

THE MEDIA MAGICA OF WERNER NEKES

DAVID ROBINSON

Werner Nekes, as fellow-members of the Magic Lantern Society well know, is one of the world's most dedicated and omnivorous collectors. He can be as excited by a 1930s trick postcard as by some rare sixteenth-century text, and will compete relentlessly to secure it. His massive collection is living and changing: one part of it was acquired by the Getty Museum in California; but the gaps were soon filled.

Some idea of its riches is conveyed by a new series of videos, *Media Magica*, produced by Nekes himself.

The four hours and twenty minutes total running time offer not so much a conventional history of the archaeology of moving pictures but a reflection of the individual philosophy that inspires the Nekes collection. He is above all fascinated by images, and all the magic that can be imparted to them by tricks of mechanics, movement or light.

It is a philosophy that is intrinsic to Werner Nekes's background and formation as a graphic artist and experimental film-maker. As a film theorist, with a special slant on art history, he has taught and lectured at numerous universities and film courses. He has directed more than fifty experimental films, ranging in length from one minute to two hours. Many of them, notably the 1981 experimental *Ulysses* and his earlier work on pre-cinematic devices, *Was geschah wirklich zwischen den Bildern* (1987), have received international prizes. In 1992 he created a major exhibition on pre-cinema, 'Von der Camera Obscura zum Film' in his native town of Mülheim am Ruhr, with an accompanying catalogue; and the following year arranged an exhibition on shadows at the Oberhausen Film Festival.

Media Magica records a wealth of pre-cinema artefacts that will make the mouth of every magic lantern collector water, but it goes far beyond the usual range of magic lanterns and optical toys. Nekes is particularly fascinated by images on paper, and the wonderful illusions that, over the centuries, have been produced in this way.

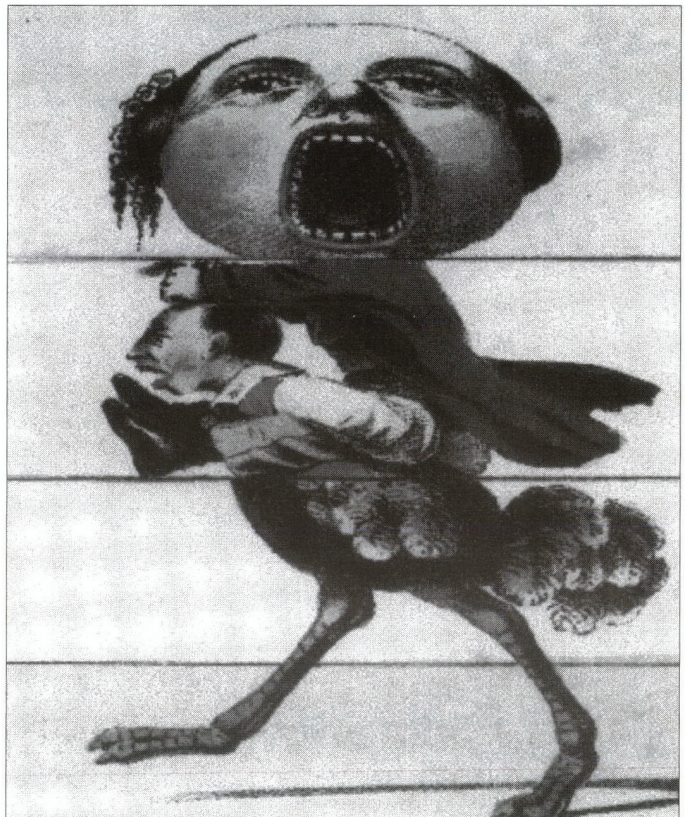


Pictures Come to Life

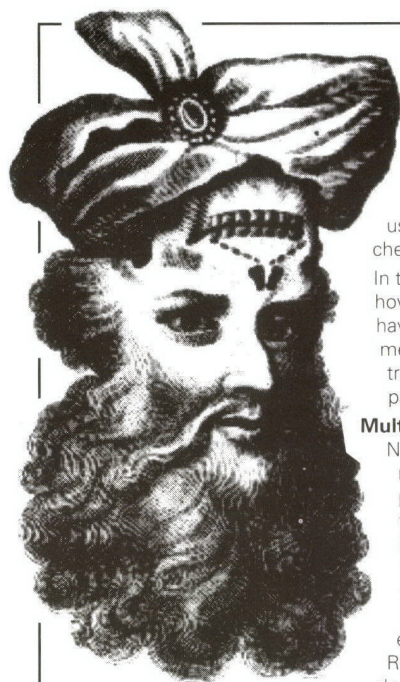
Interest in perspective conversely aroused the interest of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physicists and artists in the distortion of perspective, and Nekes displays a rich exhibition of various forms of anamorphic art.

The video then follows the thousand-year history of the shadow theatre, with newly filmed sequences of shadow theatre exponents still carrying on their traditional shows in India, Thailand, China, Bali, Egypt, Turkey and Greece. Finally Nekes shows a staggering range of shadow toys from his own collection.

Multi-Thousand Picture Show



The first of the five parts of *Media Magica* is titled **Beyond the Image** and begins by tracing the history of the camera obscura from the sixteenth-century writings of Cesariano and Della Porta, with illustrations of rare texts and actual examples of the camera. Nekes demonstrates how this device, along with the camera lucida, the Lorraine glass and other artists' aids, played a role in advancing understanding of perspective and hence in the development of the perspective box or peepshow.



The Ambiguous Image and Space

In **Pictures Come to Life** Nekes begins with a history of the magic lantern, culminating in demonstrations of moving slides. It will be especially thrilling for lantern enthusiasts to see a water-tank slide and an elbow-polariscope in use, demonstrating spectacular physical, chemical and electrical processes.

In the second half of this video he shows how images printed or drawn on paper have been brought to life by mechanical means, by tricks of light (dioramic or translucent images) or by moving panoramas that imitated stage effects.

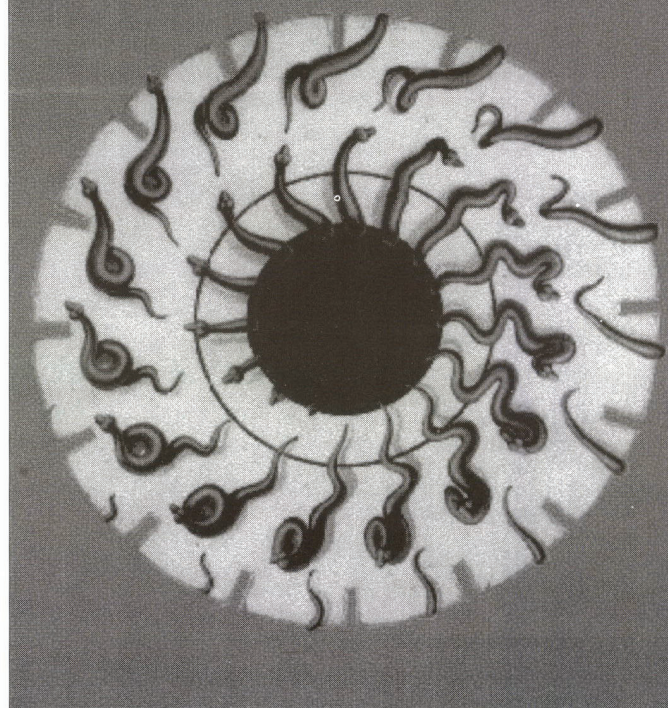
Multi-Thousand Picture Show develops Nekes's theories on various forms of multiplication and relationship of pictures, demonstrating that 'many of the techniques of montage used by both computer and film, for example morphing, have a long visual tradition that reaches back to the sixteenth century'. He illustrates his point with early anatomical diagrams, Humphrey Repton's folding montages (made to demonstrate architectural and landscape improvements), and a wonderful display of trick books, changing pictures and Victorian erotic playing-cards.

The Ambiguous Image and Space looks at ways of creating special illusions through trick pictures, perspective theatres, folding peepshows and, from the nineteenth century, the stereoscope, looking forward to today's holography.

The Magic Drum examines 'significant steps in the examination of the after-image and the stroboscopic effect', the basis of the modern moving picture. Again, every collector will envy the Nekes hoard of movement toys – thaumatropes, phenakistiscopes, zoetrope, praxinoscopes, along with flick books in ever more sophisticated forms, like the mutoscope and the kinora.

Media Magic is indeed a privileged guided tour of one of the world's richest and most personal collections. At present there is no plan for English versions of these videos, but the original versions with German commentary (by Werner Nekes himself) are available with English-language covers and cover notes. The cost is £35 each + £10 for postage; or £150 + £15 postage for the entire set.

MEDIA MAGICA - The Magic Drum



The Ambiguous Image and Space

Enquiries to:

Professor Werner Nekes
Kassenberg 34B, D-45479 Mülheim/Ruhr.
Telephone: 00-49-208-42-73-99
Fax: 00-49-208-42-10-11.

THE POOLE FAMILY TREE

As a supplement to his article in the last issue of the *Magic Lantern Journal*, John Powell has sent us a more detailed family tree of those Pooles who (except where otherwise indicated) were involved with panoramas and myrioramas.

