



JANUS FILMS PRESENTS

VARDA BY AGNÈS



69^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Out of Competition



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Agnès Varda filming *Varda by Agnès*

The final film from the late, beloved Agnès Varda is a characteristically playful, profound, and personal summation of the director's own brilliant career. At once impish and wise, Varda acts as our spirit guide on a free-associative tour through her six-decade artistic journey, shedding new light on her films, photography, and recent installation works while offering her one-of-a-kind reflections on everything from filmmaking to feminism to aging. Suffused with the people, places, and things she loved—Jacques Demy, cats, colors, beaches, heart-shaped potatoes—this wonderfully idiosyncratic work of imaginative autobiography is a warmly human, touchingly bittersweet parting gift from one of cinema's most luminous talents.

France | 2019 | 120 minutes | Color | Stereo | 1.77:1 aspect ratio | Screening format: DCP

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 1994, with a retro at the Cinémathèque française, I published a book entitled *Varda by Agnès*. Twenty-five years later, the same title is given to my film made of moving images and words, with the same project: to give keys to my body of work. I give my own keys, my thoughts, nothing pretentious, just keys.

The film is in two parts, two centuries.

The twentieth century from my first feature film, *La Pointe Courte*, in 1955, to the last one, in 1995, *One Hundred and One Nights*. In between, I made documentaries, features, short and long.

The second part starts in the twenty-first century, when the small digital cameras changed my approach to documentaries, from *The Gleaners and I* in 2000 to *Faces Places*, codirected with JR in 2017. But

during that time, I mostly created art installations, atypical triptychs, shacks of cinema, and I kept making documentaries, such as *The Beaches of Agnès*.

In the middle of the two parts, there is a little reminder about my first life as a photographer.

I've made a wide variety of films in my life. So I need to tell you what led me to do this work for so many years.

Three words are important to me: *inspiration, creation, sharing*.

Inspiration is why you make a film. The motivations, ideas, circumstances, and happenstance that spark a desire, and you set to work to make a film.

Creation is how you make the film. What means do you use? What structure? Alone

or not alone? In color or not in color? Creation is a job.

The third word is *sharing*. You don't make films to watch them alone; you make films to show them. An empty cinema: a filmmaker's nightmare!

People are at the heart of my work. Real people. That's how I've always referred to the people I film in cities or the countryside.

When you film something, a place, a landscape, a group of people, even if the subject is specific, what you shot indicates your deepest project.

I like to bring together reality and its representation. But I also like to juxtapose moving images and still images, in video and in photography.



Alain Resnais and Varda editing *La Pointe Courte*



Varda during the making of *Uncle Yanco*



Varda onstage in *Varda by Agnès*

AGNÈS VARDA INTERVIEW

This interview was conducted by Rhonda Richford in Paris on January 31, 2019. A version of it appeared in the Hollywood Reporter's February 10 daily issue at the Berlin Film Festival, where Varda by Agnès made its premiere a few days later. Reprinted with permission.

Varda by Agnès is a retrospective in some ways. What is your point of view in this film?

It could be called a master class, but I don't feel like a master, and I never taught. I don't like the idea. It is not so much about retelling the stories, but more about the structure and the intention and my sources. But I didn't want it to be very boring. So it's in a theater with people, or in a garden, and I try to be myself and communicate the energy or the intention or the feeling I'd like to share. It's what I call cine-writing, in which all the choices participate in something you could call style. But *style* is a literary word. So cine-writing is all the elements I think we have to think of, or choose, or use, to make a film.

Was it difficult to examine your own work to turn it into this film?

It wasn't difficult, because I think deeply about what I do. And when it's finished, I don't think of it as "I could have done better" or "I could have done worse," but I try to understand the process of creating. It's not only technical; I try to be spontaneous. The process is how you can find the right images, the right words, following instinct. I really try to follow a filmic instinct. I'm an artist now, I'm preparing another exhibition, and I show it vaguely in the second part because the documentary has two parts, the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. In the twentieth century, I was mostly a filmmaker, and in the twenty-first century, I am an artist. I alternate documentaries and installations. I build houses, shacks, with the actual composite prints. I've done the installations for a different way of looking at things, putting people in chairs with headphones, and I question the communication between the one who creates and the one who receives. It's like recycling my past as a filmmaker.

In a way, this is the "last word." Does this film say what you want to say about your idea of filmmaking?

I never wanted to say anything, I just wanted to look at people and share. There never was a message that you should get and understand, so I can't say if I'm satisfied or not. But let's make it clear: the film I'm presenting in Berlin is maybe not so entertaining, but I will no longer accept to do a talk. This is it; this is my talk. You show [the film], don't ask me to come. I spoke so often, everywhere, including Harvard University and a TED Talk when I was in Los Angeles. I don't want to do press; I don't want to speak about my work. I feel that I should spend two hours looking at a tree or looking at a cat instead of speaking. After Berlin, the film will be showed instead of me speaking!

You've talked about "being a star of the margins," of never being in the mainstream. How has that impacted your point of view as a filmmaker?

I have made few films in a way. I never made action films. I never made science-fiction films. I never made, really, very complicated settings, because I had modest ambitions. I knew they would never trust me to have

the budget to do something different, so my mind was more focused on things I know. So they were always mental adventures I wanted to approach and share. The cinephile section of the Oscar has chosen me when they wanted to pay tribute to people who have worked for cinema with no special connection with success or money, and I'm proud that they picked me. Working for cinema with not only no money but also no ambition for money. And I think I was happy and proud because of that, that they could understand what kind of work I have done over sixty years. I stayed faithful to the ideal of sharing emotion, impressions, and mostly because I have so much empathy for other people that I approach people who are not really spoken about.

I have sixty-five years of work in my bag, and when I put the bag down, what comes out? It's really the desire to find links and relationships with different kinds of people. I never made a film about the bourgeoisie, about rich people, about nobility. My choices have been to show people who are in a way like everybody and see that each of them has something special, interesting, rare, and beautiful. It's my natural way of looking at people. I didn't fight my instincts. And maybe that has been appreciated in the famous circle of Hollywood.



Varda filming The Gleaners and I

And aside from the Oscar, you also received an honorary Palme d'Or, a recent honor at Marrakech . . .

I think they will give me something in Berlin too. Now that I'm old, they want to give me something everywhere! It's like saying, "You're old, so we'll give you something." So I have two closets full. I say thank you, of course, as if someone gives you a gift, but I think it's unfair. Some other woman, some other director should have it. There are a lot of directors working, especially in France, a lot of them good, and I'm the oldest, so I look at it like, I'm a potiche now, and it's easy to put me on the top [of a pedestal]. But I really respect a lot of women directors who don't get awards. So I feel a little like it's an alibi, like saying, "We respect women," but it's too much for me. Some other women are really good; I would like them to be in the light more often. I could say, for example, Céline Sciamma, Naomi Kawase, Ula Stöckl, Maren Ade, Pascale Ferran, Claire Denis,

Emmanuelle Bercot, Noémie Lvovsky, Ruth Beckermann, Sally Potter, Jane Campion, and I could name many others.

Does cinema have a responsibility to educate?

I work hard to make honest cinema, but I'm not so pretentious as to think I can change the world. JR says that art can change the world. No, we can sometimes change the mentality of people, or we can change the vision of people about the world or about other people. We have to know that being an honest artist is already something, but I don't know if we can do much more.

I appreciate that you took the time today.

Well, you should, because this is the end, my friend. I will do some art now after, because filming is tiring. I no longer want to work so hard. It's too difficult. I'd like to stay here a little, be calm, enjoy; even remembering peacefully can make my day. You don't

disturb me. You did it with a good and friendly spirit, but you see, we spent an hour talking about my career, and life is passing, every minute is passing.

I enjoy what is here. And even seeing the tulips aging, I love that. The more you wait, they become very bizarre. As it was with the heart-shaped potatoes aging in *The Gleaners and I*. The aging process, I enjoy it a lot. I love what happens to things aging, and to people aging, and I love the wrinkles, the hands, I love all that. I'm really interested in what can happen to a hand. It can be a lovely landscape. So I have a good time aging, and I love to see things getting to be naturally, vaguely destroyed.

One of my art pieces is *Patatutopia*. It is a triptych of heart-shaped potatoes. I kept the potatoes and checked on them to see how they were aging, and aging potatoes are really beautiful. So you have to feel that way. Don't suffer. Be like a potato.

VARDA FILMOGRAPHY

The films listed below are narrative features, unless otherwise noted.

La Pointe Courte (1955)

Diary of a Pregnant Woman (1958) (short)

Ô saisons, ô châteaux (1958) (documentary short)

Du côté de la côte (1958) (short)

The Fiancés of the Bridge Mac Donald (1961) (documentary short)

Cléo from 5 to 7 (1962)

Salut les Cubains (1964) (documentary short)

Le bonheur (1965)

The Creatures (1966)

Elsa la rose (1966) (documentary short)

Uncle Yanco (1967) (documentary short)

Black Panthers (1968) (documentary short)

Lions Love (. . . and Lies) (1969)

Nausicaa (1971) (lost)

Women Reply (1975) (documentary short)

Daguerréotypes (1976) (documentary)

Plaisir d'amour en Iran (1976) (documentary short)

One Sings, the Other Doesn't (1977)

Mur Murs (1980) (documentary)

Documenteur (1981)

Ulysse (1983) (documentary short)

Une minute pour une image (1983) (documentary short)

The So-Called Caryatids (1984) (documentary short)

7 p., cuis., s. de b. (1984) (short)

Vagabond (1985)

You've Got Beautiful Stairs, You Know . . . (1986) (short)

Jane B. by Agnès V. (1988)

Le petit amour (a.k.a. *Kung-Fu Master!*) (1988)

Jacquot de Nantes (1991)

The Young Girls Turn 25 (1993) (documentary)

One Hundred and One Nights (1995)

The World of Jacques Demy (1995) (documentary)

The Gleaners and I (2000) (documentary)

Two Years Later (2002) (documentary)

Le lion volatil (2003) (short)

Ydessa, the Bears and Etc. (2004) (documentary short)

Quelques veuves de Noirmoutier (2006)
(documentary adapted from installation)

The Beaches of Agnès (2008) (documentary)

Agnès Varda: From Here to There (2011) (documentary)

The Three Buttons (2015) (short)

Faces Places (2017) (documentary, codirected with JR)

Varda by Agnès (2019) (documentary)