



# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

SUNDAY  
MARCH 6, 2016  
2:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

AND THE YALE FILM COLLOQUIUM PRESENT



PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT  
FROM PAUL L. JOSKOW  
'70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.

## THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN

In 1909, Mark Twain was caught on film for the first and last time by Edison's Kinetograph, strolling around his mansion in Redding, Connecticut (a 48 minute drive from the Whitney Humanities Center), smoking a cigarette, chatting with his daughters, and contemplating his imminent departure with Halley's Comet. Born just after the comet's first appearance in 1835, Twain puckishly predicted that he would die upon its return. A year later, the Great American Wit delivered his own punch line and died of a heart attack as the comet soared into the sky.



Adopting Twain's cosmic final journey as its premise, *THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN* (1985) brings its star back to the screen, molded out of clay, launched in a hybrid steampunk spaceship, and accompanied by three of his beloved characters, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and Becky Thatcher. As the four explorers travel through sculptural tapestries of the universe, Twain regales his young companions with stories from his literary oeuvre—"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," *Eve's Diary*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, and "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven"—that gush out of books, purple curtains, and other portals. As David Thompson writes in a review for *The Mark Twain Journal*, "it is apparent that the ship itself is literally an airborne embodiment of Twain's mind and imagination as well as the archive for everything he ever wrote."

Remarkable as this story sounds, it has long been overshadowed by the form pioneered by director-producer-animator Will Vinton, who coined the term "Claymation," won an Oscar for his first Claymation short, *CLOSED MONDAYS* (1975), created such memorable clay characters as the California Raisins and Domino Pizza's ill-fated mascot the Noid, made the monsters for Disney's *RETURN TO OZ*, and in 1985 released the first Claymation feature-length film, screened here this afternoon. In *THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN*, literally everything is made of clay, even the backdrops of clouds and starry skies, which were clay-painted in multiple passes and layers to create depth and transparencies. As a result, the film reportedly required 130,000 figure changes and took three and a half years to make. Sculpted, shot, and edited in the converted bedrooms of a house behind a barbershop (Vinton and his crew dubbed it the Barbershop Studio), the film was an intimate family affair. The animators worked in the basement while the producer pored over Mark Twain's writings in one bedroom and Vinton's then-wife, Susan Shadburne, wrote the script in another. Knowing these details from production contributes to the paradoxical pleasure of the film, which Stanley Kauffman described in *The New Republic* as the simultaneous appreciation of its smoothness and "the invisible immense labor that made the smoothness possible."

The other paradoxical pleasure of *MARK TWAIN* is its inability (or refusal) to decide upon its target audience. Stamped with a G rating and released around the country for a brief run of matinee performances by a failing distributor, the film was quickly relegated to the "Kiddie Ghetto" where it would languish, confronted by the confused dismay of children who had presumably not read the rave review in *The New Republic*, until its unlikely reemergence as a viral video with a cult following decades later. The "Mysterious Stranger" sequence from *MARK TWAIN* became a YouTube sensation partly through the initial uploader's erroneous claim that it had been censored for the TV version due to its disturbing content. Vinton has since declared himself mystified by this rumor and its circulation, but like the return of Halley's Comet, it is a mysterious phenomenon that has brought Mark Twain back to the sky and screen, for another generation to enjoy.

DIRECTED **WILL VINTON**  
WRITTEN BY **SUSAN SHADBURNE**  
BASED ON THE STORIES OF **MARK TWAIN**  
(1985) 86 MINS.  
PRODUCED BY  
**WILL VINTON PRODUCTIONS**  
WITH THE VOICES OF **JAMES WHITMORE,**  
**MICHELE MARIANA, GARY KRUG,**  
AND **CHRIS RITCHIE**

NOTES BY **LEANA HIRSCHFELD-KROEN**

**DID YOU KNOW:** THE VOICE OF MARK TWAIN, JAMES WHITMORE (YALE '44) VERY NEARLY HAD THE COVETED "EGOT," WINNING AN EMMY ("THE PRACTICE," 1999), GRAMMY (GIVE 'EM HELL, HARRY, 1975), AND TONY (COMMAND DECISION, 1948), AND RECEIVING TWO ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS, FOR SUPPORTING ACTOR IN *BATTLEGROUND* (1949) AND LEAD ACTOR IN *GIVE 'EM HELL, HARRY* (1975).

**NEXT UP:** ONE OF THE FIRST WESTERNERS TO ENCOUNTER THE KAPAUKU PAPUANS OF NORTHERN NEW GUINEA, PROF. LEOPOLD POSPISIL OF YALE'S DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY MADE A PIONEERING ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM, *KAPAUKU 1954/55 - 1959*. A 16MM PRINT OF THE FILM, PRESERVED BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL FILM PRESERVATION FOUNDATION, WILL BE PRESENTED WITH LIVE NARRATION BY PROF. POSPISIL ON **SUNDAY, MARCH 27 AT 7:00 PM.**