



# Centenaries

## Tomàs Mallol and Amateur Cinema 1923-2023

In 2023, we are commemorating two centenaries that happily coincide: Tomàs Mallol and amateur cinema.

Tomàs Mallol is known in particular for being a collector of cinema and pre-cinema and his collection was the origin of the museum you are now in. However, Mallol had another side to his character that is less widely-known, but no less interesting, that of an amateur filmmaker: a brilliant career made up of thirty-one short films, many of which achieved public recognition, winning various awards and prizes.

In 1923, the first amateur cinema cameras were marketed: the Pathé Baby in Europe, with the 9.5 mm film format; and the 16 mm format from Kodak in North America, making it possible for the general public to be able to shoot and screen their own films. The commercial and technological success of these devices was immediate and indisputable and marked the starting point of the worldwide phenomenon of amateur cinema

This exhibition aims to offer a double tribute. Firstly, to Tomàs Mallol, as an amateur cinematographer, as well as to the Catalan amateur filmmakers of his generation who took centre stage in the golden age of this type of cinema, made with absolute independence and creative freedom. And secondly, to the first amateur film devices, which a hundred years ago revolutionized the practice of "making movies", bringing them closer to aficionados and the general public.

## **TOMÀS MALLOL AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES**

The work of Tomàs Mallol, spanning between 1956 (*El pastor de can Sopa*) and 1977 (*Quan soc perdut en l'ombra*), includes around thirty short films that reflect some of his life's obsessions and which provide us with a more complete view of his life and work.

But his filmography also forms part of one of the most fruitful periods in Catalan amateur film making, and it is for this reason that this exhibition not only looks at all his work, year by year, but also includes prominent films from Catalan amateur filmmakers made in same year that Mallol screened his work.

The selection, although necessarily incomplete given that there were important filmmakers both before and after Mallol and that there are years in which several interesting works were screened, allows us to grasp what the cinema made in those years was like and, at the same time, to understand its political, social, cultural and, of course, cinematic context.

**You will find the translation of the remainder of the texts on this subject on the interactive screen that is installed there.**

## **UCA (Union of Amateur Film-makers)**

The Unió de Cineístes Amateurs (Union of Amateur Film-makers, UCA) was established in Barcelona in 1968 following the split of a group of filmmakers from the Agrupació Fotogràfica de Catalunya (Photographic Group of Catalonia), who would be joined by others from the Amateur Cinema Section of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya (Hiking Club of Catalonia). Formed without premises or conditions and with greater autonomy than other associations, throughout its history it organized a club competition (from 1969), an exhibition (1969-1972), several cinematographic training courses and published a newsletter, in addition to screenings, debates, round-table discussions, script competitions and the creation of a film library, among other activities.

The first president was Conrad Torras, and it had a board of members that included Tomàs Mallol himself. The organization would later be chaired by Gabriel Pérez Rius, Perfecto Santalies, Carlos Soler Viñas and Jaume Vila. At the beginning of the 1980s, it changed its name and became known as the Club de Cinema i Vídeo UCA (UCA Cinema and Video Club). In 1984 it was dissolved and all its documentation has been preserved in the Museu del Cinema.

## **THE ORIGINS OF AMATEUR CINEMA**

From the beginning, for technical and economic reasons, cinema was split into two well-differentiated areas: that of professionals in the medium; and that of amateur filmmakers. Very soon, cameras and projectors appeared on the market aimed at this latter audience, who began to make their own films. The cinematographic possibilities of amateur cinema allowed aficionados to capture images from their own present which, over time, became the memory of their past, just like photographs in the family album. These new devices also made it possible to create works of an amateur nature outside the film industry, some which had great artistic merit.

### **1. The forerunners (1899-1922)**

At the beginning of cinema, only professionals in this new industry or people with enormous purchasing power could afford the cameras and projectors to make and watch their films. In order for cinematography to be available to a wider public, it was necessary to simplify the

devices, to make them lighter, more manageable, simpler, more economical and to reduce the danger of the film, made using highly flammable nitrocellulose. Between 1899 and 1922, some manufacturers offered several models intended for the non-professional public, which tried to solve these problems. Despite their lack of success, they laid the technological foundations for the later popularity of amateur cinema, which was spearheaded by the Eastman Kodak company in the United States and by Pathé Cinéma in Europe.

## **2. The pioneers: Pathé and Kodak (1922-1923): 9.5 and 16 mm**

Between 1922 and 1923, Charles Pathé, an active, brilliant entrepreneur in the fledgling French film industry, created a camera and projector for the amateur public, which used a new non-flammable 9.5 mm film. At the same time, in 1923, the Kodak brand in North America began to manufacture a projector and a camera with a non-flammable 16 mm film format. The success of both devices was indisputable and was the decisive step towards the consolidation of amateur cinema in Europe (Pathé Baby) and North America (Kodak), after several failed attempts by these and other companies.

Amateur cinema equipment made it possible, in a simple and inexpensive way, to go from spectator to creator, from watching films in cinemas to creating moving images and projecting them in the privacy of the home.

### **2.1. PATHÉ BABY 9.5 mm**

From 1912, the Pathé Cinéma company had been trying to produce a non-professional cinema camera and projector, which were easy to use, inexpensive and safe. Success came to them with the first Pathé Baby projector and cinema camera models, which were designed and manufactured by Victor Continsouza, commissioned by Pathé Cinéma. The projector was marketed from Christmas 1922, and in April 1923, the camera went on sale. They used a 9.5 mm film with central perforation enclosed in a metal chassis, which avoided the film being touched by hands.

The success of these devices for the amateur and family market was immediate. From 1923 to 1946, Pathé continued to launch new, better models of cameras and, particularly, projectors with all kinds of accessories which delighted amateur filmmakers. The 9.5 mm film format was adopted by other brands, all of which were European since, in the United States, the 16 mm and later the 8 mm formats from the Kodak company triumphed

### **2.2. KODAK 16 mm**

From 1914, the photographic equipment company Eastman Kodak had been investigating materials and techniques to manufacture equipment for the emerging amateur film market. The research would focus on finding a smaller, safe (non-flammable) and good quality film format. The result was 16 mm film, which began to be marketed in July 1923, together with the Cine-Kodak model A camera, with a tripod, a film splicer and a screen. Kodoscope was the name given to the 16 mm projector, equipped with an electric motor, which was also marketed that same year.

### 3. The evolution (1930-1970): 8 mm, super-8, sound and colour and some other brands

With the initial successes of the Pathé Baby and Kodak devices, many other companies set out to conquer this new amateur cinema market by selling cameras and projectors inspired by these two benchmark companies. However, this momentum also boosted research and technological evolution in this area. Thus, in 1932, the new 8 mm format created by Kodak appeared in order to make a minute of film even cheaper and, in 1965, the super-8 came on to the market, which increased the surface of the frame and enclosed the film in a plastic cassette. The addition of colour and sound were other significant advances until, in the 1970s, analogue video technology appeared, quickly replacing the old amateur cinema equipment.

(Foyer area)

## THE AMATEUR FILM-MAKER

The task of the amateur film-makers didn't require less dedication simply because they were non-professional: self-taught practical training was usually preceded by, and continued with, specialized publications, books and magazines, and also with groups of amateurs who shared concerns; the practice of filming had to be as accurate as possible, with the appropriate accessories and staging if required; expertise was needed to handle the film and patience to wait for the results to be processed by the laboratory; precision in the editing process and the insertion of credits was important, and meticulousness during sound and synchronization was essential, and finally, the right screening conditions had to be achieved in order to make the film look its best.

The enthusiasm for making films became widespread among certain groups of people and associations were created that promoted festivals, contests, competitions and screenings of amateur productions, both nationally and internationally.

*Your life in real, moving images. Only one pleasure equals that of filming: screening your happy moments. Filming makes life pleasurable and it's easy and cheap.* (AGFA Advertising in *Cinema Amateur. La revista de l'art i la tècnica de l'aficionat* (Amateur Cinema. The magazine of the art and technique of the amateur). Cinema Section of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya. No 7, Winter 1934-1935)

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