

Chris Marker

A Grin Without a Cat

The work of visionary French artist and filmmaker **Chris Marker** (1921–2012) laces reality with science-fiction and lyricism with politics. His influence extends across art, experimental film and mainstream cinema. A master of the ‘essay-film’ - a hybrid of documentary and personal reflection - he also worked in multiple artistic formats as a photographer, writer, editor, and as a pioneer of new media and installation art.

This first UK retrospective presents works in a variety of media and from different periods in Marker’s career, giving an unprecedented survey of the full range of his creativity. The exhibition unfolds in four key themes that recur throughout Marker’s work – The Museum, Travelogues, Film and Memory, and War and Revolution. Pivotal films are shown in relation to rarely exhibited photographs, bookworks, collages and multimedia installations.

The first section of the exhibition **Statues Also Die: The Museum**, brings together works in which the idea of the museum is both the subject matter and the organising principle. Marker reflects upon questions of time, history and memory to interrogate the practices of collecting, archiving, and displaying of images and objects.

Active in the cultural education movements of France after World War II and aware of writers such as André Malraux and Walter Benjamin, Marker also embraced the potential of emerging technologies, from cinema to the internet. This is explored through three key works that open the exhibition. *Ouvroir. The Movie* (2010) is a guided tour of the museum Marker created in the website *Second Life*, where visitors to this virtual archipelago are welcomed by Marker’s avatar, the cat Guillaume-en-Egypte. *Immemory* (1990–97) is an encyclopaedic CD-ROM of images and texts; and the seminal essay-film about African art is *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (*Statues Also Die*) (1953).

Selections from the photographic series *Staring Back* (1952–2006) weave throughout the exhibition as visual commentaries on the themes explored.

Exhibition co-curated by Christine van Assche and Chris Darke.

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The works on display in this gallery **Memories of Things to Come: The Future-Past of Film**, reflect Marker's conception of cinema as a time machine, as a repository of memory-images, and explores his fascination with the temporal paradoxes of the filmic image, allowing the viewer to travel through 3 dimensions of time as much as to travel in space.

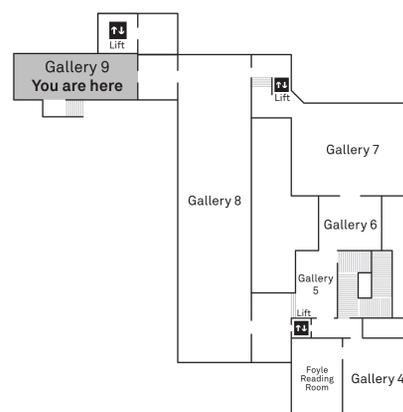
This approach is best encapsulated by his influential short science fiction film *La Jetée* (The Pier) (1962) about 'a man marked by an image from his childhood' - screened here in a rare version with a different opening sequence from the definitive cut.

Shown alongside the film is a series of archival documents, including Marker's *La Jetée* workbook, which develops his description of the film as a 'photo-roman' (photo-novel). In stripping cinematic projection down to its basic element, the still image, *La Jetée* paradoxically enhances its looped, time-travel narrative.

The term 'future-past' finds a different expression in each work. *Silent Movie* (1995) celebrates the creation of cinema and presents Marker's memories of cinema's past as a 'silent' or a 'mute' medium. This five-monitor installation looks back to Constructivist industrial design, and screens black-and-white images from silent films with an accompanying sound track.

The deliberately archaic style of each work co-exists with a sense of futuristic anticipation. Cinema is situated somewhere between the past and the future as a form in continued development.

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Marker was politically engaged in the historic upheavals of his time, from the end of colonialism to the Iraq war, chronicling the global uprisings which took place throughout May 1968 to the popular struggles of the early 21st century.

The events addressed in the final section of the show, **When the Century Took Shape: War and Revolution**, were formative experiences for Marker as for many others. Born between the two world wars in 1921, he joined the Resistance in World War II, and was a participant in the leftist and collectivist politics throughout his life.

This section opens with the faces of Paris citizens in the 1960s and the early 2000s contrasted across a pair of large-screen sequences from two films portraying periods of social and political transformation. The crisp black-and-white images of *Le Joli Mai* (1962) confront the digital-video street footage of *Chats Perchés* (The Case of the Grinning Cat) (2004).

Two multimedia works made almost thirty years apart offer equally contrasting treatments of images of the First World War and its revolutionary aftermath. The installation *Quand le siècle a pris forme: Guerre et Révolution* (*When the Century Took Shape: War and Revolution*) (1978) and the eight-channel *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* (2005), inspired by TS Eliot's poem of the same name.

The exhibition culminates in a large-screen projection of the newly restored version of Marker's epic documentary *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* (*A Grin Without a Cat*) (1977). This remarkable collage of archival footage rescued from the 'dustbin of history' charts the fallout of the post-1968 global revolutionary movements.

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