

The Museum of Modern Art

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CHRIS MARKER: A VIDEO SELECTION

January 7 - 17, 1994

A series of eleven recent videotapes by French documentarian Chris Marker is on view at The Museum of Modern Art from January 7 to 17, 1994.

CHRIS MARKER: A VIDEO SELECTION demonstrates the ways in which Marker blends image, text, and idea to create poetic visual essays that expand the boundaries of nonfiction cinema.

The exhibition reveals Marker's wit and inventiveness in a work such as *The Last Bolshevik* (1993), which follows the life and work of the Russian director Alexander Medvedkin and the history of Soviet cinema and communism. Also included is *Owl's Legacy* (1990), an epic thirteen-part meditation on Greek culture and its heritage. In the videotape, Marker incorporates strikingly shot interviews of philosophers, cultural critics, and filmmakers, with film excerpts and music from several centuries and countries.

Other highlights of the exhibition are Marker's video diaries: *Prime Time in the Camps* (1993) focuses on the war in Bosnia and the hopelessness of the people there; *Berlin 1990* (1990) shows the street life near the Berlin wall shortly after it came down; *Tokyo Days* (1988) presents views of daily life in modern Tokyo; *Andrei Tarkovsky* (1986) is a profile of the Russian director before he disclosed his illness with cancer; and *From Chris to Christo* (1985) concerns the artist Christo as he wraps the Pont Neuf bridge in Paris and the reaction of onlookers, including the painter Matta.

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Chris Marker was born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve in 1921. He has given various answers when asked where he was born, including Paris, which is the most likely place. During World War II, Marker fought for the Resistance in France and was an enlisted paratrooper in the United States Air Force. After the war, he wrote for the journal *Esprit* and was an early contributor to *Cahiers du cinéma*. A devoted traveler, Marker has gone all over the world as a journalist and photographer and has published illustrated books about the countries he visited. In 1949 he wrote *The Forthright Spirit*, a novel about aviation.

In 1952 Marker made his first feature-length film, *Olympia 52*, about the Helsinki Olympic Games. The following year he collaborated with his friend Alain Resnais in the writing and directing of *Statues Also Die* and was the assistant director on Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955). Marker went on to make films in and about a variety of countries, including China (*Sunday in Peking*, 1955), Russia (*Letter from Siberia*, 1957), and, finally, France (*Le Joli Mai*, 1963). One of Marker's most acclaimed films, and his only fiction film, is *Le Jetée* (1964), a short "photo-novel" set in a bleak Paris of the future, after a third world war.

In 1967 Marker formed SLON, a collective project to protest America's involvement in Vietnam. The collective created *Far From Vietnam* (1967), a film featuring segments by Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, and Joris Ivens, among others; Marker supervised the editing. During this period, he made other political films, such as *À bientôt j'espère* (1968), *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (1968), and *The Battle of the Ten Millions* (1970), and, later on, *The Base of the Air Is Red* (1977), on the hopes and disappointments of the 1967-68 period.

In the late 1970s, Marker resumed his world travels and made *Sans Soleil* (1982), an extraordinary travel-film which addresses the relationship among time, memory, and film. In 1985 he made *A.K.*, a portrait of the Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa and the making of his film *Ran* (1986). *A.K.* has been called one of the best documentaries ever made on the filmmaking process.

CHRIS MARKER: A VIDEO SELECTION was organized by Barbara London, associate curator, Video, Department of Film and Video.

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