

The Museum of Modern Art

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INFLUENTIAL FRENCH FILMMAKER AGNÈS VARDA RECEIVES FIRST MAJOR NEW YORK RETROSPECTIVE

**A Visit by the Filmmaker and Several New York Premieres
—Including a Number of Rare Short Films—
Highlight Program of Thirty-One Works**

Agnès Varda
October 3–31, 1997
The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1

The exhilarating work of French filmmaker Agnès Varda is the subject of a major retrospective to be held from October 3 to October 31 at The Museum of Modern Art.

Varda, now in her fifth decade as a filmmaker, will introduce the opening night screenings, launching a thirty-one-film program that includes all her feature-length and short works.

The series opens with the world premiere of a newly struck print of *Le bonheur* (1964), Varda's exploration of the complexities beneath the surface of domestic life that won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival; and *Vagabond* (1985), one of the director's most powerful films, which stars Sandrine Bonnaire and which won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival.

Born in Brussels in 1928, Varda was the official photographer for Paris's Théâtre National Populaire before her Left Bank colleagues persuaded the then twenty-six-year-old, who had seen relatively few films, to make her first feature, *La pointe courte* (1954). The work was a financial failure but a critical success, and is today considered by many to be one of the authentic ancestors of the *Nouvelle Vague*.

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Following *La pointe courte*, Varda made three visually arresting short films about places in France that held special meaning for her: the French Riviera, Chambord, and Paris's Left Bank. But it was her next feature, *Cleo from Five to Seven* (1961), that brought her international acclaim. In the film, which follows the life of a young woman who is anxiously awaiting reports from her doctor, Varda's signature elements can be clearly discerned: namely, a tendency to inflect narrative with documentary reality, a photographer's keen and practiced eye, and a deep interest in the everyday life of women.

A critical feminist, Varda regards her filmmaking as artisanal work, equivalent to cloth weaving and hand sewing, and has established her own atelier, *ciné-tamaris*, to make her films. She has traveled widely in her professional work, blending social and personal histories and documentary with more or less fictional narratives to create intriguing films in France, Iran, and Cuba.

Varda has also made several films in the United States. In the 1960s she made a short work about a relative in San Francisco, *Uncle Yanco* (1967); a political documentary, *Black Panthers* (1968), shot in Oakland; and a lively riff on Hollywood "un"-reality, *Lion's Love* (1969), starring, among others, Warhol superstar Viva and the writers of *Hair*, Jim Raddo and Jerome Ragni. Varda returned to Los Angeles a decade later to make *Mur Murs* (1980), about the city's street murals, and *Documenteur* (1981), a tale of a single mother looking for work and adequate housing.

The director's other acclaimed features include *The Creatures* (1965), starring Catherine Deneuve and Michel Piccoli; *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1976), chronicling

the friendship of two women over the course of fifteen years; *Jane B. by Agnes V.* (1987), a portrait of the actress Jane Birkin; and *Kung Fu Master* (1987), a love story about an older woman, played by Jane Birkin, and an adolescent, played by Varda's son, Mathieu Demy.

In the early nineties Varda made three films about her husband, the celebrated French filmmaker Jacques Demy, to whom she was married in 1962. The first, *Jacquot de Nantes* (1990), explores Demy's childhood. After his death in 1990, Varda completed two documentaries, *The Young Girls of Rochefort—25 Years Later* (1992) and *The World of Jacques Demy* (1993), both loving and exuberant portraits.

Her most recent film, *A Hundred and One Nights*, made for the centennial of cinema in 1996, is enlivened by cameos by numerous European film stars, including the late Marcello Mastroianni.

Agnès Varda is organized by Larry Kardish, Curator and Coordinator of Film Exhibitions, Department of Film and Video, and presented in cooperation with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy.

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Note: Agnes Varda will be available for interviews in New York City from September 15 to 18 and from September 29 to October 6.

No. 57

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