



# The Art of the Hollywood Backdrop

*Karen L. Maness, Richard M. Isackes*

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**The definitive behind-the-scenes history of one of Hollywood's most closely guarded cinematic secrets finally revealed—painted backdrops and the scenic artists who brought them to the big screen.**

In almost every feature film of Hollywood's golden age, from *The Wizard of Oz* to *North by Northwest* to *Cleopatra* to *The Sound of Music*, painted backings have convinced moviegoers that what they are seeing—whether the fantastic roads of Oz, the presidents of Mount Rushmore, or ancient Egyptian kingdoms—is absolutely real. These backings are at once intended to transport the audience and yet remain unseen for what they really are. *The Art of the Hollywood Backdrop* reveals the hidden world and creators of these masterpieces, long-guarded as a special effects secret by the major studios such as MGM, Warner Brothers, Universal, Columbia, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount.

Despite the continued use of hand-painted backings in today's films, including the big-budget *Interstellar* and *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* among many others, digital technology is beginning to supplant the art form. In an effort to preserve the irreplaceable knowledge of scenic masters, Karen Maness and Richard Isackes, in collaboration with the Art Directors Guild, have compiled a definitive history of the craft, complete with interviews of the surviving artists. This is a rich undiscovered history—a history replete with competing art departments, dynastic scenic families, and origins stretching back to the films of Méliès, Edison, Sennett, Chaplin, and Fairbanks.

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