

Moonlight, Camera, Action!

The moon: one of the first subjects to be explored in cinema, made famous by Armstrong's "big step" and revered ever since...

When *A Trip to the Moon* was released in 1902, our moon became the subject of the very first planetary success in the world of cinema. The film also set the foundations for the science-fiction genre: inspired by the novels of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, Georges Méliès' scenario portrays the extravagant journeys of a team of astronomers. This deliberately burlesque film was produced at very low cost in the director's studio in Montreuil, Paris. Still, it was met with tremendous success in France, gradually seeing its popularity spread throughout Europe. So much so, in fact, that it gave rise to the first ever known cases of film piracy. For example: in the United States, popular public showings of the film were made possible thanks to counterfeit reels, copied from the original and imported with support from America's first studios. The end certainly justified the means: the awe inspired by this French masterpiece at the time could be compared to the release of *Avatar* in 2010! The world had to wait until 1929 for another major movie to shine light upon our natural satellite: Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Moon*. From then on, the moon became the subject of second-class creations: none were able to equal Méliès and Lang's creativity; until a certain Stanley Kubrick came along...

For 2001: *A Space Odyssey* released in 1968, the grand master imagined a moon landing scenario one year before Apollo XI's spectacular success. The world stood in awe before the thrilling viewing experience Kubrick had created. As a matter of fact, the subject was not broached again until 1988. Terry Gilliam turned Kubrick's realist vision upside-down and took a dash of Méliès' poetry to send *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* into cinematographic orbit. It portrayed a moon expedition not aboard a rocket, but on a hot air balloon!

Hollywood's next great contribution to the lunar myth arrived in 1995 with *Apollo XIII*. The movie was inspired from one of the most dramatic moments in the history of space exploration: "Houston, we have a problem!" resounded in Ron Howard's interpretation of the mission that had failed in April 1970.

But did the Americans really set foot on the moon? Rumour – and conspiracy theories – has it that they may not have, a topic explored in *Dark Side of the Moon* by William Karel (2002). This "mockumentary" is based on real interviews, sequenced to suggest that Stanley Kubrick created Armstrong's "big step for mankind" in a movie studio. A real eye opener!

First Man by Damien Chazelle is yet another movie on the subject, this time focused on Neil Armstrong played by actor Ryan Gosling. It shows the eight gruelling years of training the astronaut had to complete before the mission. Going to the moon is something you have to earn.