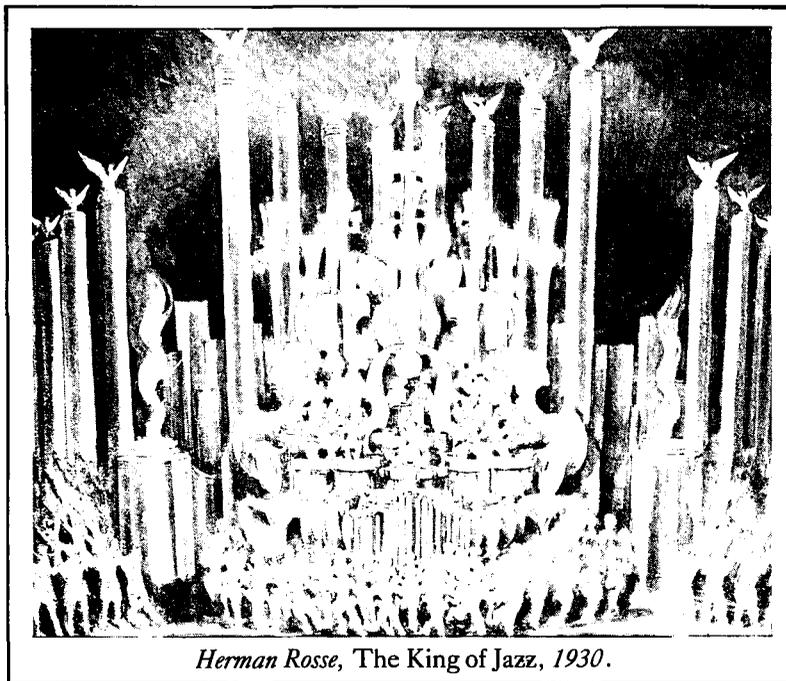
seeing the burning gas station from the birds' point of view.

We went up on a cliff which is now occupied by the Universal Hotel, but in those days there was a parking lot down below and only the cliff above. In the parking lot, we lined out with tape the position of all the buildings. The telephone booth was real, but everything

was marked out. A few walls were put in where it was necessary to back up the action, but most of the action was backed against the asphalt of the parking lot. And in that parking lot we added the gasoline, the car, and the fire, just as we'd had it in Bodega Bay. It was an actual fire, actual people, actual cars. But that was only part of it. Now we had to put in the rest—and that's where Al Whitlock came in.

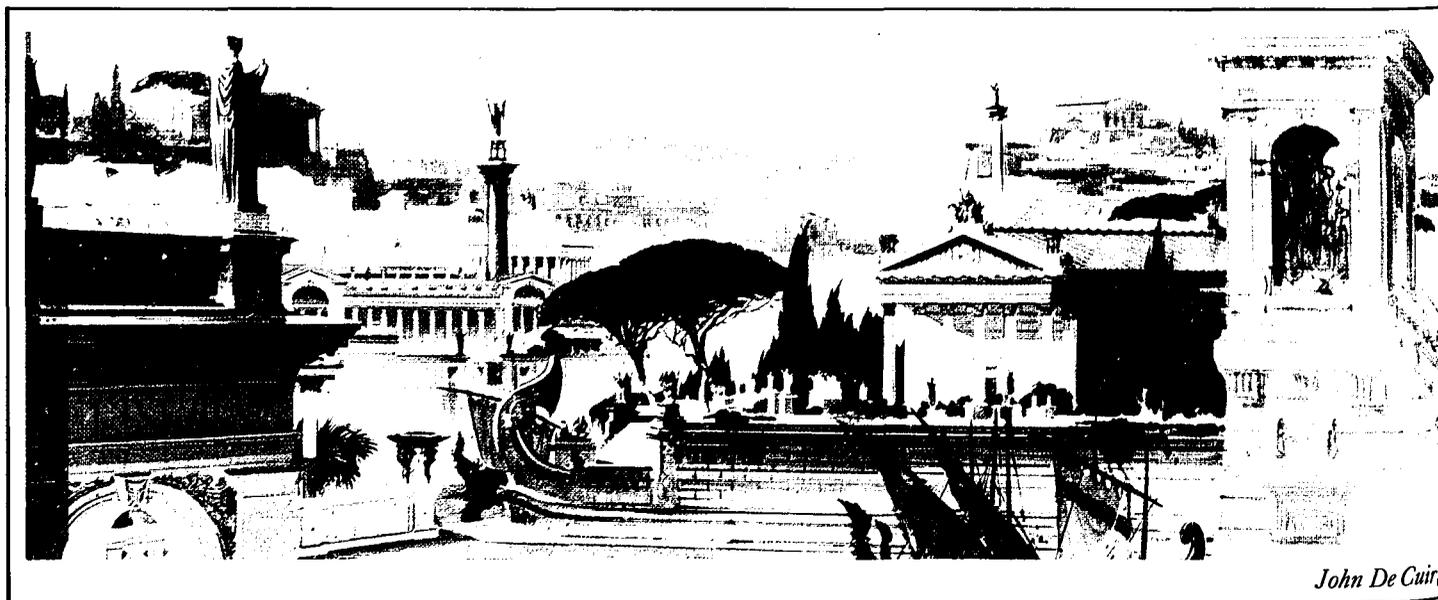
Al painted a matte that included the real hotel and the real restaurant. Then we painted in the rest of the "Bodega Bay" community, which had never existed in the first

place. We couldn't have made that shot even in Bodega Bay because the town was actually made up of three or four towns. In this shot, we also wanted to make the statement that there was a community around there. So, in the matte painting there was a town with a school, with a church, with all the amenities. Over that was another overlay



Herman Rosse, The King of Jazz, 1930.

ence as to what was going on—and a lot was going on! At that time, we were concentrating on depicting the subjective feelings of the people involved and how they were reacting to the birds. The birds were diving down and about to inundate the whole community. So now we had to pull back and view the whole situation from a distance. That meant



John De Cuir,

which was a roscope of real birds shot on a down shot. Those birds were shot from a hundred-foot cliff off one of the islands in the Pacific off Santa Barbara. Fish were used as bait to get the seagulls to dive for the fish as they were thrown out. That was photographed and then, from those photographs, hand-painted mattes—rotoscopes—were made. It was a separate piece of film with real birds on it. The sea was then matted out, and we were left with just birds flying in under the camera.

Apart from all this, since there was a fire going on in a real location in the parking lot, the smoke from the fire had to go through the matte. We had to photograph miniature smoke at a speed that would be commensurate with real smoke. The smoke had to be joined, not only going through the real part of the set, but then through the matte, and out of the picture. At the completion of that sequence, we counted thirty-two pieces of film that were involved, and it only once went to a second generation. We cheated a bit since we counted the Technicolor three-strip as three pieces.

It was an extremely important shot. Not only did it re-establish what was happening, but it was one of the first times that you saw the entire community terrified by the power of the birds to cre-

ate this havoc. I think this was the most difficult shot with special photographic problems ever made. It was a fanciful shot, a fantastic shot, but a very real one. It functioned the way Hitchcock wanted the shot to function: it told the story. All his films have that sense of verisimilitude. He bends reality to his purpose to get the real truth. ☼

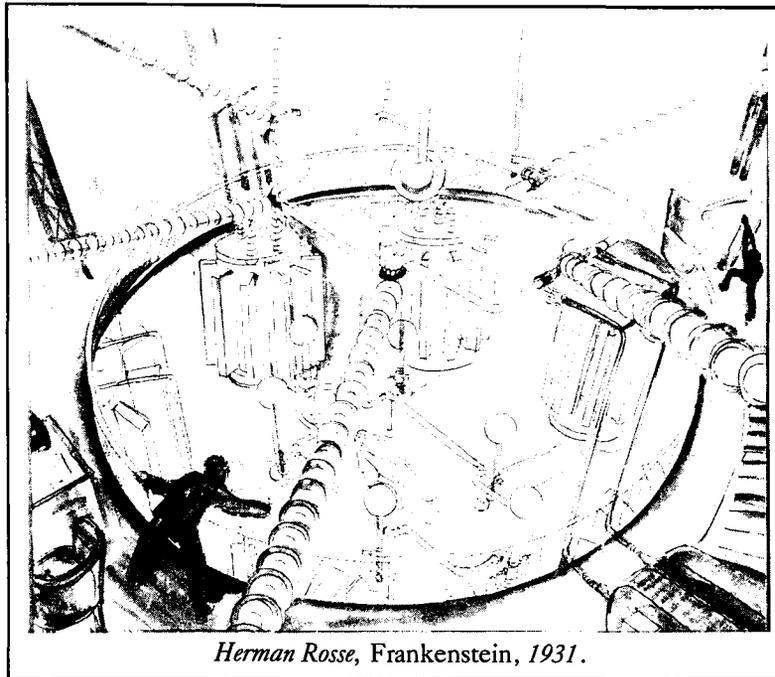
ued creating movie magic there and in America until 1965. His thirty-four films with Maurice Tourneur display the first cohesive sense of film design.

My career began as a young painter of sets and backdrops for the Paris stage. I worked for six years as a stage designer before going into movies in 1900. By 1905 you saw Méliès, Pathé, Lumière in some theaters and music halls. But by 1906, when I was designing for Gaumont, that's when film production started on a large scale. Up to then, it had been rather ordinary—you know, a view of a train coming into a station, etc.

At Gaumont, we'd be given an assignment to build a set. The set would be built, and the director would come in to direct without knowing anything beforehand about the set. I came to America in 1912, and I wanted my director, like Maurice Tourneur, to know in advance the sort of set he

would get. I would show him sketches, but I would sketch them for myself. I wanted to know what to do in advance, because Tourneur was shooting six reels. Almost nobody had done six reels at that time, so I had to make sure that there was a continuity to the scenery and sets throughout the film.

I knew a director who left Gaumont,



Herman Rosse, Frankenstein, 1931.

Ben Carré

BEN CARRÉ surely holds the record for the longest and liveliest survival in the film business: he began painting movie sets in Paris in 1900, and contin-



Cleopatra, 1963.

and came to America to work for Eclair. During his vacation, he recommended that I be approached to work as his art director. Eclair got in touch with me to see if I'd be interested. I was anxious to see America, and the job was more interesting and paid more than my job at Gaumont, so I accepted. I worked with a French director who didn't speak English, who was not fascinated by the life of America. It seemed that I was always with the Frenchman. We were in downtown New York and life was happening uptown. I was mostly building prop sets—stationary backgrounds—and was miserable until Tourneur came along in 1914. From 1914 until we came to California in 1918, we worked in Fort Lee. Jules Brulatour realized that he could make money with Tourneur's films, so he financed those films and at the same time gave complete directorial control to Tourneur. Eclair was not good enough, so they joined Peerless—later to become Peerless-World' Corporation. Brulatour realized that Tourneur was the man who was producing more film and better films, so he said, "I will build you your studio."

They built Paragon Studio in Fort Lee and we moved there in 1915. Every morning, I would take the ferry at 127th Street to New Jersey. From there, the streetcar stopped first at Solex Studio, Eclair, Fox, and Paragon. During this time Famous Players Lasky was trying to get Tourneur and me to work for them. [Marshall] Mickey Neilan had come to finish a picture in New York. He visited me and said, "When you make a change, I want to be the first one you think of." So I said, "Sure Mickey, I'll let you know." Mickey later became a good friend and we worked together on many pictures. In 1918, with the war shortages, it was impossible to shoot in New York, so we moved to California. I was working on *Prunella* then and had three days to do my sets at the Biograph Studio in Fort Lee—my first sight of that studio was for this picture. Before I came there, the scenery was built mostly like theatre scenery—flat sets and lots of silhouette work.

I did twenty-four sketches for the subterranean sequences in *The Phantom of the Opera*. I was always fascinated by Gaston Leroux's *Le Fantôme de L'Opera*. I wanted Tourneur or Mickey Neilan to film that story. A few years later, Rupert Julien was interested in directing, but didn't know how to shoot the below-ground sections of the opera. He was aware of the fact that I had designed pro-

ductions for the Paris Opera and knew the building quite well. So I was hired to do the sketches and sets for that sequence. Even though I knew something about the construction of the place, many of my designs were from my imagination. To re-create the Phantom's chambers, we used five floors beneath the regular stage plus a double trap door to lower the dressing room to the cellars.

I was in New York about to sail for Nice when I received a telegram from Julien at Universal. The telegram said, maybe you can help us out because you know the theater and we have to depend on you because we have no one else who can help us. The interior, the auditorium, everything above ground is all right, but what will be the milieu of the phantom, and how will he be able to do all that he is doing in the picture? I couldn't resist his plea.

I worked with everyone; I watched the studios grow. I came back from a trip to Europe in 1925, and was amazed to see how MGM's Art Department had developed. They had draftsman, set dressers, prop men—people doing things that I was used to doing all by myself. I was working in a Marion Davies film, *Lights of Old Broadway*, and usually had my sketch box with me. We wanted to stage a crowded fight scene. I would explain what I wanted to do by painting a little sketch right on the lot. It was the common language that everyone knew. You could show your workers the sketch and, immediately, they understood what had to be done.

In 1926, at Metro I was preparing sets for *La Bohème*. I had finished many drawings when I got a call from Warners to work on something special for Barrymore, *Don Juan*. There was a kid, a draftsman who was doing pretty well, and had done one picture all right. I saw it and thought, "Well, why not give my work to Buddy Gillespie. He's certainly promising." He got the picture, and my drawings, and had a long career at MGM as art director, and later with special effects. At one time, I, too, decided to quit art direction for miniature process. I did many glass shots before completing my film career as scenic painter for many MGM films—*The Wizard of Oz*, *An American in Paris*. I spent thirty years in the scenic shop there. Few people realized I'd been doing the same work long before there was ever an MGM, or a Hollywood—that this French fellow, painting backdrops in near-total obscurity, was there in the early days, watching it all develop. ☼

Robert Clatworthy

ROBERT CLATWORTHY was an art director at Universal for over twenty years (1943-64). His work includes such masterpieces of fear and atmosphere as *Phantom Lady*, *Written on the Wind*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *Touch of Evil*, and *Psycho*. He is now painting sunnier sets at the Disney studio.

I was always inclined toward art and went right to work during the Great Depression. I started in the art department at Paramount Pictures. They had some fine art directors at the time: Ernst Fegtté, Bob Usher, Bob Boyle, and Boris Leven were there; and, of course, Hans Dreier, the head of the department. It was a good place, a happy place. And because it was rather small, you learned a little bit of everything. There were six or seven people on the boards. The studio made forty, fifty pictures a year; each art director did six, seven, eight pictures, so naturally they relied on the help to block things in, to draft, to sketch, to get on with the designing. You did a little bit of everything and it was wonderful. Unlike today, you didn't have the restrictions that unions place on everybody. Today they break things up a little too tightly. I'm talking about drafting personnel, set decorators. Theoretically, I'm not really involved with what's happening down in the building area. I go there as an observer, taking a coffee break.

I worked at Paramount for eight or nine years. Then I worked briefly with Selznick, and on to Universal, where, in 1943, I received my first full credit as art director. It was called *So's Your Uncle*, a quickie that Billie Burke was in. In those days they made B-pictures, strictly commercial films, but now you get better films to work in; more care is given. We rarely do more than one picture at a time. As you know, it's changed into a more independent operation. All of the people I mentioned—the ones still living—are free-lancing now. We do a picture for a company, we see what happens, we rest between pictures, we'll work in all the studios. Universal is the one studio where they have a permanent art department, mostly because of television.

I never did musicals at Universal—nothing like *The Great Ziegfeld*, that style. I did two semi-musicals, though, for producer Aaron Rosenberg: *Never Steal Anything Small* and *The Benny Goodman Story*. They were directed, respectively, by

Charles Lederer and Valentine Davies, both writers. Rosenberg thought they would make good directors. Well, he was wrong. Disaster.

At Universal, I considered directing a film, as most everyone who enters the business does. Joan Harrison, a very bright woman who was Hitchcock's associate producer for a long time, thought I would be a good director for *Phantom*



Lady. Then it turned out to be a co-director job, and I decided it wouldn't really work. Robert Siodmak directed that film; I did the sets for it and for another Siodmak, *Christmas Holiday*.

Of the shows I worked on at Universal, the one I most enjoyed was *Touch of Evil*, Orson Welles' show. It was shot in Venice, California, because part of the town resembled the covered walkways in Tijuana. On the night we did the opening shot—the three-minute-long take that follows a white car through the streets and to the Mexican-American border—Welles had eleven generators working. Eleven! That's a lot of generators to light a night scene. If you visit Venice today, it's easy to imagine the route the convertible travels to the border.

Psycho was a little quickie picture for Hitchcock: only four weeks to prepare and shoot. Hitchcock had decided to do a picture that would cost less than a million—it came in at \$830,000, I think—so it had to be shot in black-and-white. Certainly it worked better in black-and-white; so did *Touch of Evil*. Color tends to brighten things up too much; I always try to take the color out. Hitchcock is a great planner. He knows precisely what he wants to do. Sometimes he could read a newspaper while he's making a movie, he's that sure of himself. Joe Hurley and I designed the motel and the Bates house, which is still standing on the Universal back lot. And for the roof, we borrowed parts from the rooftop of the house that was built, ten years earlier, for *Harvey*!

Then, about fifteen years ago I went free-lance and I spent some time with Stanley Kramer, who once in a while, no matter what most people say, would come up with something truly cinematic. I designed *Ship of Fools* for him, and we never went near a ship. I thought there was a touch of the allegorical in that film which made that possible. I don't think that in some other film you could

have been that brave, to manufacture the whole thing on sound stages. But we trucked the whole ship in sixty-four sections from Columbia to Paramount, because that's where they had the best process equipment. Al Whitlock did ten or eleven matte shots, and it worked fine.

I haven't seen much original art work



around the studios. It was never saved, could be taken home by anybody, or thrown away. There is no sensible record of art direction in Hollywood. ❁

Buddy Gillespie

A. ARNOLD (BUDDY) GILLESPIE has been at MGM since 1923, when he helped design the original *Ben Hur*. He served as art director until 1936, when he turned to orchestrating some of the studio's most dazzling special ef-

fects: the earthquake in *San Francisco*, the tornado in *The Wizard of Oz*, the otherworldly "id" in *Forbidden Planet*.

My family moved from El Paso, Texas to Oklahoma City when I was three. I was the art director of my high-school paper. Since we lived in the Midwest, my father said



I should go east or west. I chose New York City; I thought it would be an



education in itself. It was. I went to the Art Students League and the School of Journalism at Columbia.

During World War I, I met a chap by the name of Colin Tate who was in my outfit in the Army. He was also C.B. De Mille's assistant director at that time. When I came to California in 1922, one of the first things I did was to go out and see Tate and watch him make movies. One day he asked, "Are you a draftsman?" I said, "Well, of course," having had four years of mechanical drawing in high school, but never having worked in an architect's office. They needed somebody for about two weeks in De Mille's

art department; eight months later I left.

We worked from twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, and I got \$25 a week, which I thought was pretty good. My mother thought it was not so good; she said, "You can't do this for that price." I said, "Well, they don't charge tuition"—I called it the De Mille Academy—"and they're even paying me \$25 per week." I was learning the entire business, including what a T-square was. We went through two pictures:

Manslaughter with Leatrice Joy and Thomas Meighan, and *Adam's Rib* with Milton Sills and Anna Q. Nilsson.

There was going to be a two- or three-week layoff, which I didn't like, so I went to the Goldwyn Studio, which later became part of MGM, and talked to Horace Jackson, Cedric Gibbons' assistant, who hired me as a draftsman for \$65 a week. That was quite a change.

Another chap and I saved our money to go to Europe for a year, and we left in February 1923. We spent all our money in Paris the first five weeks we were there. We knew that *Ben Hur* was being made in Italy at that time. Horace Jackson was there; I called him, we went down, and nineteen months later I left

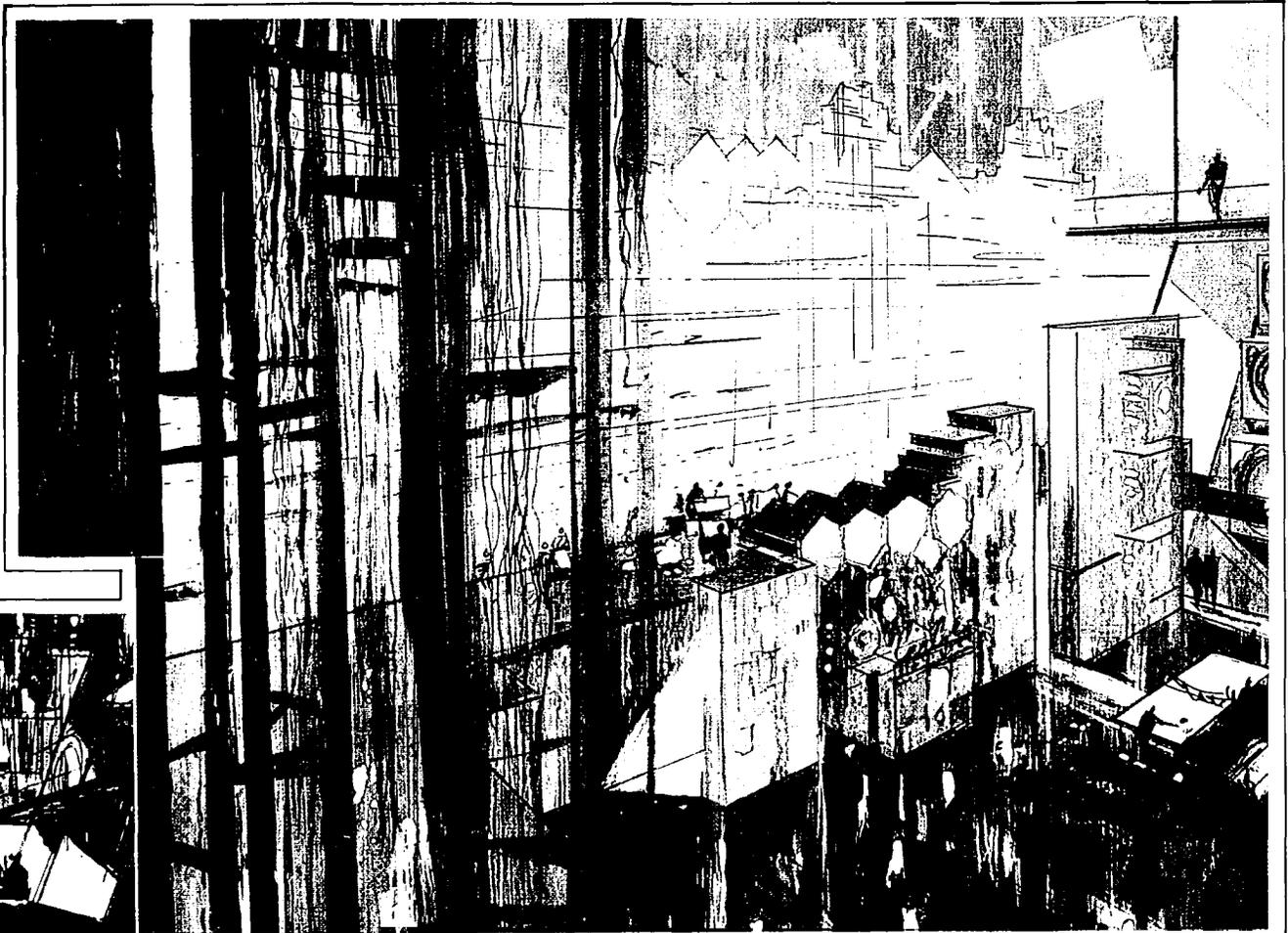
a bad script, and vice versa. So, number one were the writers. Then Cedric Gibbons would read the script, and give it to his unit art director. It was up to the art director to really design the film.

Our goal was fifty-two features and forty shorts per year at MGM during the Twenties and Thirties. That was a lot of production—an average of a movie a week. Well, Gibbons was the head of the whole doggone thing. He was quite a person: probably the finest executive on the lot at that time. He gathered around himself competent people and gave them almost complete autonomy, but he knew every minute what was going on. Even though there was a separate wardrobe department, he often was involved

was smart enough to give all of his men, including me, almost total control.

Gibbons always had an obsession for moldings around doorways or carvings in a piece of furniture. There's a whole lot of stock molding that the art directors or the draftsmen used; but Gibbons in those days used to design and cut all our moldings! He loved to go into the drafting room, and sit there and spend an hour or so on a little picture molding.

Gibbons was so admired by the people on his staff, I don't think they ever felt any resentment that he would get the acclaim for a picture. I used to insist that certain of the men that worked for me had credit. He could never understand that, you know. He thought, "Well



Robert Boyle, sketches for *Winter Kills*, 1978.

Italy after *Ben Hur* was completed. When I returned home, they made me a unit art director under Cedric Gibbons. There were three or four of us then, and I held that position until 1936.

To my way of thinking, the most important person in the production and the creation of a movie is the writer. If it's not on paper, it's not there. A good director can't make a very good picture out of

in costumes. There was another separate department, the set dressers under Ed Willis, but Gibbons was over all of them, too. Later on, a matte painting department headed by Warren Newcome was also under Gibbons' jurisdiction. And when I became the head of the special effects department, unlike all the other studios, it was still part of the Art Department, and I was under Gibbons. But he

Buddy, you're the guy who's in charge." But there were tremendous contributions from other people. The Oscars from *Ben Hur*, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, and *Green Dolphin Street* are mine, but there were a lot of other individuals involved in the winning of those Oscars.

Everybody in the studio called him Mr. Gibbons. Many years ago, I got him interested in tennis, and we used to play

Robert Boyle, continuity sketches for a sequence from *The Birds*, 1963.



tennis before coming to work. On the tennis court you can't say Mr. Gibbons, it was Gibby and Buddy back and forth. An hour later, I'd come into his office with an idea or a plan or a drawing, and I'd say, "Mr. Gibbons, may I have a little of your time?" It was Mr. Gibbons always—not that he demanded it, but there was a certain something about the man that deserved that kind of respect.

My first picture as unit art director was *Lovey Mary*, which was directed by King Baggott. There was a big dump out on Lot 1 at MGM where all the trash was put. I decided that would be a good place for the Cabbage Patch, the little village in the film. So we made quite a set out of the dump yard on Lot 1.



hull of a ship either in miniature or in full size—we could get naval architects in who knew this sort of business. We had the use of all the facilities of the studio, for whatever artistic purpose.

We built the first outdoor tank on MGM's Lot 3. The tank was 200 feet in width, but later we added another hundred feet and made it 300 by 300. It provided the best light in the world, because there's no electrician like the sun. We shot all of our night scenes for *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* in broad daylight—the sunnier the day, the better we could do for night. We had to build all our ships to a fairly large scale so they would be believable. We had one ship that was fifty-five feet in length. The old idea of a little



had to do: to control and maneuver a perfect line of tanks through water, down cliff, over embankments, etc. Control, however, is the important thing. In *The Wizard of Oz* we did a tornado. Now, you can't go to Kansas, and wait for a tornado, and wonder where to put the cameras, and hope that you get it. So there must be control on all physical elements. And if you do it properly, people accept it. Samuel Goldwyn once asked me to help him with a buzzard. He needed a buzzard to fly down and land on a man collapsed on the desert. They actually put somebody down in the desert for a long while with raw meat on him to attract the buzzard. They never got anything, so I thought, "If I can make mon-



During that period I apparently had a flare for the physically dramatic pictures that I had worked on: the sinking of the galley in *Ben Hur*, the earthquake sequence in *San Francisco*. Consequently, when the offer came from Gibbons to work in the special effects department after James Basevi had left, I accepted. I thought it was one of the most challenging parts of studio work—everything from atom bombs to sinking ships. They called it the disaster department, because we were always making disasters.

In those days we had quite an art department, composed of very skilled people with many architects or graduate architects who were trying to get into the motion-picture business. And if we needed any particular kind of thing—the

boat in a bathtub makes a good cartoon, but it's not very realistic on film. The miniature carrier for *Thirty Seconds* was so large that it couldn't travel through the water very far; it would have run right into the painted backing. So we kept the ship stationary, and put hydraulic rams on it for rock and tilt and pitch, and moved the ocean instead. Then with camera speed, wave machines, and wind machines, we were able to keep the 300 feet to the backing clear for takeoffs and other effects.

In *Comrade X*, Gable and Hedy Lamarr are trying to escape, so they hide in the General's tank—and of course all the other tanks follow them. Well, those are just enlargements from miniatures, but it was one of the toughest things we ever

keys fly, I should be able to make a buzzard fly." I did.

One of my best creations was Robby, the robot in *Forbidden Planet*. Up to that time, robots in science fiction films looked like men in starched aluminum suits. I thought of an old pot-bellied stove like the ones they used to have in grocery stores. So Robby was really the outgrowth of my fondness for pot-bellied stoves. He was the first robot with a sense of humor. The whole physical end of movies, in my opinion, was so interesting because whether the picture was modern, whether it was in the future, whether it was a dream world like *The Wizard of Oz* or in outer space like *Forbidden Planet*, it was illusion made real. That was my profession. ☼





Dale Hennessey

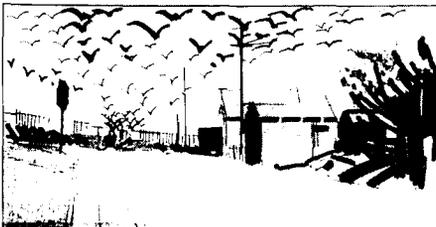
DALE HENNESSY is responsible for some of the most artful fantasy designs of the past dozen years: in *Fantastic Voyage*, *Sleeper*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Logan's Run*, and *King Kong*. But he is just as proud of the extravagant realism he brought to *Dirty Harry* and the new *Dog Soldiers*.

I came home after World War II and went to a Veterans' art school in Glendale. I seemed to have a flair for illustra-



tion, but what I really wanted to do was paint. So I taught art courses for about a year, and I starved for a little while, before going to work as an illustrator at Fox. John De Cuir and I hit it off, and most of my work at Fox was for him: *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and so on. Then I went to Disney, where my father had worked as one of the key art directors on *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Fantasia*. They really valued an illustrator's skills there. Even in his live-action films, you know, Disney would have every shot illustrated, and then the director would shoot the shots Disney approved.

One of my early films as art director was *Fantastic Voyage*. It was a once-in-a-lifetime film, because it dealt with the greatest architecture, the human body.



The sets representing the interior of the body were called "soft sets"; it was one of the first films to experiment with plastics and fiberglass to achieve a flexible look. We worked very closely with medical instructor Frank Armitage and the UCLA medical facility, and with them we were able to take microscopic anatomy and blow it up to the point where, although medically correct, the sets became pure abstractions. This was what gave the film its style.

But after *Fantastic Voyage*, and *In Like Flint*, and *John Goldfarb, Please Come Home*, it was a pleasure to work on a picture like *Dirty Harry*: it got me out of fantasy and into gritty reality. We shot a lot of San Francisco locations—except



for the bank-robbery sequence at the opening of the picture, that street, which a lot of people think really *is* in San Francisco; we did it here at Universal. I lived up there for almost three months.

There's a scene where the killer robs a liquor-store owner and steals his gun; we wanted to shoot it in an actual liquor store that was famous for its wines. We offered \$600, then \$750, but the owner refused to stay open after 6 P.M., when we'd be shooting. And Don Siegel, the director, was insisting that we shoot in that area. Now, four doors down from the liquor store was an abandoned restaurant that was occupied on Fridays by a man who ran a sort of loan-shark operation. And he rented us "his" place for \$600. So we literally duplicated the liq-



uor store down the street: the neon signs, the whiskey bottles, the beer—all the distributors were lending us their liquor. The only thing we changed was the name of the store. And every day the owner of the real store would come down to our set with a cigar in his mouth, and shake his head, and walk away.

I made two films with Woody Allen: *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* and *Sleeper*. In *Sleeper* we were going for a style 200 years into the future; and at the same time, due to Woody's attitude, we had to give the film a slightly cartoon look. All of the sets, cars, flying belts, and props were designed with this in mind. We were also lucky to be able to tie our sets into some great existing archi-

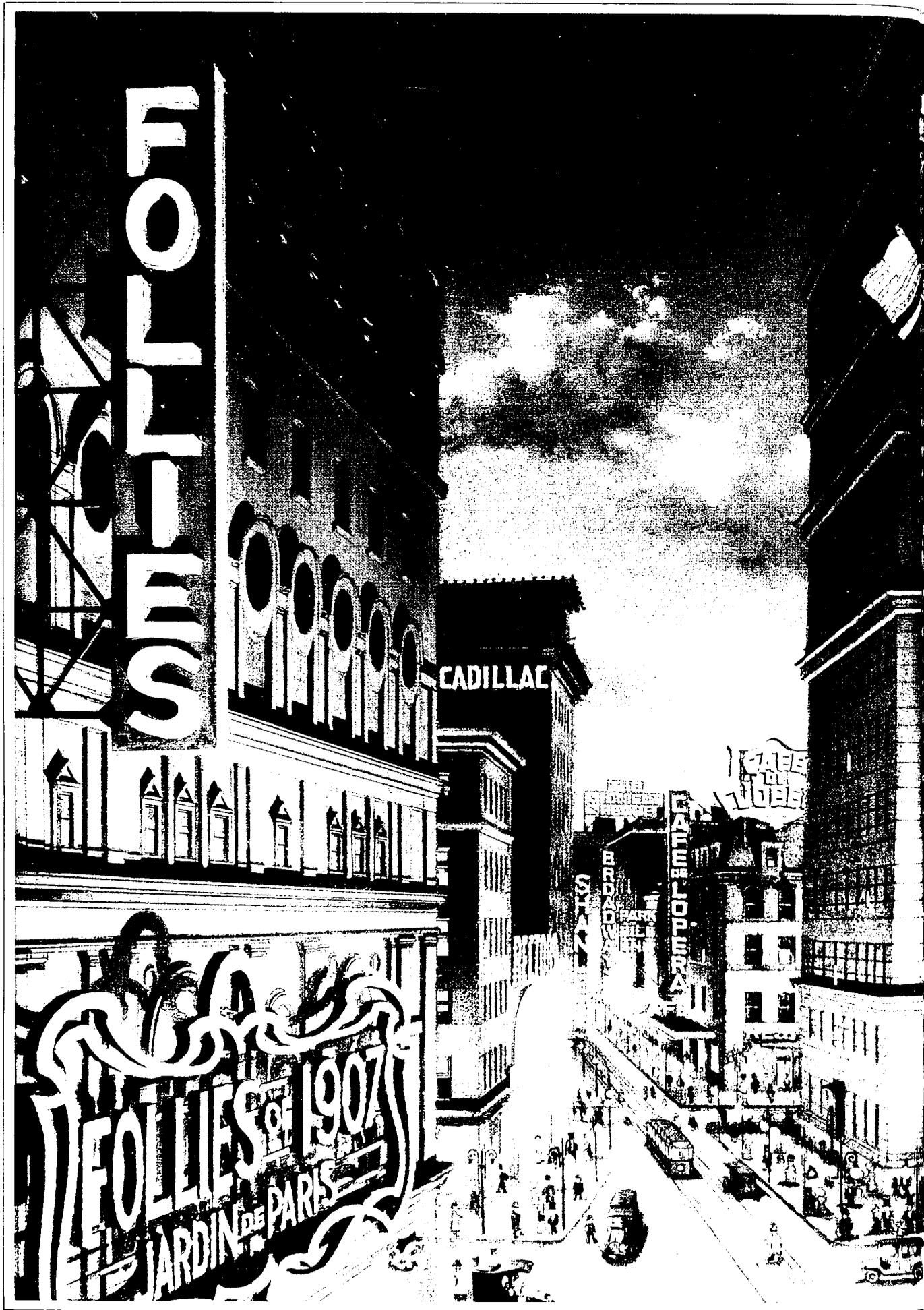


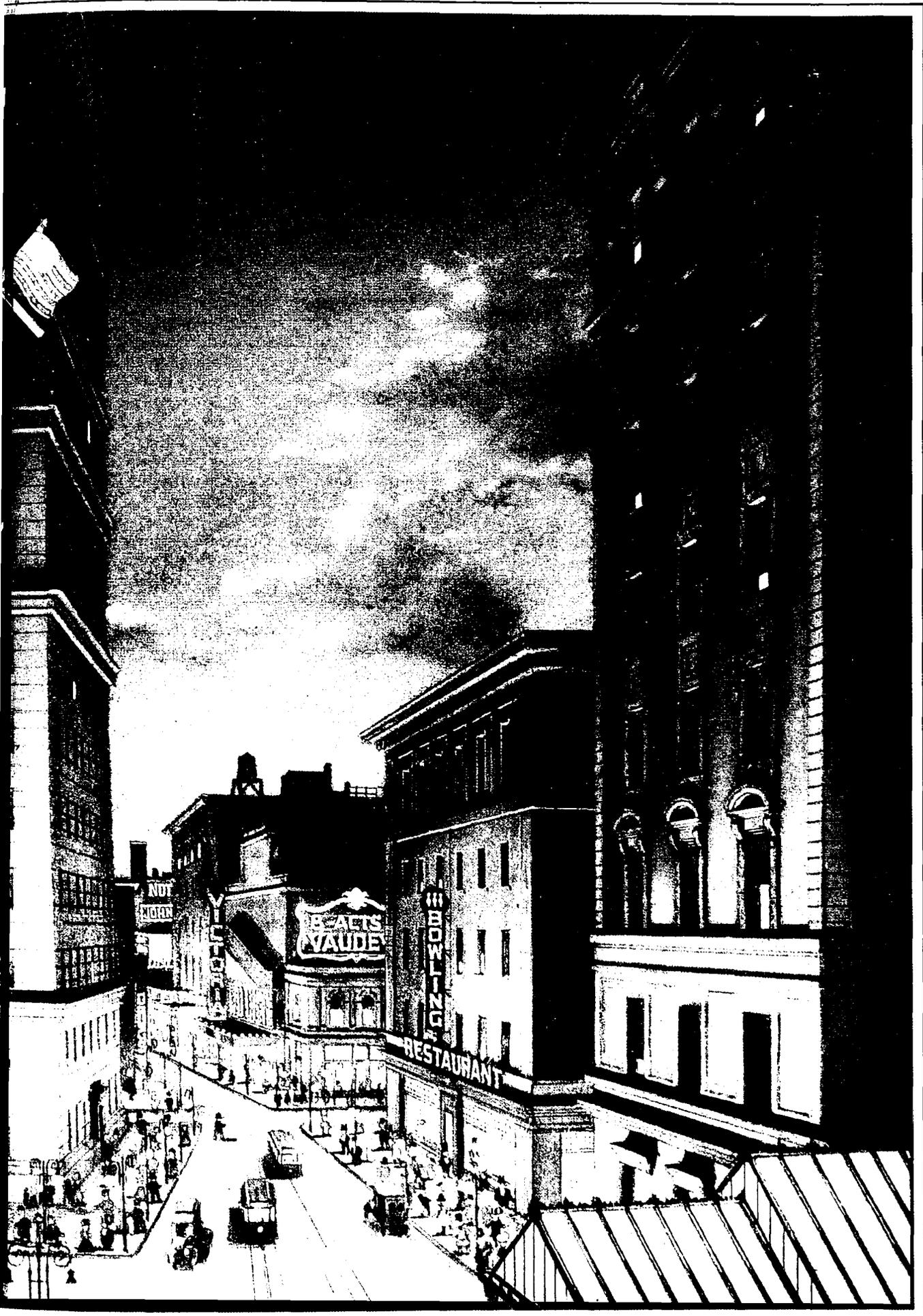
tecture in California and Colorado. Woody's film sense, and his ability to bring out the creative juices of his coworkers, made this a very special film for me.

Young Frankenstein was a total joy. It was just a nice company. And everything worked. We shot the Mittel-European-village scenes at MGM, but everything else—the castle, the lab, the bedroom—we squeezed onto a single stage at Fox. I designed everything except the four lab machines, constructed by Ken Strickfaden, which had been used in the 1931 film. I tried to capture the feel of the Universal movies without getting too close to the actual design. And with the crazy genius of Mel Brooks to guide us, I think we did it.



Warren Nevinson, Ziegfeld Follies, 1946.





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It's my job—and my pleasure—to make a picture look as good as possible. So it was a pleasure to design the futuristic sets for *Logan's Run*, and the waterfall scene for *King Kong*. But if a picture doesn't have a good story, all the beautiful sets in the world won't save it. That's why this experience with Karel Reisz on *Dog Soldiers* was so wonderful for me—because it's gonna be one hell of a picture. We had some interesting challenges there: we had to turn a street in Durango, Mex., into a street in Saigon; we took a Mexican villa and turned it into a Vietnamese villa, and built Vietnamese shacks alongside of it. Most challenging of all, we had to go to Cuernavaca and find a mansion that's supposed to be in Bel Air!

There was a crazy period when all the studios just started selling everything. A few years ago I got a call from a friend of mine who said, "I just bought one of your sketches. Fox had an exhibit out in the Valley, and they were selling everything." In those days your work was the property of the studio; as a result, too much of Hollywood's past has been sold or destroyed or—worse—just mislaid. ☹

George Jenkins

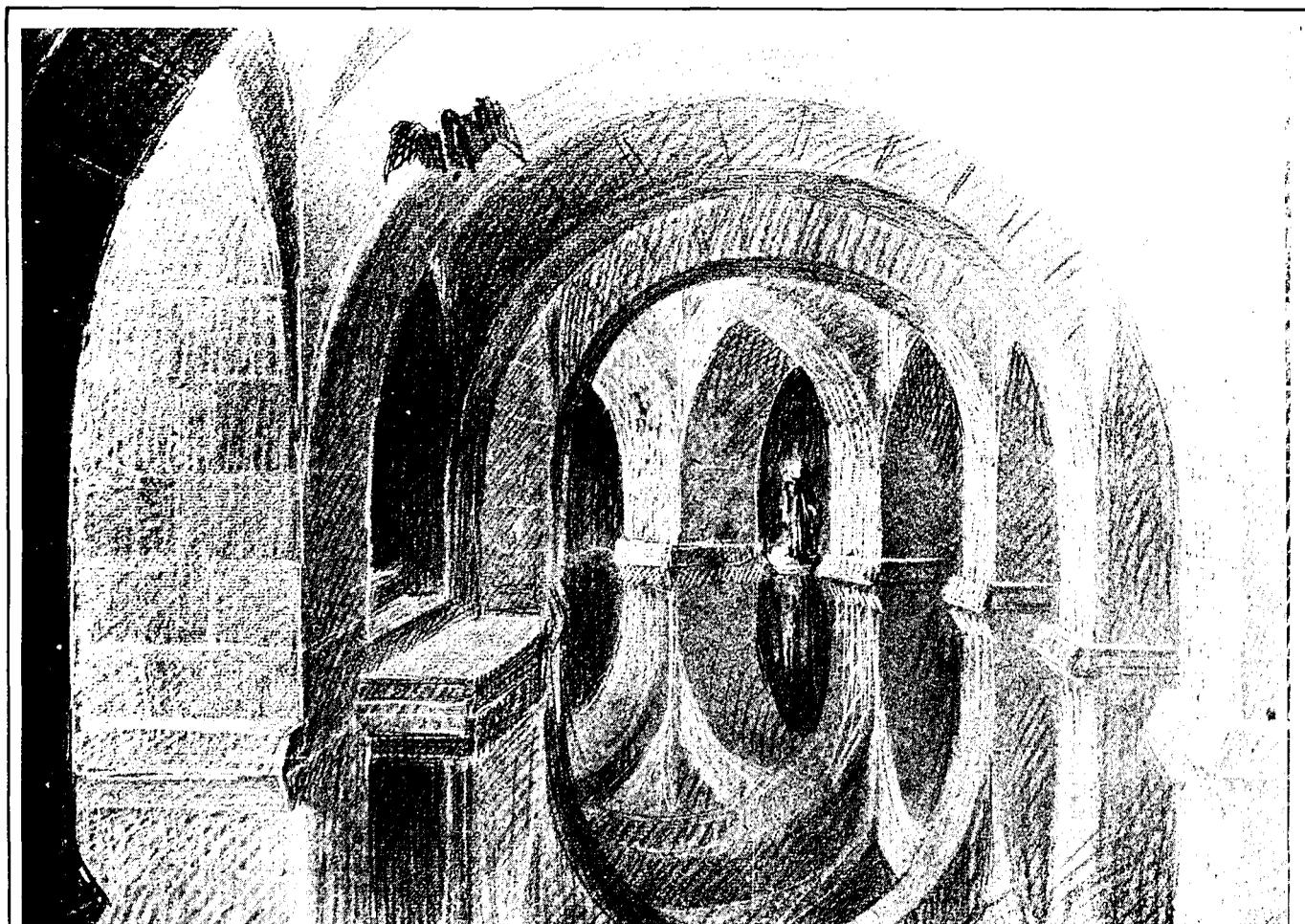
GEORGE JENKINS is a student, and master, of film and stage perspective. His Broadway credits stretch from *I Remember Mama* (1944) to *Sly Fox* (1976). His most productive film alliances have been with Samuel Goldwyn (*The Best Years of Our Lives*), Arthur Penn (*Mickey One*), and Alan J. Pakula (*Klute*).

I started out in the New York theater—a good start, in many ways the best, because the discipline of the theater is so demanding. It can offer a greater challenge, and greater opportunities. Even a novice stage designer can—must—visualize the entire project; a young draftsman in the motion-picture business rarely gets that chance. My career as a draftsman for the stage began with designer Jo Mielziner on a musical, *Sing Out the News*, and it was just Jo and myself to do it all. In the theater you work with the stagehands on a more intimate basis than you do in motion



pictures. Making movies is a bigger operation; the mechanics are more complicated; so the work is compartmentalized. Of course, when you arrive at the top, when you design a production, you have a hand in every facet of the picture.

Even then, control is limited. The set is designed and constructed to be photographed in the best manner—but it may not be photographed that way at all, because the cinematographer's is the final eye that looks on the set; it's through his lens the audience sees the picture. In the theater you design for the best seat in the house, but every theatergoer gets at least



Top and above: Ben Carré, *The Phantom of the Opera*, 1925.

some of the view you had in mind. In the theater you have to worry about the sight lines—most theaters have terrible sight lines—but in movies you have to think about the *camera's* sight lines.

It was during the war that I came out to Hollywood to do my first movie, *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Samuel Goldwyn had seen a play I'd designed, *I Remember Mama*, in 1944; and in his inimitable way he said, "Come out and do a picture"—as if they were interchangeable media. I was pleased, but not really surprised: I'd known that some day I would do a picture. I'd been preparing for it for some time. As an architecture student, and then as a stage designer, and then an art director, I was always involved with perspective. Back in New York I had investigated the process of producing a projected sketch. But when I came out to the Goldwyn Studios, I found that I really didn't know too much about it.

It was then I met a matte artist, Audubon Tyler. He saw that I was struggling with perspective, and taught me a method he'd used in matte painting: with a *curved* picture plane. It's like this: the distance between any point of the

you, but that's the way I wanted it to look.

Perry Ferguson was Goldwyn's contract art director—had been, since right after Perry had done *Citizen Kane*, and then Goldwyn had hired him to design *Ball of Fire*—and it was a great shock to Perry when I came to Hollywood. Goldwyn hadn't told him I was coming, and Perry thought *he* was going to design *The Best Years*. When I met Perry he looked at me and said, "Well, you're a surprise. There's an office upstairs near the drafting room. You can have that." It was the worst office in the building.

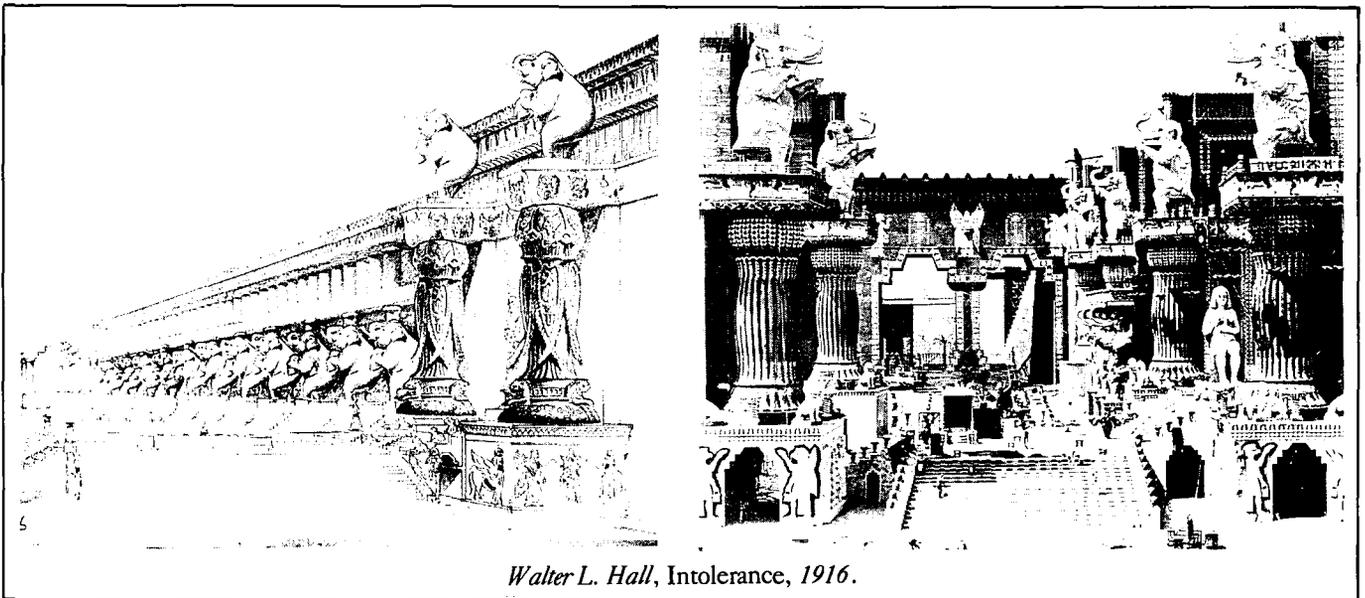
But although I didn't know it at the time, it was the best office for me. I was right next to the fifteen men at the studio who were actually going to do all the work. I got to know them and their abilities; familiarity bred respect. I wasn't a distant or imperious art director—I was right in there with them all the time. And they helped me a lot, too.

William Wyler, the director, was very cooperative. I saw him a couple of months ago at a screening, and we began to talk about *The Best Years of Our Lives*. He said, "You know, that was the first

everything "wild," and I still do. Most of the time you *have* to go "wild."

One set in *The Best Years* was a dressing room in which all the walls were mirrors. I talked that over endlessly with Gregg Toland, the cinematographer, because Willie Wyler was willing to go along with whatever we worked out. So I figured out how the scene could be shot without the camera appearing in the picture. The only problem: there was no place for the director, just for the camera. So Willie had to get on a ladder and direct that scene looking over the top. It was all done in one take, and it's a good scene—a very tricky scene, because there are very small cuts every time the camera passes one of the mirrors.

If I recall correctly, the film was not brought in on schedule, for a number of reasons: because it was shot almost in continuity; because there were certain scenes Wyler wanted to do later with Virginia Mayo, who played Andrews' wife, after she'd rehearsed a bit more; and because Wyler couldn't make up his mind what kind of apartment he thought the couple should live in! He eventually bought my idea for a one-room apart-



Walter L. Hall, *Intolerance*, 1916.

camera lens and the picture plane is always the same. The picture plane you're really painting isn't flat at all; so, if you project it on a curved picture plane, you eliminate the distortion.

I became enamored of the whole operation, and made a hobby of it. It helps a lot. I do a sketch: I look at it and think, "Jesus, this really doesn't look so good"; I change it—and then I can back-project it to build the set with the new changes. It's very complicated, but it gives me this terrific feeling of security. I know the set isn't going to surprise me. It may surprise

time I ever worked in sets that were the same size as they'd be in real life. You brought a latitude to our work." I don't think I was the first person to do it, but I must have been the first to do it for Wyler. Up to that time, the idea was to build the set big enough so you wouldn't have to "wild" the walls—build them so they can be whisked away when the camera has to see, or move, through them. Traditionally, you'd just make them twice as big, and hope the cinematographer would shoot the set in such a way that it would look the right size. But I made ev-

ment with a Murphy bed, and used it brilliantly. Unfortunately, Wyler and Goldwyn fought toward the end of *The Best Years*, and they never worked together again, though at one time they'd made six films in as many years. I remember when we were told that Willie was no longer allowed in the cutting room. The final cut of *The Best Years* is Goldwyn's.

I got to know Gregg Toland's way of working from doing *The Best Years*. So when I designed another Goldwyn-Toland film, called *Enchantment*, I made

a sketch for what I thought would be a typical Toland shot: a little girl in front of a fireplace with the door opening, from the viewpoint of the Jayne Meadows character—everything in perfect focus, Meadows in close-up and the little girl thirty feet away, everything f.16 sharp. I came in one morning to watch Toland light the set—and it looked so bright, especially since the scene's one source of light was the fireplace. I knew he had been working on a device to make the flames flicker, a box that had huge electric lights in it, several sizes and shapes of 10,000-watt bulbs. And it *was* brilliant—but the rest of the room was also so bright! Of course on film it turned out looking exactly as the sketch had. It's exciting when an artist like Toland can bring an idea of yours so vividly to life.

Cedric Gibbons had been supervising art director at Metro for a couple of decades when I first met him here at the studio—in fact, in this very room. I remember him saying to me that he hadn't held a pencil in his hand in fifteen years. I had designed a picture for David O. Selznick, *Little Women*, which was to star Jennifer Jones and be directed by Mervyn LeRoy. The sets were practically all built, and they were into screen tests. At least once a week Selznick would screen for all of us his original version of *Little Women*, with Katharine Hepburn. I suppose it was meant to inspire us, but it only depressed Jennifer. Finally she decided she couldn't compete with Hepburn, and Selznick called the picture off. The sets were moved over to Metro, where it was going to be made with June Allyson as Jo. I thought I was going along with my sets, but MGM didn't want me, so I forgot about it.

The picture came out in 1949, and there was no mention of my name in the credits—but there on the screen is the whole March house, interior and exterior, which had been set up on the Metro lot. When I called Cedric Gibbons about it, he waffled; I guess he just didn't want my name on it. I had copied the March house from the author's own home in Concord, Massachusetts. I remember Selznick saying the set didn't look right to him, and me answering that it couldn't be anything but right because it was the original Alcott home. Well, that house was put in a big truck and taken to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Now, almost thirty years later I'm sitting at Cedric Gibbons' desk; and the fact that Gibbons didn't give me any credit on the picture isn't very important any more.

I spent the Fifties in New York, work-

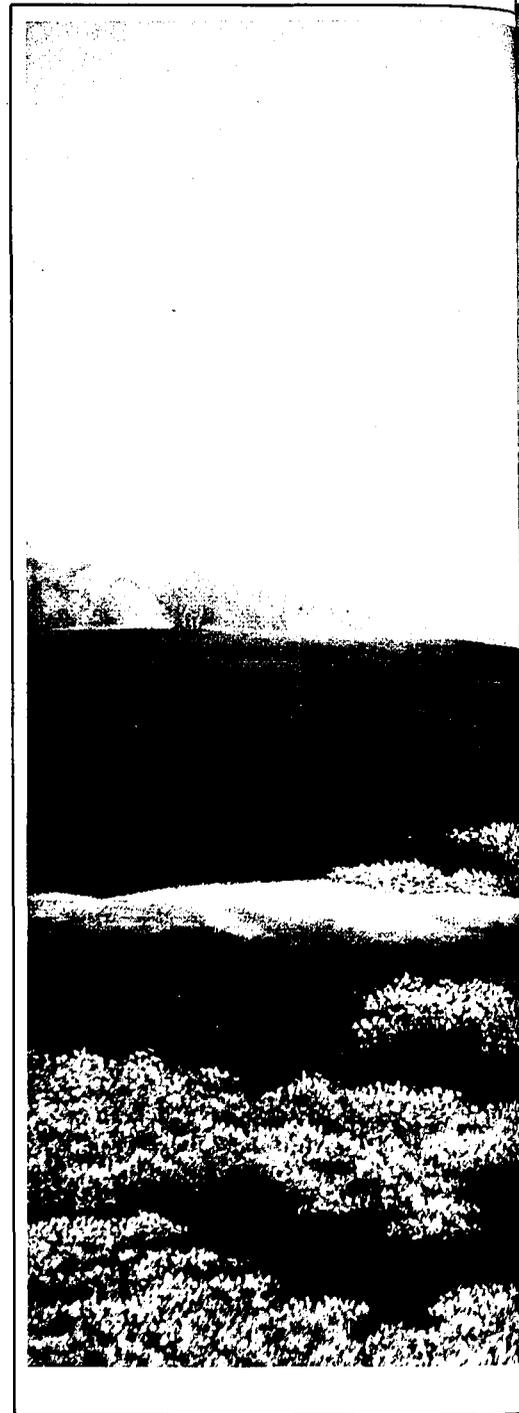
ing in the theater and television. It was Arthur Penn who started me out on a motion picture career again with the film version of *The Miracle Worker*, which I had designed for him on the stage. The main thing was to find a spot, near New York City, that looked like the Georgia home that Helen Keller's family had. This we found, after a long search, in Redbank, New Jersey: a beautiful, old Victorian house. We used the interior of the house very little. We built the dining room and the living room and Helen's bedroom on the sound stage, but used the home for exteriors. I remember the final scene of Patty Duke sitting on Anne Bancroft's lap; she was singing a nursery rhyme to her and the camera moved back across the lawn revealing the full house in the evening light.

We had to solve several technical problems in order to do things that Arthur wanted done. He wanted to use a hand-held camera with a 360° range in the tantrum scene in which Helen Keller throws her dolls all over the place in the little garden house where she was living with Annie Sullivan. He also wanted to go from floor level to four feet above the floor at the same time. So we cut a trap in the floor in the middle of the house and then built an elevator, that the cameraman sat on, so we had a 360° pan of the room at any height. We did exactly the same thing in the dining-room scene. We cut a hole in the middle of the table to film the fight that Helen and Annie Sullivan were having over holding her napkin. Arthur, to keep from being photographed, had to look over the top of the set from a step ladder—just like Willie Wyler with *The Best Years*.

My next picture with Arthur was a Fellini-type tour de force in Chicago, called *Mickey One*. It was way ahead of its time; Arthur had many innovative things that he did in it. I remember it was the first time I had ever heard the sound of the next scene start long before the previous scene was finished dissolving.

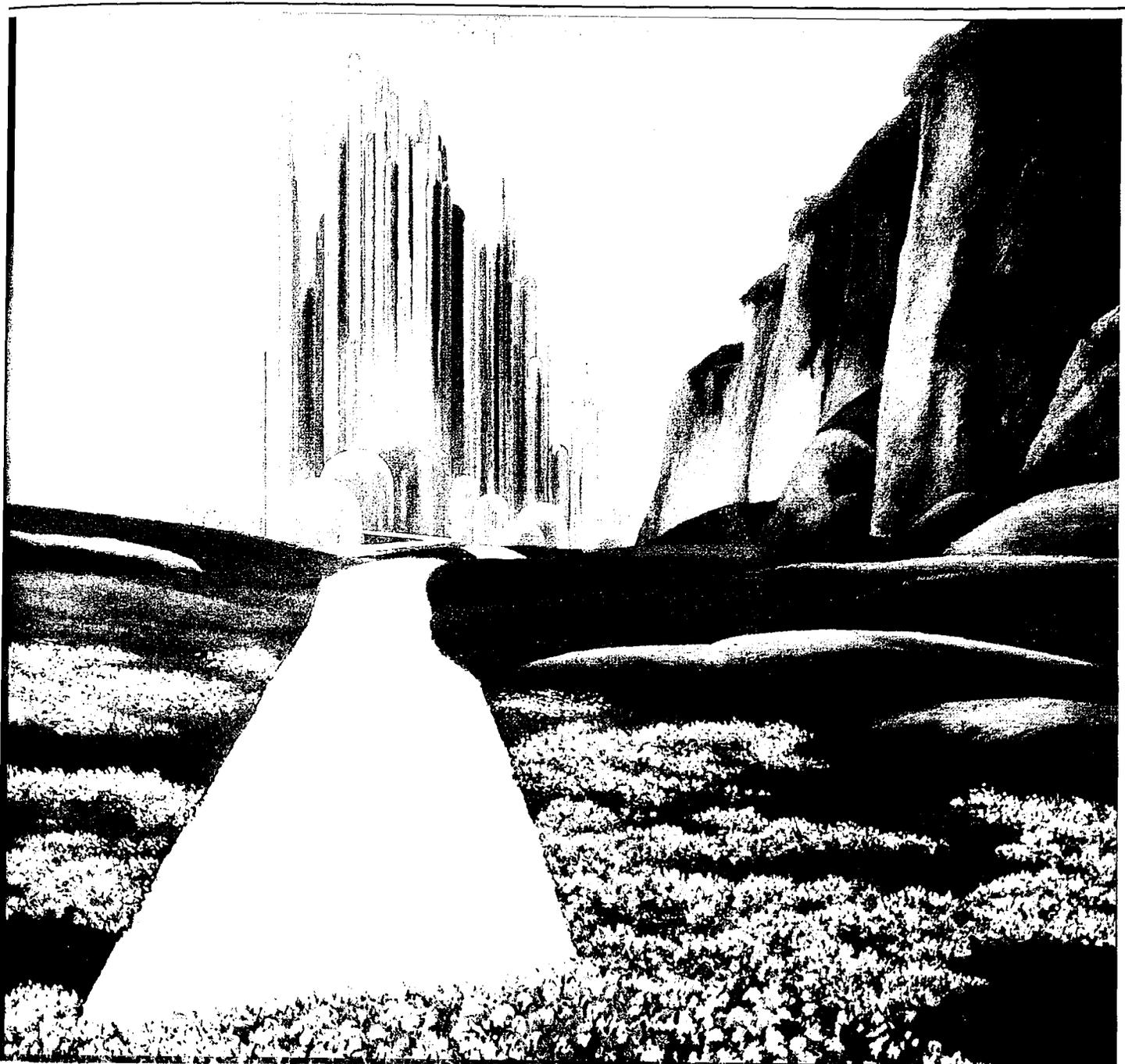
There were many nightclubs in this story; I think we had seven or eight. We built some of them, found others. We had a strip joint that we just built with black velour and smoke and the audience. I've often wanted to do a set where there really wasn't any set at all, and that is a very good example of it.

Night Moves, the last picture I did with Arthur, was shot mostly in Florida. I built a marina from the ruins of an old ferry station and then a few miles away we built an old-fashioned rundown motel, the one Gene Hackman and Jennifer



Warren live in. That motel was actually built in a studio in California, trucked to Florida, and reassembled.

My first association with Alan Pakula was on *Up the Down Staircase*—Alan was the producer, Bob Mulligan the director. Meeting Alan was a definite milestone in my career, but the first time I worked with him as a director was on *Klute*, with Jane Fonda. You remember the apartment we built for Jane's character, Bree Daniels? Jane, being the extraordinary person that she is, wanted to spend nights in this apartment before we started shooting, so she could really feel



Warren Newcombe, The Wizard of Oz, 1939.

at home in it, and decide if the props that I had provided were the things that Bree would own. We had a guard in the studio all night while she was sleeping in this set. We had built a ceiling over it and she could lock all the doors and windows. Every morning I would meet Jane quite early at the studio. The guard would let me in, and Jane would have put outside the door of the set four or five props that she thought Bree would not have. I would come in and sit down, and she would tell me about the additional things she had decided in the night that Bree would keep in her apartment.

From an art director's point of view, you're usually proudest of the sets you design and build yourself. We had one set in *The Parallax View* that was a small, very run-down boarding-house room—the one in which Warren Beatty is approached by the Parallax representative. I designed it to be ten feet by ten feet. All it had in it was a single bed, an old chest of drawers, and a small gas burner on a table. The unusual thing about this set was the way Alan Pakula shot it. He had Gordon Willis, the cinematographer, use a telephoto lens. Then he removed one wall and photographed a

good part of the action from fifty feet away from the set. The usual solution to shooting in a small room is a wide-angle lens, which tends to make it look larger. The telephoto lens, however, compressed the room further, making it look even smaller than it was.

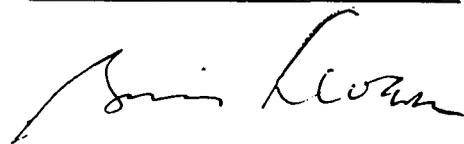
For *Parallax*, I built a set of a newsroom of a small-town newspaper. To research this, I visited newsrooms in towns from Anaheim to Bellingham, Washington. We built this set on the stage. It was just a joy to do, because I had seen all the personal care that goes into a small newspaper: the owner-

editor-boss and his relationship with all the people in it, and his small office right off the newsroom, which may have only a dozen desks in it and one teletype machine. I didn't know at the time that I was going to do *All the President's Men*, but it was a microcosm of it.

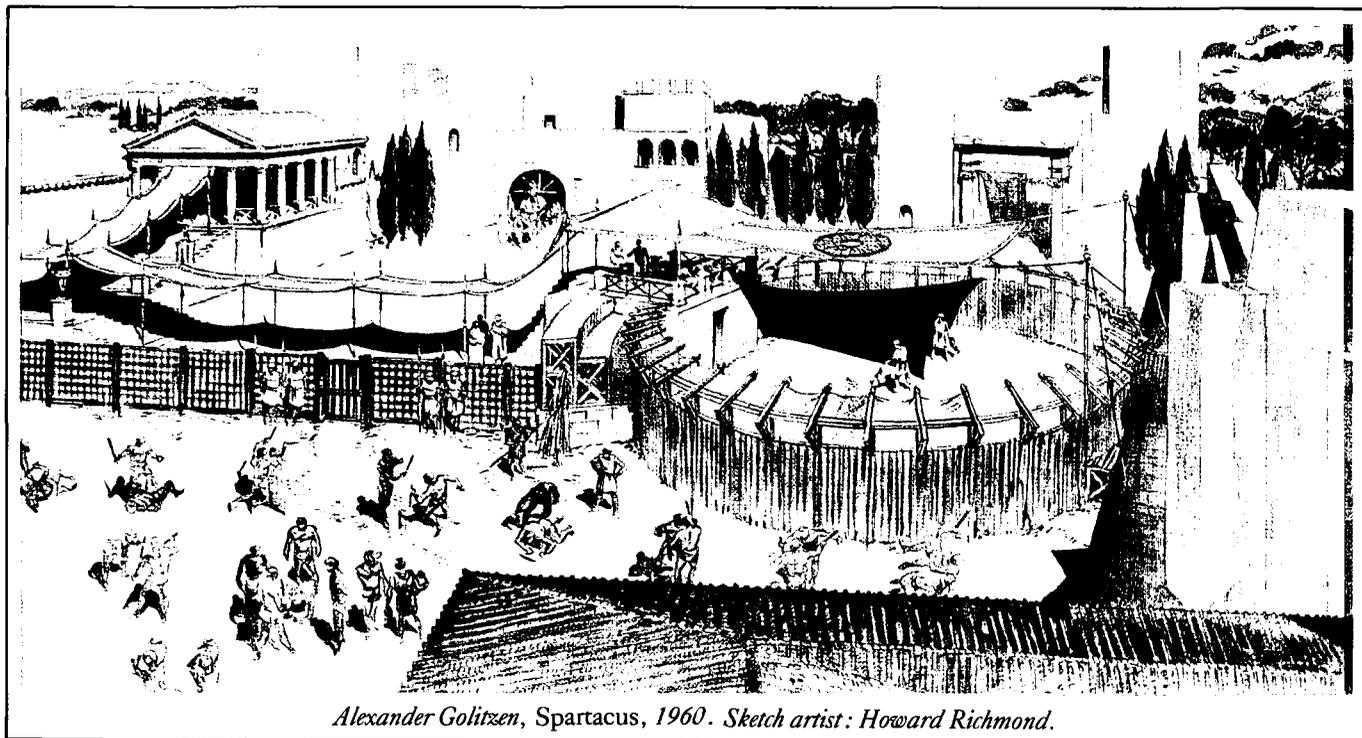
When Alan and I made our first visit to the Washington *Post* to research *All the President's Men*, and I got my first look at the fifth-floor newsroom, my heart sank: I realized that it was virtually an impossible job. It was so enormous—I saw a thousand details just at a glance. I had rebelled for years against the Hollywood practice of faking things, so I knew that if I really wanted to do the room properly it

fore we shoot. If you'll allow me to put a cardboard box by every desk, then your reporters will put in the boxes the letters and magazines they'd normally throw out." Three months later, we had seventy-five boxes of flat paper and books, etc. We then photographed the top of every desk as well as made a list of what was there. Then in Hollywood, when it came time to dress the *Post* set, we were able to put this material on the appropriate desks. Howard Simon said to me, "George, you know that you're going to get terrible publicity on this. People are going to say you're bringing our trash to Hollywood." And I said, "I don't care."

problem of re-creating the newsroom, the rest was clear sailing. And *All the President's Men* remains the picture that gave me the greatest pleasure. ☼



BORIS LEVEN says his design credo is "simplicity." He might add the words "elegance" and "impact." From the casino in *The Shanghai Gesture*, through the lonely mansion in *Giant*, up to his wittily stylized sets for *New York, New York* and



Alexander Golitzen, *Spartacus*, 1960. Sketch artist: Howard Richmond.

had to get about 200 percent of my attention. You might say that my reproduction of the *Post* newsroom was in the spirit of the film: undercover work. The real reporters weren't pleased with all these movie people snooping around their offices, so I'd sneak in at night to make my notes, sketches, and photographs.

Now, I want to set the record straight here: I did *not* bring any garbage or contents of scrap baskets from Washington to Hollywood. What I did was to go to Howard Simon, the *Post's* managing editor, and say: "I need stuff to put on the desks, and I don't want it to be old scripts topped off with a letter from somebody who's been working in Warner Brothers for the last twenty years. I want all the reporters to have material on their desks that they would normally have. We have three months be-

fore we shoot. If you'll allow me to put a cardboard box by every desk, then your reporters will put in the boxes the letters and magazines they'd normally throw out." Three months later, we had seventy-five boxes of flat paper and books, etc. We then photographed the top of every desk as well as made a list of what was there. Then in Hollywood, when it came time to dress the *Post* set, we were able to put this material on the appropriate desks. Howard Simon said to me, "George, you know that you're going to get terrible publicity on this. People are going to say you're bringing our trash to Hollywood." And I said, "I don't care."

Once I figured out how to lick the

The Last Waltz, Leven has modernized and transformed the sophisticated studio style of Hans Dreier's Paramount.

Hans Dreier was a tall man, whose posture was ramrod-straight, a real military bearing. In fact, he'd been in the Army Engineers. And he ran the Art Department at Paramount—where I began my movie career in 1933—as a kind of military hierarchy. You'd spend so many years as a private—a draftsman; then you'd become a corporal—an assistant art director; and so on. In other respects, the atmosphere was much freer than at, say, MGM, where I worked for a few months in 1938. I almost never saw Cedric Gibbons in all that time. I only saw his unit art directors, who all dressed very much like Gibbons—but not exactly like him; that would be dangerous.

Mind you, Gibbons stood behind his boys, and he was instrumental in promoting the profession of art direction. But that was because he was as much an executive as an artist. Louis Mayer admired him for being a superior administrator and running an efficient assembly-line.

Paramount, as I say, was different. Every morning Dreier would walk through the entire department, stopping at each desk, making comments on your sketches or on the film in pre-production. Ernst Fegté was the finest designer in the department, and when I first worked there I tried to copy Ernie's style. When Dreier saw my sketches he

said, "I hired you because I liked *your* style. I don't need you if you're going to draw like Ernie."

At MGM I never knew where the paint shop, the props, the carpenters were. I only knew where my desk was. You went to your desk, and then it was lunch time, and then you went home. At Paramount I not only knew where all the shops were, but it was my job to follow through with all these departments on whatever film I was designing. There was no assembly line at Paramount. We all did our own drawings, our own details. Paramount was the best studio for learning your craft—a crash course in Art Direction. Most of us "kids" in the

department—Bob Boyle, Eddie Cargano, Walter Tyler—had been at USC together and, basically, we continued our schooling at Paramount.

The joy and the curse of working as an art director in the studios was that everything was *right there*. You almost never went on location; everything was shot in the studio, or on the back lot. Each sound stage had its own standing set—say, a colonial home with a beautiful curved stairway—that would be used perhaps ten times a year, slightly redressed each time. One company would move out, having taken down their decorations, and we would move in, with eighteen hours to redo the set for our



John De Cuir, The King and I, 1956.



Eugene Lourie, Diary of a Chambermaid, 1946.
Sketch artist: Dorothea Holt Redman.



Ted Haworth, Pay or Die, 1960.

own picture. If it was a back lot, you had a bit more leeway to be inventive. Goldwyn's back lot had a "New York" street; we dressed it with Chinese signs and décor, and that's the street you see in *The Shanghai Gesture*!

Josef von Sternberg, for whom I'd done some designs on *The Scarlet Empress* in 1934, was a

tremendous personality—and he could drive you up the wall! I went through hell with him on *Shanghai Gesture*; he was really the most conceited and unpleasant person. Sternberg had sent me to a museum that had a fabulous collection of Chinese paintings; I photographed them, and they were the guide for my sketches. I must have made over 200 sketches for that film. I showed them to Sternberg and he said, “Look, they don’t have to be fancy or detailed. *I’m* the artist.” So he took my ideas for the painted mirrors in the dining room, and the circles-of-hell motif for the casino—and used them exactly.

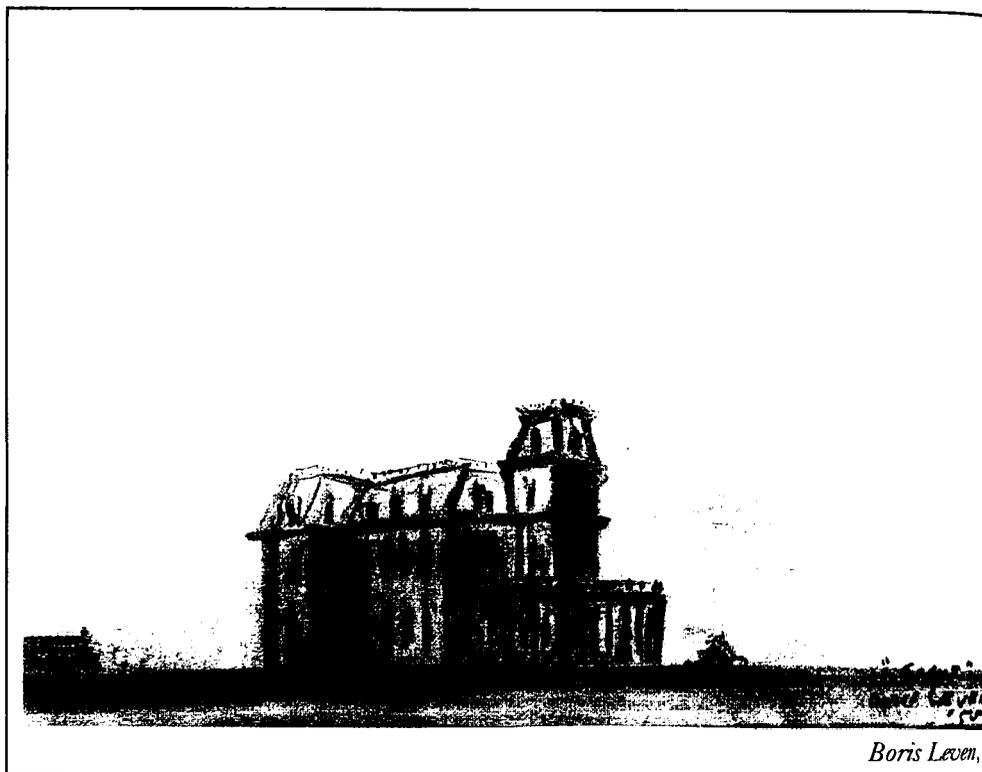
The casino I built for *Shanghai Gesture* was enormous. Sternberg was riding the biggest boom in the world—he loved booms, you know, ever since Bill Ihnen, his art director on *Blonde Venus*, had ordered a boom without consulting Sternberg; Sternberg was astonished that anyone would try to supersede his authority, but he took a ride on it anyway, and loved it—and that’s how legends, or self-images, are born. So on the *Shanghai Gesture* set, there was Sternberg on his boom, and he had a pocketful of silver dollars. Every time an actor did something that pleased Sternberg, he’d throw a silver dollar to him. The actor would go over, and slowly pick it up, and we would all feel terrible.

Before we started shooting *Shanghai Gesture*, Sternberg called a meeting; there was a blackboard next to him. He said, “If anyone wants to see me, you must first put your name on the blackboard, and then stand about five steps behind me on the right side. Wait ’til I motion for you to speak.” The next day, I did this, and waited almost an hour to speak to him. At the end of the day, I told him, “Mr. von Sternberg, it won’t work, this arrangement.” He said, “Well, with you perhaps, I’ll make an exception.” But with the others there was no exception. You know, we all talk about Sternberg—but nobody talks about, say, George Sidney. I can’t remember a thing Sidney ever did like that. See, in this business it pays to be an eccentric.

Fritz Lang was another one who thought he could design a picture himself. He’d sit and plot with different-colored pencils, he’d use a slide rule, every shot angle, every scene, until his page of notes was so cluttered you couldn’t read it. In *House by the River*, which we did together in 1949, there was a courtroom to be designed. He laid out the courtroom down to the smallest

dimensions—and they *were* the smallest: the space between the judge’s chair and his desk was something like two-and-eleven-twelfths inches. I cautioned him that the dimensions were all too small, but he was adamant, so I had the set built exactly as he’d demanded. Of course, it was disastrous. He screamed at me, “What did you do?” I showed him his piece of paper and said, “I followed your directions.” We had to rebuild the set, but Lang never admitted he was wrong. Then again, maybe he *didn’t* need a designer: the sets were filmed so

made in 1951, and by now they were going on location for certain sequences. On *Sudden Fear* the exterior of Crawford’s house was in San Francisco, and we’d gone up there scouting in the summer of ’51 and found this lovely location—a little house, with lovely young trees outside. Now we come back to actually shoot the scene in November. Not a leaf on the trees. This was Saturday morning; we were to shoot the scene on Monday. So all day Sunday we had some fellows wiring leaves to the branches of these eight trees. The local people were



dark, you couldn’t see the house!

Now, Bob Siodmak—with whom I made *Criss Cross*, the year before *House by the River*—was completely different: a very talented man, and a real human being. *Criss Cross* was what they call today *film noir*, and it marked the only time I’ve worked closely with a screenwriter: Daniel Fuchs, the Thirties novelist who wrote movies, off and on, for about twenty years. The three of us—Siodmak, Fuchs, and I—really planned the look of the film, down to the camera angles in that hospital scene where Burt Lancaster is afraid someone’s going to come and kill him, and has devised a mirror so he can see down the hospital corridor. It was one of my pleasantest and most rewarding assignments.

Another example of *film noir* was the Joan Crawford movie, *Sudden Fear*; David Miller was the director. This was

going to church, and they’d stop and look and shake their heads . . .

On location, an art director faces strange challenges. When I designed a TV movie called *Reflections of Murder*—it was a remake of *Diabolique* directed by John Badham—we needed a swimming pool for the scene where Joan Hackett dumps Sam Waterston’s body after she thinks she’s killed him. The location was a nunnery in Seattle, but they had no swimming pool; so we offered to build them one, and they agreed. I had to use a special kind of paint, because the pool had to look old. I went to the local university, and researched how to create the scum and the mildew we needed in the water. Two young scientists there helped me. And I must say, our scum and mildew and rotting leaves were truly beautiful!

Scouting locations for *Giant* was even

more challenging; George Stevens was a hard man to please. We needed the big ranch house for the Benedict family, and it was difficult work. Finally, a Texas friend of mine suggested I go to Decatur to see an old Victorian house that had been the residence of the Wagner family. When I saw it, I thought, "Wouldn't it be interesting to have a large Victorian house—all by itself, nothing else—just that structure sitting incongruously alone on the prairie?" I made the sketch, and brought it to one of Stevens' meetings. He picked it up and walked out of the room

a wonderful man, who always encouraged and inspired me to do my best work—and the first was *West Side Story*. The problem was to find a style that could combine the abstract design of the original production and the "realism" you expect in a movie. We also had to combine location shooting with studio shooting. At one point Russ Tamblyn and his gang are in a playground; that was shot in New York. They walk out of the playground and around a corner and, when the camera catches them, *that* was shot here in the studio. Our New York

staircases, all very elaborate. They were just wasted. The production number was cut from the final film.

Marty is really a New York-street director. He's a master of 360-degree realism. He has a strong documentary sense; he edited *Woodstock*; he loves rock-and-roll. So it was natural for him to direct the documentary *The Last Waltz*, about The Band's farewell performance in San Francisco. But he also loves Hollywood, and he didn't want to make it just a rock-and-roll documentary. So, in the middle of shooting *New York, New York*, he took me up there to the Winterland Theatre and said, "How would you decorate this?" Well, I borrowed the *Traviata* set from the local opera company, and a big chandelier from the Fox prop department—and we had our set. And that's how I became the first Production Designer on a rock-and-roll documentary! ❁



Giant, 1956.

Eugene Lourie

EUGENE LOURIE had already designed four Jean Renoir films before coming to America in 1941, where he collaborated with some of Hollywood's most distinguished émigrés: Renoir (*The Southerner*), Max Ophuls (*The Exile*), and Charles Chaplin (*Limelight*).

to his office. When he came back, he put his arm around my shoulder and said, "This is the best damn thing that has happened to this picture."

So we built the house—or rather, the front, the porch, and the sides—what the camera would see in the film. That frame was still standing when I was back in the area to do *The Andromeda Strain* in 1970. We found the perfect location, near a town called Marfa. After we built it, we learned that, when it rained, the area would be flooded. We prayed it would stay dry while we shot—and, sure enough, the first unit did its work without a single day of rain. When the second unit took over, then it poured. They had to contend with about two feet of water in the house. I kept a diary of my *Giant* experience; I called it "My Leven Days in Texas."

I worked on six films with Bob Wise—

location was in the seediest part of Manhattan—so seedy the city decided to tear the whole section down. And what did they build there, where we shot *West Side Story*? Lincoln Center!

A more recent New York picture—*New York, New York*, as a matter of fact—was made completely in Hollywood. Marty Scorsese had been mesmerized by all those MGM Forties musicals about New York that ended with the title: "Made in Hollywood, U.S.A." So we designed New York settings that were totally false, totally Forties Hollywood. The problem was, I had a very tight budget; and all those details—curved stairways, plaster work, cornices—cost money. So I did very little detailing; I went for strong, simple effects: the neon tubes, the painted trees. Just about all the money we had went into the big production number: ten minutes long, big

Before I came to Hollywood, whenever I saw the name of Van Nest Polglase on the credits of RKO movies, I thought it was Polglase who designed the sets himself. I didn't know that he was the department head. I thought that Cedric Gibbons made all those pictures at MGM, and Hans Dreier at Paramount. Like every European, I was impressed by the brutality and realism of the melodramas, and the sleekness of the sets in those tremendous musicals: the floors were shining like no floor ever shone in Europe, like a mirror!

Soon enough, though, I became accustomed to the lack of individuality in the sets. When I came to Hollywood I met many art directors who are very talented, and good friends, but somehow they're still suffering from the system. Art direction here is impersonal, with a wonderful, glossy finish. That's the American mind: mechanical perfection, every screw in place. But the departmentalization gives you less individuality. And the inflated budgets, ironically, limit you.



George Jenkins, All the President's Men, 1976.

Things were different—less finished, more personal—in the films I'd designed for Jean Renoir in France: *The Lower Depths*, *La Grande Illusion*, *The Rules of the Game*. The same year as *Rules*, 1939, I did the sets for Max Ophüls' *Sans Lendemain*, and my wife did the costumes. When the war broke out, I made one picture with Josephine Baker. After that, we left very quickly for the south of France. From there to Casablanca and then New York. We played the *Casablanca* story: two months in the bay on a little boat, waiting.

When I arrived in New York, and spent six months there, I met some of the French émigrés there, and one was Julien Duvivier. I told him I was going to Hollywood, and he almost dissuaded me. "Don't go, you will not find work, it's a terrible place." Then I met Anatole Litvak, who was living at the Hotel Pierre. We went to lunch at the Russian Tea Room, and he said, "You will never get into the union, you'll starve to death, don't go." I did go to Hollywood, and among the films I designed were *The Imposter*, directed by Julien Duvivier, and *The Long Night*, by Anatole Litvak!

When I arrived in California, Robert Florey—one European I had never met, not in Paris, not even in New York—was making a picture called *Desert Song*, and he hired me as technical adviser. He couldn't take me as art director because it was for Warner Bros. and I was not in the Art Directors Guild. It was very nice of him, because I spoke very poor English then and had never worked in an American studio before. First thing we did was shoot locations: it was supposed to be Morocco, of course, but we went to New Mexico. I told Florey that Moroccan boys always had a tuft of hair left on their shaved heads—so we offered forty boys a dollar a shaved head. This was in 1942. The same year, Renoir made a picture here called *This Land Is Mine*, and I got my credit: Production Designer.

Somehow, it was not difficult to adapt my way of working to the studio system. It was difficult only in relation to the front office. When I started to work at Universal in 1943, they assigned me to a script whose story was set in Paris; they told me, "We'll shoot it on the European street in the back lot." I looked at the street—it was out of some Bavarian mu-

sical! I went back to Production and told them, "Listen, I cannot do this picture. I know Paris. I can't take this street and say 'This is Paris.' Assign it to some art director who's never been to Paris—maybe *he'll* believe in it!" They understood and assigned me to another picture: the one directed by Duvivier.

Nothing is ever perfect. No painter is ever satisfied with what he paints. There's a resistance of the materials to become what you have created in your mind. Nonetheless, I'm satisfied with my work in some pictures which are not necessarily the best pictures I've worked in—my favorite ugly-duckling stepchildren. Like Alex Golitzen, I worked at Universal on one of those Maria Montez "sand and tits" pictures. It was *Song of Scheherazade*, directed by a successful writer and a good friend, Walter Reisch—and I'm very proud of it.

Right after *Scheherazade*, in 1947, I did *The Exile* for Max Ophüls, also at Universal. And then he asked me to design a picture called *Vendetta*, which Howard Hughes was producing. Hughes had suffered a fall and was sick for some time; then suddenly he wanted to see what



had been done on the film. He scrapped everything, and brought in Preston Sturges. I had been hired by Ophuls, so if I tried to talk to Sturges he'd practically kick me. While Sturges was directing, Ophuls stayed because he needed the money. It was absolutely tragic. Later on, Sturges left, and they finally made it as a slick, Paramount-type picture.

I didn't find art direction in America all that different from Europe—just a little more separation in work. What's done by one man in France is done by ten men here. Finally you don't deal with persons, you deal with departments. It's changed a bit now, when every producer is independent, but when I came here, every picture was produced by the studios. There were MGM people, Fox people, Warners people, each very faithful to his department. And the set dressers, now called set decorators: they were a tremendously independent lot.

Then there was the existence of sets. In Europe you built a picture, then the sets were destroyed. It was much more interesting: the set had more mood, more style; you created for a picture. Here, every studio had a lot of standing

sets, and of course they tried to exploit them. Normally, you'd take many existing sets, and try to adapt them for your new picture. Of course, that influenced the new set. It somehow had the same inspiration as the old one, and the creative impulse was stifled. Every picture should have a specific visual atmosphere, even if it isn't always noticeable. In the old Hollywood, that was often very difficult.

Sometimes you could make it work. When I made the Chaplin picture, *Limelight*, I used an existing street. Paramount had a "New York" street that looked very much like a London street; I used that, and I also used an existing theater at the RKO-Pathé Studio. But everything else was designed specifically for the film at the Chaplin Studio in La Brea, where we built the big sets.

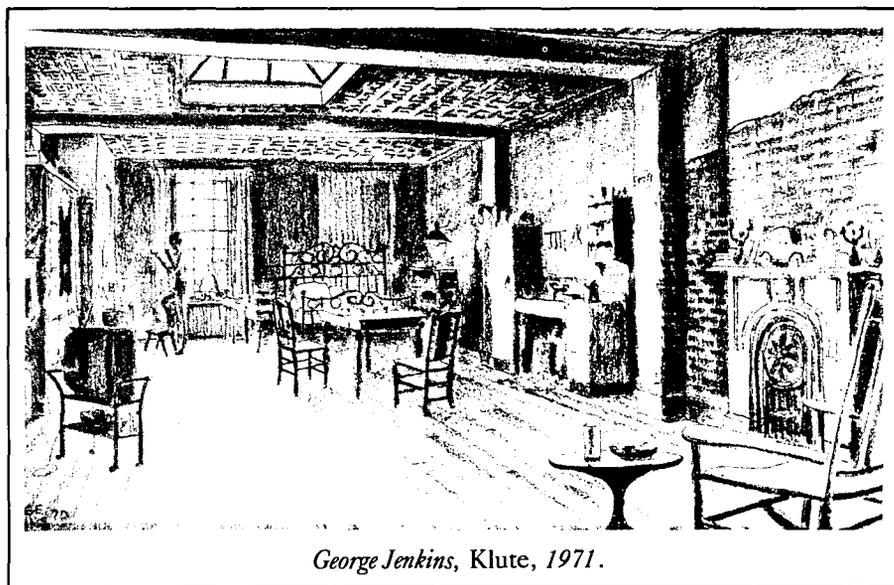
Limelight was released in 1952. That was the year a smalltime producer named Jack Dietz called me and said, "I have three very cheap pictures to do, back to back to back, and I'd like you to be the art director." One of the three stories, in outline form, was different: it was the outline for *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. I asked him who was going to direct. He told me no director had been signed, and the budget was \$150,000—who could do this picture for so little money? Almost as a joke, I said I'd do it.

the first print. When the producer saw it, he thought he would approach a major distributor, and Warner Bros. bought it.

I stopped directing after *Gorgo* in 1961. No one was interested in what I wanted to direct; they all wanted more of the same comic-strip monsters. I'd made at least three of them, and I was tired of the formula. I'd already destroyed New York once and London twice—once in black-and-white, once in color. But once you've had the responsibility of being a director, it's hard to turn back to just art direction. So in addition to designing films, I did second-unit direction and special effects: on *Crack in the World*, *The Battle of the Bulge*, *Custer of the West*, and *Krakatoa, East of Java*.

In all my pictures as art director, especially the later ones, I wanted to simplify. Let's make it very pure, because the audience can only see so much and no more. If we need a table, we put in a table. But I hate pictures on the wall, if only because most cameramen don't know how to photograph them. You have your conception, you build your set, and then the cameraman comes in with a totally different conception of how to light it—red light, pink light—or he says, "This wall is too empty. Let's put a painting on it."

In *The River*, Renoir became very en-



George Jenkins, Klute, 1971.

He said, "Okay, find a writer and start to work on this script. I'll see you in two weeks." I found a story by Ray Bradbury that somehow could be incorporated into the picture. So we bought his story. The credits read: "Based on a story by Ray Bradbury," but that's not true—it was only a tiny episode. I shot the picture in twelve days, and spent \$210,000 up to

enthusiastic about the idea of making it uncluttered. We were shooting in India, in a garden with a lot of flowers—very disturbing in Technicolor. So I took all the flowers out, and then we put them back, one at a time, according to color composition. We had eighty coolies, putting red flowers here, there, just where I wanted them.

I liked very much working with Renoir, because he knew what was important: not the studios, but the best story and the best relation with your co-workers. Renoir left me my independence. On *The Southerner* I found the perfect location setting near Fresno: by the river there was a cotton field next to another, uncultivated field. It was ideal: we could change the seasons at will. But just to be sure, I went to the little Texas town where the original novel was set—to see if we could shoot there, and also to make a 16mm film about the people, how they looked and lived, walked and sat on the sidewalk. But somehow it was all wrong: the house was too far from the river, the river was in a deep ravine. Which goes to show: the real truth is never as truthful as the invented truth. ❁

JACK MARTIN SMITH

JACK MARTIN SMITH's work at MGM (1939-53) included many of the studio's great musicals: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Ziegfeld Follies*, *On the Town*, *An American in Paris*. In 1961 he succeeded Lyle Wheeler as Fox's Supervising Art Director.

I was a graduate of the USC College of Architecture. Bob Boyle, Boris Leven, we all went to school together in the late Twenties. Boris was the prize student, won all the Beaux Arts competitions, had a great college career. It wasn't easy to get through architecture school then.

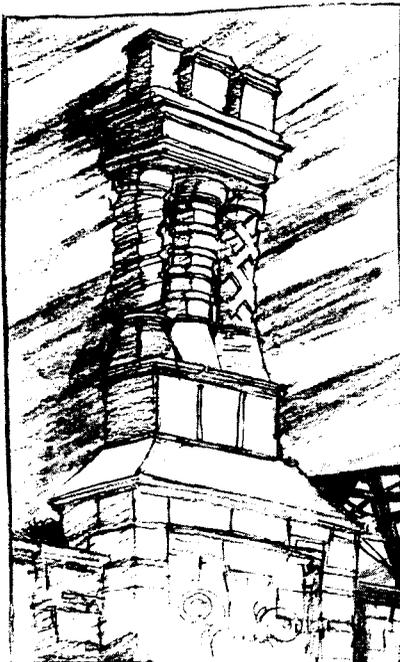
I worked as a sketch artist at Metro, under Cedric Gibbons. He loaned me out to Lyle Wheeler for *Gone With the Wind*, and I worked as a sketch artist on the film for three months. There was never anything at Metro about "Would you like to do this picture?" You came back from lunch, the script was on your desk. You immediately made a list of sets, made a breakdown, got that list in. No funny business there.

Metro was a marvelous place then. Two thousand people worked on the lot—anything could be done.

You had to build an airplane, by Friday morning it's sitting there. When I first worked for MGM, they had a twenty-four-hour shift: eight hours, eight hours, eight hours. When you made a working drawing, you had to put all the information on it—because while you're at home, they're building.

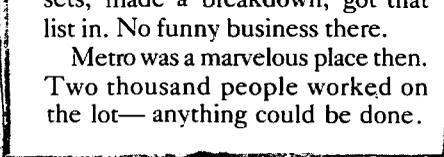
I made seven pictures with Vincente Minnelli, including his parts of *Ziegfeld Follies*—I had also worked, in different capacities, on *The Great Ziegfeld* and *Ziegfeld Girl*. The musicals, which were my specialty, usually had two art directors: one to design the book, the other the musical numbers. Merrill Pye, for instance, was designing musicals at MGM since the days of *Broadway Melody*, back in '29.

I designed the rotating room in *Royal Wedding*—the one where Fred Astaire dances up the walls and on the ceiling. I built the room, extended the floor a few feet, put in an ironing board, and strapped the camera and the cameraman to it. The camera was on its side, so the audience never knew the relation of the camera to the room. The room would



Lyle R. Wheeler, Rebecca, 1940. On the sketch, Wheeler wrote to David

O. Selznick: "Dear David: Start an unblemished chimney against a moonlit streaky sky, for 'Manderley was the most beautiful house I ever saw'—then possibly something: 'its roofs and gables a thing of grace, exquisite and faultless' as you move over charred roof timbers and broken gable. . . . Also note the entrance is choked with debris. This should bring you to 'mullioned windows' and start back rapidly showing terrace covered with debris and weeds, brambles, etc. . . ." Selznick passed the notes on to director Alfred Hitchcock, who followed them for Rebecca's opening.



start to revolve and, as the floor slipped away, Astaire would put a foot on the adjacent wall, and dance onto that wall. We had to sew the cushions to the sofa, make the pictures stationary, fix the drawers so they wouldn't fly open—those were the A-B-C things. The big problem was to get the lighting to go with the set; the light source couldn't change, so we built a frame and strapped the lights to it. The whole thing was in a cage of Bethlehem steel bands, eighteen feet in diameter. We made a model of that set, and even then you'd be surprised how few people understood how the set operated.

When I was there, Metro built Stage 27: it was fifty feet high at one end, eighty feet at the other. They also built Stage 30 for [Arnold] Buddy Gillespie, and I designed a lot of stuff for that stage. Metro also had a ninety-by-ninety-foot swimming tank for Esther Williams; I designed the colored-smoke number directed by Busby Berkeley in *Million Dollar Mermaid*. I built the entire set out of smoke. I put columns of yellow, red, and blue smokepots in the tank. We

my vacation, I said, "See you later, because I'm going to work at 20th Century-Fox."

Lyle Wheeler was in charge of the art department at Fox. I worked with him on the original *Peyton Place*. We built the town square right by the studio commissary, where the parking lot was, and it looked like a million bucks. Twelve years later, I'm head of the art department, and John De Cuir has laid out a magnificent Fifth Avenue and Broadway set for *Hello, Dolly!*—but the only place it would fit was out at the ranch in Malibu. By now we had spent \$200,000 leveling the space at the ranch, ordering surveys of materials and such, when I remembered the *Peyton Place* set. I told John: "Let's look around the lot in the car." So we looked around the lot and, my God, we found space right near the entrance where the set could be laid out. Since then Fox has made their money back in rentals of that set to other studios and television productions.

I guess *Cleopatra* had the biggest budget for sets. De Cuir was working on it by the time I became Supervising Art Di-

rector and navies, as well as the distinctive bridles and saddles of their cavalries. The budget I drew up was for \$3,250,000. Up to that point, there was no control, and this very demanding picture was in a shambles.

For *Tora! Tora! Tora!* we had so many shots on the battleship *Arizona* that I decided it would be more expedient to build half the ship. And Elmo Williams, the producer, approved the budget. The mast alone cost \$125,000—but with a helicopter we were able to go by that mast in the foreground and see the whole half of the *Arizona* on fire with real planes coming towards it. We had thirty-one Japanese planes in the air; two aviators were killed. Richard Day was my art director on that picture—a great designer who died shortly after.

I worked all of 1976 on Disney's *Pete's Dragon*. It took another year for the animated twelve-foot dragon to be added to the film. When we would line up a shot with the little boy and the dragon, we'd use a plywood dragon, painted bright orange. We'd put that in like an easel, and a frame on that to include his head, and



James Basevi, *Spellbound*, 1945. Dream sequence designed by Salvador Dalí.

spent \$10,000 on an air-
evacuation system in the
roof to get the smoke out
after each take. We also
devised a slide for the
swimmers to slide down
while standing erect—an
extremely hazardous and
difficult feat to master.

In 1953, Metro was at a
low ebb. I designed only
one film that year, *Valley
of the Kings*. The twenty
art directors working in
the Art Department had
to take rotating vacations.
When the time came for

rector at Fox. It had started on the Fox
lot in Hollywood. Then it moved to
England—but they had trouble with the
ice freezing on the ground, the horses
were slipping on the ice. So I said, "Let's
go to Italy where it's a little warmer."
And that's where it wound up. My boss,
the production manager, said to me one
day, "Go to Italy and see what's cookin'
over there. Take a week or ten days."
Ten-and-a-half months later, I got home.

In December 1961 I sat down and
wrote a budget for the sets, which
included the ships, the galleys, Cleopatra's
golden barge. We had to design and
build, to accurate detail, the Roman and
Egyptian civilizations: their respective

then we'd take it out and shoot the
scene. The Disney Studio is the only
place left that reminds me of Metro in
the Thirties and Forties: all that activity,
all that care. Metro was a factory, and
yet—working hard, casting it right—
they made masterpieces there. ☸

Lyle R. Wheeler

LYLE WHEELER was the art director of *Gone With the Wind*; what do you do for an encore? You go to Fox, and mastermind the transition from the sleek,

black-and-white look of the Forties to the De Luxe CinemaScope expanses of the Fifties and beyond.

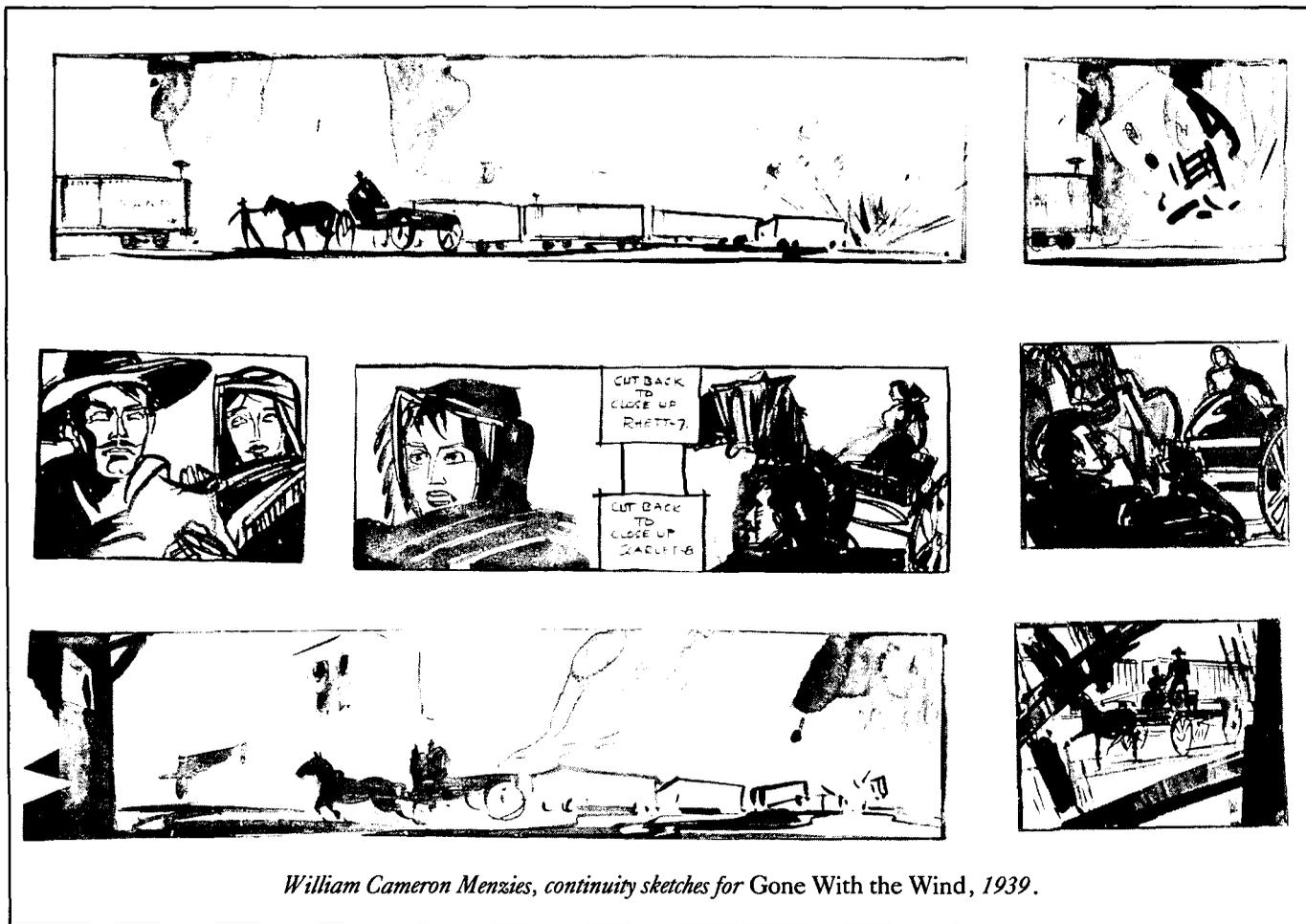
The first picture I worked on was around 1925; Marshall Neilan was the director. I was hired to do the continuity sketches: I made them, brought them in—having done exactly what they had asked for—and then spent half the night discussing changes. I took the sketches back, changed them, brought them back again, and they started to go through it all over again. Finally I told them: “You

which she played Libby Holman, *Reckless*. David Selznick was the producer, and from then on I worked with him. After *A Tale of Two Cities*, Selznick left to start his own company. I followed; and from *The Garden of Allah*, his second independent film, I worked on all his projects.

With *Garden of Allah* we began to work with color. We weren’t the first. There had been Robert Edmond Jones’ experiments in color for *Becky Sharp* and *La Cucaracha*. Selznick was fascinated with the process, and I remember screening *La*

film took Technicolor twice as long to process. When *GWTW* was finished, David had every print checked by me or by Jack Cosgrove, the special effects man.

William Cameron Menzies was, of course, the artistic genius on *GWTW*. The term “production designer” was devised by Selznick and myself to describe Menzies’ contribution. He did excellent sketches, but his major function was second-unit direction: the battle scenes between North and South, some locations near Lake Arrowhead where



William Cameron Menzies, continuity sketches for *Gone With the Wind*, 1939.

guys don’t know what you’re doing, you have no idea what you want, and I can’t waste my time on this.” I walked out and went back to architecture.

The reason so many architects—Robert Boyle, Boris Leven, Bill Ihnen—went into pictures was because the Great Depression pushed architecture right out the window; there simply weren’t enough projects. So in 1931 there I was at Metro, working as a sketch artist. I soon graduated to assistant art director under Cedric Gibbons who, one soon learned, wouldn’t let anyone else have credit on a film. I did several Jean Harlow pictures, among them one in

Cucaracha over and over for him. Technicolor wanted all the producers to do exactly the same things so that they wouldn’t have to change the color densities. There was a lot of nonsense in connection with the process in the early days of color photography—all the clauses about having a Technicolor cameraman and a color consultant on the set. Selznick fought with them all the time, from *Garden of Allah* to *Gone With the Wind*, forcing them to change the density of the emulsion as they went along. “I don’t want all the lights, I want natural lighting,” David used to tell them—which meant that every reel in a Selznick

the lumber camp was built, and the scenes in which Scarlett is attacked by the blacks.

David Selznick inscribed my copy of the *GWTW* screenplay, “In memory of our joint agonies.” Sidney Howard, who wrote the script, was run over by his own tractor two weeks before we were due to start shooting with Cukor as director. Selznick started to rewrite the whole script. It became a horrendous rat race to get things done. He slept in the day and worked all night—we were preparing *Rebecca* at the same time. We were constantly threatened with a company shut-down. I had crews working all day in

eight-hour shifts, but we all had to be there. Selznick could never have two pictures going on at the same time; unlike Zanuck, he couldn't follow through. For weeks at a time, I worked eighteen to twenty hours a day, because everything had to go through while David slept. God knows how many writers he had up there at the time! Most of the time, I could only do a rough sketch and planning, then show it to David and, if he approved, pass it on to a sketch artist who'd do a color illustration.

Selznick always involved himself in

1957, when he was building a new wing on his house and wanted advice, he would call at 8:30 on a Saturday morning and ask my wife: "Is he in for David O. Selznick?"

We use to outline every single camera movement in the sketches. If you look at the sketches for *Rebecca*, you'll see written notes indicating where the real set ends and a painted matte should meet, and how the cameraman should move.

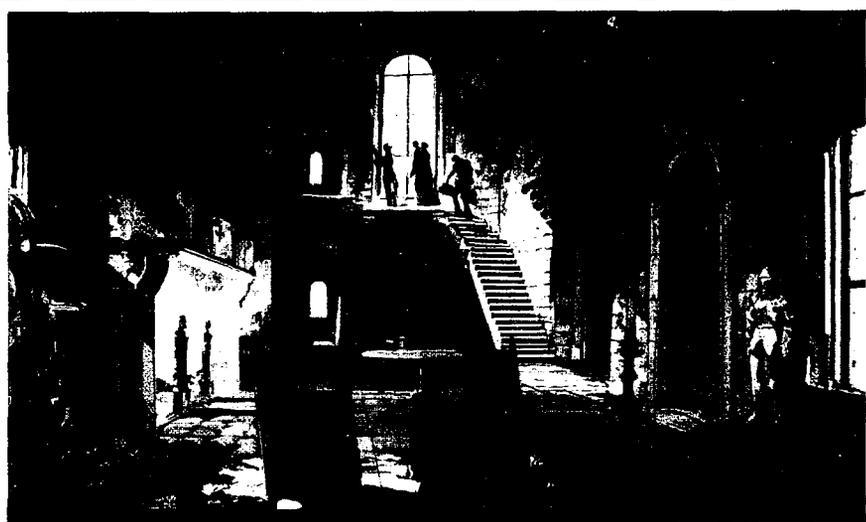
I had built five large sets with the idea that the film was going to be shot in color. But Hitchcock had worked only in

boathouse. Laurence Olivier is delivering his story, and the camera travels over every inch of the room. It took about a day to shoot. Unfortunately, it was cut from the final print. But four years later, I got Otto Preminger to film exactly the same shots in the opening scene of *Laura*.

By this time, 1944, I was Supervising Art Director at Fox. I would scout locations with the art director assigned to each picture, approve all sketches, and most importantly, work with the writer almost from the beginning of the project.



Jack Martin Smith, *North to Alaska*, 1960.



Dale Hennesy, *Young Frankenstein*, 1974.

every aspect of every production. He worked himself as hard as he did all his employees, and he remained loyal to us all. David used to say to my wife, "Lyle has a lifetime contract with me." And he meant it, even though I left him when he went out of business in 1941. As late as

black-and-white and, at that time, wouldn't fool with color. It's unfortunate: *Rebecca* would have been the first psychological drama shot in Technicolor. The first long take he devised—which I thought was great, because it showed off the set so well—was in the

I believe that the narrative is central to the success of a picture, and I was always more interested in that facet of filmmaking than in directing.

Generally, art directors don't make good directors. There have been only two good directors who came from the field: Alfred Hitchcock and Mitchell Leisen. Leisen had designed sets and costumes and was very adroit at comedy. When Menzies worked as a director, I used to tell him, "You're no damn good as a director." The first thing he would ask for when he came on the set is, "Dig me a hole in here," and that's where he would put his camera. He wanted to photograph ceilings and didn't give a damn what the actors were saying. But when Menzies had Sam Wood working with him, he had Wood to control him. *Our Town* and *King's Row* are good examples of a collaboration in which the two men took turns at the camera.

Of all the Fox films that I worked on, *Anna and the King of Siam* gave me the most pleasure and lasting pride. It was originally planned as a color picture, but the painters and the carpenters went on a

terrible strike. The strike lasted almost two years, from 1944 to 1946. Hundreds of people were out of work. The plasterers were not on strike, so I convinced Zanuck to go with black-and-white. The sets had to be built in plaster—even the doors were cast from plaster. There was a material called nicrosyn which cameramen use in sidewalks to kill excessive sunlight reflection and which looks like gunpowder. We used it to get the different values from the plaster; we had shadings of gray and even black. The picture is so good looking today that people came out of a recent screening at the Academy asking me, “Why didn’t you make it in color?”

I stayed at Fox for eighteen years; never once was I loaned out by Zanuck or the studio. From 1944 to 1962, I worked on every picture Fox made. If I left, it was because the old company seemed to be on the way out. Zanuck was gone, Buddy Adler was dead, Spyros Skouras had all sorts of problems with *Cleopatra*. I was on *Cleopatra* for two years while it was a Walter Wanger production—with sets worth \$250,000 already built on the lot—when Elizabeth Taylor came into the project. The film was going to be made in London, then they moved to Italy. Rouben Mamoulian was going to direct—I worked closely with him on the design—but then Joseph Mankiewicz took over.

With a new director my Rome—Rouben Mamoulian’s Rome—didn’t look at all like the gold and marble Rome you see in the finished film. We wanted a realistic Rome, closer to that of *The Robe*, earthy in color and texture. *The Robe*, incidentally, had been quite a problem to design. The second revolution to hit the movie business, after color, was CinemaScope. I much preferred the old 4:3 ratio. CinemaScope had so much empty space along the sides. The camera picked up the smallest detail, so work had to be extremely finished. One of our studio art directors, John De Cuir, was a master working in large, minutely detailed canvases, and he, ultimately, designed *Cleopatra*.

Today, I’ve come full-circle and work primarily as an architect. My ventures into film are strictly on a free-lance basis. The work is there, and the involvement is, naturally, at my discretion. Although I do not own one sketch from any of my films, I do have a few tokens of my years with Selznick and Fox: five Oscars for *Gone With the Wind*, *Anna and the King of Siam*, *The Robe*, *The King and I*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. ☻

