



The American Venus (1926), Source: BFI National Archive/Paramount Pictures

## Opening Pandora's Box BFI uncovers rare Technicolor footage of Louise Brooks in living colour

**For Immediate release: 30 April 2018, London**

The BFI today announces the discovery of a cache of extremely rare Technicolor film fragments from the 1920s held by the BFI National Archive, including previously unseen footage of Louise Brooks dancing in colour. The very image of the modern woman, this tantalising glimpse of Louise Brooks comes from *The American Venus* (1926), her first credited film role and is one of the only images we have of her in colour. The feature is believed lost with the exception of footage from the film's trailer, held by Berkeley Art Museum and The Library of Congress. It is thought that this extremely short extract discovered by the BFI may come from a costume test.

The fragment from *The American Venus* (1926) was found alongside material from *The Far Cry* (1926), *The Fire Brigade* (1926) and *Dance Madness* (1926) within a copy of *Black Pirate* (1926), donated to the Archive by The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1959.

In the same print of *Black Pirate*, there is also a test shot for historical drama *Mona Lisa* (1926) starring Hedda Hopper, the 'Queen of the Quickies' and legendary acerbic Hollywood gossip columnist for the LA Times, whose biting wit was recently portrayed by Judy Davis in award-winning TV series *Feud*. The fragment shows Hedda Hopper as Mona Lisa in repose, one assumes, about to be painted by Leonardo da Vinci. No other material from *Mona Lisa* is currently held by any film archive.

Other extracts from a number of early Technicolor musicals were discovered in a batch of 1950s cinema ads for a local television shop in Chingford, North East London that were donated to the BFI National Archive last year. All dating from 1929 these fragments comprise footage from *Sally*, which only exists in black and white, a previously lost section of *Gold Diggers of Broadway*, as well as short clips from *Show of Shows* and a trailer for *On With The Show!* In addition a short extract donated by one of the BFI's curators in 2007, has now been identified as *Paris* (1929).

These discoveries were made by Jane Fernandes, Conservation Specialist at the BFI National Archive. Work was undertaken at the BFI's conservation centre in order to give an approximation of what the colour would have been like from the colour process it was filmed in.

Many of these lost fragments were discovered attached to heads and tails of film reels. Potentially coming from test shots, trailers, alternative takes and outtakes these short sequences may not have appeared in the final complete films or have been used for promotional use.

The importance of these rare fragments cannot be stressed enough. As **Bryony Dixon, BFI's Curator of Silent Film** explains, *"Everybody loves Technicolor but so much film from glamorous 1920s Hollywood is lost; when it turns up, however fragmentary it's exciting. What to do with tiny clips that are only a few seconds long? Imagine an Egyptian vase shattered into pieces and the shards scattered across museums all over the world. You can imagine that one day you might be able to see it whole again. It's like that with films; only an international effort by film archives like the BFI can bring the pieces of the jigsaw together. For now we have the shards but we can dream of seeing Louise Brooks's first film or a lost Hedda Hopper in colour"*.

**James Layton, MOMA's Film Department Preservation Manager** adds, *"Only a few Technicolor musicals from the dawn of sound survive complete and entirely in colour, whilst some only exist in poor quality black and white copies. It is always a cause for celebration whenever previously lost colour footage turns up. These excerpts provide fascinating glimpses at these films' pioneering use of colour, which we could only guess at before."*

Together, with other similar recent discoveries, it is hoped that some of this colour footage can be reinstated into surviving black and white copies to be made accessible for future audiences.

Starring Louise Brooks in her most iconic role, the BFI releases *Pandora's Box* (1929) at BFI Southbank and in cinemas across the UK from 1 June. An edit of the early Technicolor discoveries is available to view on the BFI's YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a46tD6sjD58>

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#### **ABOUT THE BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

#### **ABOUT THE BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE**

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film

festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage.

That heritage includes all time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean and Powell and Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant collection of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.