

A Trip to the Moon It Its Original 1902 Colors

In May 1902, Georges Méliès shot the film, *A Trip to the Moon*. It was released in black and white, and also in color, hand painted. It was considered as a long feature at the time - around 14 minutes - and was success worldwide. The first blockbuster in the history of cinema was immediately pirated and plagiarized. In 1913, the black and white version survived Georges Méliès' act of folly, when he attempted to burn his collection of film negatives.

The color version was considered definitively lost, however a color print was finally found in 1993 in Barcelona, Spain, donated by a private film collector to the Filmoteca de Catalunya. However, the nitrate print had been severely damaged over time and was in such poor condition that attempting any restoration work seemed futile. Following a film exchange with the Filmoteca de Catalunya, Lobster Films received the damaged color print and began the tedious task of peeling off and unrolling the nitrate prints to be able to digitize them. It took two years to extract the images fragments. The data obtained was stored on a hard drive for eight years as the technology available at the time did not allow Lobster Films continue the restoration.

In 2010, a project team involving Lobster Films, Groupama Gan Foundation for Cinema and the Technicolor Foundation for Cinema Heritage – the only two foundations in France dedicated to worldwide cinema – launched the most complex and ambitious restoration project in the history of cinema, with a budget equivalent to a long feature high-end restoration (more than 400,000 euros).

The digital restoration of *A Trip to the Moon* took place at Technicolor's laboratories in Los Angeles, California and was supervised by Tom Burton. A black and white original nitrate print belonging to the Méliès family and a positive print belonging to the Centre National du Cinéma (CNC) were used during the restoration. The digitization of these elements was done by the Archives françaises du film (CNC-AFF) near Paris.

As is the case with all the restoration projects conducted by the two foundations, the objective is to circulate the film to the largest audience possible. For this purpose, they have asked the French band, AIR, to compose an original soundtrack to accompany this silent film, which was at the time of its first release screened with a musician on stage playing "popular music," as described the in the film reviews of the time.

"This is the most complex and ambitious restoration project we have ever taken on, all the more that this film, one of the first in the history of cinema, was had vanished for over 100 years," declared Serge Bromberg (Lobster Films), Gilles Duval (Groupama Gan Foundation for Cinema) and Séverine Wemaere (Technicolor Foundation for Cinema Heritage).

A colossal amount of work was done in order to breathe life back into this color masterpiece by Georges Méliès. Its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, Cannes Classics section, marked the 150th anniversary of the filmmaker's birth.