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Emmy Winner Thomas Walsh to Trace Early History of Art Direction Through Ben Carre Doc

The Art Directors Guild past president is in prepro and raising funds to tell the story of 'Ben Carre: A Parisian in Hollywood.'

BY CAROLYN GIARDINA OCTOBER 20, 2023 6:39AM



An American in Paris (1951) EVERETT



Emmy-winning production designer and a past president of the Art Directors Guild Thomas Walsh is in prepro and raising funds to make a documentary about pioneering art director and painter Ben Carré (1883-1978), whose little-known story, which begins in Paris with the invention of motion pictures, also serves as an early history of his art form.

“The history, origin and profession of **art direction** for motion pictures has never been properly documented and Ben’s journey is our Rosetta Stone,” explains film history enthusiast Walsh, who is writing, producing and directing the project based on Carré’s unpublished 400-page memoir, archival material and exhaustive research.

Ben Carré: A Parisian in Hollywood will trace the subject's life, starting in silent movies in Paris, before moving to Fort Lee, New Jersey, when the Hudson River region was an early filmmaking destination, and then to Hollywood. Carré is credited with set designs for classic such as 1925's *The Phantom of the Opera* and 1927's *The Jazz Singer*. Later, he painted backgrounds for iconic MGM films including 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*, 1951's *An American in Paris* and 1959's *North by Northwest*.

Plans for the doc include interviews with historians such as Kevin Brownlow and some aging filmmakers who knew Carré. "We must capture their stories on film while their memories and voices are still strong," explains Walsh, who is perhaps best known for *Desperate Housewives*. His efforts to preserve film history has also included work on the ADG's Backdrop Recovery Project and ADG Archives.

To complete the interviews to make *Ben Carré: A Parisian in Hollywood*, there's a current fundraising campaign through Seed & Spark Crowdfunding, and then fundraising will continue through nonprofit and project sponsor The Film Collaborative. 