

## Once You've Handled Film You Can Never Forget It

Recently, I was watching Rebecca and Jérôme, my children, round eyed, out of breath, voiceless, while they watched a slow-motion high jump on the screen of the Ciné Centre in Rixensart. Then they suddenly turned with curiosity toward the window of the projection booth.

Düsseldorf, January 2002, the indestructible B12 is giving off sparks. The projectionist appears suddenly. He cuts the power and reappears with his soldering iron, opens the lamphouse door on the Bauer projector and, after a quick and efficient repair, restarts the projection. Although I had already been inside a projection booth and experienced this incredible fascination, it was while I was carrying out a project for the Filmmuseum Düsseldorf in 2002 that I had a real opportunity to talk with projectionists, to see them handle film and thread the machines. I decided then to make portraits, to collect fragments of life as if they were small pieces of film, to collect them doggedly, as many projectionists did when they were children. Placed end to end, these fragments constitute a genuine little history of cinema, of which this is a kind of movie trailer.

"I have worked in cinema since I was six years old," Patrick Adam tells me. "My mother sold ice cream, and I handed out programs. Always a little bit ahead of time, I brought to the projection booth the 45 RPM records that would be played during the intermission. I looked at the machines, I asked questions, and that is how I learned the profession. Little by little I would stand in for the projectionists. The heavier the bag and the longer the film, the happier I was. I never felt as though I was working, I always did it for fun, and that is still true today. At the Brussels Musée du Cinéma, I had the opportunity to project nitrate films (a highly flammable base) twice. Once you've handled film you can never forget it. But the profession is going to change; it will disappear. I can still see the guy, it wasn't that long ago, step into the booth holding a little box. Everything was inside, everything was automatic." "It's simple: without a shutter, no more flickering light. It's frightening how nowadays you can film with your phone, you edit, you broadcast," says Francesco Navarro (Flagey, Brussels). "I recall that my grandfather told me that he saw the audience going behind the screen to see where the horses had gone. You might not believe me," continues Maurice Vanschel (Acinapolis, Jambes, and Eldorado, Namur), "but when the old guys tell you about cinema, even if they embellish things a little, I can tell you it's still almost always short of the truth. Today, cinema is simply something else."

No more shutter, no more flickering light. No more film, no more projectionist? "When you open a Cinemeccanica projector," Laurent Haro from Cartoon's in Antwerp explains to me, "inside it's like a Fiat, full of belts." But even the oilcan will likely disappear altogether from the projection booth. Some people depict digital as an evolution as important as talkies: the world of the moving image is purifying itself. It is changing into a race for technical perfection, competition for the "all-digital".

"After the war, my sister and I had our room behind the screen at the Châtelineau Kursaal. We could see the end of the movie through the ajar door before we fell asleep. I helped my father in the booth. In those days, there was only one screening a day. We were still using three-hundred-meter reels for approximately twelve minutes