

## ■ Movie palaces

*The magnificent movie palaces of the 1920s were visible symbols of the decade's widespread prosperity and conspicuous consumption. Such elaborate theaters allowed audiences from all socioeconomic classes to view films in sophisticated and luxurious settings that contrasted sharply with the nickelodeons and vaudeville theaters of earlier decades.*

Early in the twentieth century, films appeared primarily in vaudeville theaters, amusement parks, and small storefront theaters known as nickelodeons. As films became increasingly more sophisticated, so too did their venues, culminating in the development of the large, elaborate theaters known as movie palaces. One of the first movie palaces was the Regent Theatre, which opened in Harlem in February of 1913 but did not achieve renown until it came under the supervision of Samuel L. Rothafel later in the year. Rothafel believed in providing audiences with a level of comfort and sophistication far greater than the low ticket price would suggest. Accordingly, Rothafel glamorized the presentation of silent films by embellishing the Regent's decor, orchestra, screen, seats, staff, and stage. He did the same for a number of theaters throughout the 1910s and 1920s, including the Roxy Theatre in New York, which opened in 1927. The early movie palaces of the 1910s set a standard for luxury and extravagance that became apparent in those of the next decade.

During the 1920s, deluxe movie palaces opened in cities throughout the United States. Notable theaters included the Paramount in New York, opened in 1926, and Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, opened in 1927. Movie palaces were built and decorated in a variety of styles, including Art Deco, Baroque, Chinese, Egyptian, Gothic, Mayan, Moorish, neoclassical, Persian, Spanish Mission, Renaissance, rococo, and eclectic combinations thereof. Inside were colossal rotundas and lobbies, large-scale paintings and sculptures, elaborate mirrors and chandeliers, massive marble columns, and monumental staircases. The theaters bore names such as Avalon, Majestic, Regal, Rialto, Riviera, Rivoli, Tivoli, or simply the Palace, reinforcing their royal grandeur and reputations for opulence.

### Impact

As the prevalence of movie palaces during the 1920s had largely relied upon the prosperity of the period,

the onset of the Great Depression generally halted the construction of new venues. One of the last major movie palaces built was Radio City Music Hall, which opened in midtown Manhattan in December of 1932. However, although many movie palaces of the 1920s were torn down in later decades to make way for multiplex theaters, several palaces remained open to the public, serving as testaments to a golden age of moviegoing.

*James I. Deutsch*

### Further Reading

Hall, Ben M. *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*. New York: Bramhall House, 1992.

Naylor, David. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981.

Waller, Gregory A., ed. *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002.

**See also:** Architecture; Art Deco; Film; Grauman's Chinese Theatre; Talking motion pictures; Vaudeville

## ■ Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

**Identification:** American art museum

**Date:** Founded in November 1929

*The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was the first American museum to focus its collection solely on works of art created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In displaying works by such artists as Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, the museum played a key role in defining modern art and its relationship to society.*

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), originally located in a rented space in the Heckscher Building in Manhattan, was envisioned by wealthy collectors Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The founders sought to call attention to modern artists and works largely neglected by American museums, which typically focused on art from earlier eras. The former president of the Albright Art Gallery board of trustees, A. Conger Goodyear, became president of the new museum. Other additions to the board of trustees included philanthropist