

MAYSLES CINEMA

For Immediate Release

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Interviews, film screeners, and images available for this program.

MAYSLES CINEMA PRESENTS 'STRANGERS IN STRANGE LANDS,' A FILM SERIES FEATURING TRAVEL DOCUMENTARIES BY GREAT FRENCH DIRECTORS FILM SERIES DATES: JULY 13-AUGUST 6, 2008

"To walk is to vegetate, to stroll is to live." —Balzac

Maysles Cinema, a new theater devoted to documentary film and operated by the Maysles Institute, will present *Strangers in Strange Lands: The Explorations of Great French Directors*, from July 13 through August 6, 2008. The series features eleven films—many rarely seen in the United States—by great French directors including Louis Malle, Jean Vigo, Chantal Akerman, Jean Epstein, Agnès Varda, and Jean Painlevé—as they explore territory from 1960's India to 1930's Nice; from the 1970's in New York City to the 1920's at the bottom of the sea. Screenings are open to the public at the suggested admission of \$7. The Maysles Cinema is located at 343 Lenox Avenue/Malcolm X Boulevard at 127th Street, in New York City.



The five programs in the series feature seminal works of avant-garde documentary that range in time period from the classic through the contemporary, and travel through exotic, familiar, and even internal terrain. A highlight of the series is the U.S. premiere of a new restoration of Jean Epstein's *Finis Terrae* (1929, pictured right), imported from the Gaumont-Pathé Archive in France for this series, as well as rare screenings of four science documentaries by Jean Painlevé's (1928-1947), accompanied by the U.S. Premiere of an enthralling new documentary on the director himself, *Jean Painlevé: A Dream for Marine Biology*. The film series *Strangers in Strange Lands* was guest curated by Livia Bloom, Museum of the Moving Image.

"By combining close observation with intimacy and self-inquiry, the films in this series represent artistic, environmental and ontological inquiry at its most personal," said Ms. Bloom. "The films are entirely site-specific, distinct products of their own place, their own time, and their creators' strong authorial voices. Yet as each toys with traditional expectations of documentary, travelogue, and narrative, they capture the universal experience of being an explorer, a foreigner, and a stranger in a strange land."

Maysles Cinema was founded by legendary documentarian Albert Maysles (*Grey Gardens*, *Salesman*, *Gimme Shelter*). "Over 50 years ago I had the good fortune and inspiration to relate the lives of individuals through documentary film," says Mr. Maysles. "Today the mission of the Maysles Institute is to cultivate this same inspiration and talent in others—especially young people—so they may learn to put across their feelings about themselves, their family, and society—things that are universal but often go unspoken."

The Maysles Cinema, a new non-profit theater in Harlem, is dedicated to the exhibition of documentary film and video. In addition to presenting the masterworks of the documentary tradition, overlooked or under-distributed gems and new releases, the Cinema is a space for meaningful social exchange, offering a forum for the discussion of questions of social, racial, and economic justice.

'STRANGERS IN STRANGE LANDS' SCHEDULE AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS:

All films screened on DVD or BetaSP and shown in their original versions with English subtitles.

Program One: Louis Malle

Phantom India

Sunday, July 13 at 1:00 p.m.

(1969, color, 7 episodes, each 50 mins. Total 363 mins.

Directed by Louis Malle.) Traveling in India with only a cinematographer and a sound recordist, Louis Malle recorded what he observed—often without knowing he was seeing or why it drew him, yet inspired by this striking, ancient land.

Culled from 30 hours of footage (none of which Malle developed or watched until after he'd returned home to France), *Phantom India's* seven episodes are grouped by themes or locations, with the director's own voiceover on the soundtrack. Working with Suzanne Baron—editor of Malle's *My Dinner with André*, Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*, Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum*, and Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres Fous*, among other films—long scenes in *Phantom India*, often five or ten minutes in length, unfold without interruption. Their rhythm reflects the freedom and spontaneity of Malle's trip, and the film that emerges is highly instinctive and sometimes controversial, as well as political, spiritual and deeply thoughtful.



Program Two: Jean Vigo and Chantal Akerman

A Propos de Nice and News From Home

Tuesday, July 15 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 16 at 7:30 p.m.

A Propos de Nice (1930, black and white, silent, 22 mins.

Directed by Jean Vigo.) Jean Vigo's first film is a study of Nice, the celebrated French resort town to which tuberculosis had confined both him and his wife. Inspired by cinematic city portraits like Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and Alberto Cavalcanti's Paris classic *Rien que les*

heures, Vigo worked with his neighbor, Russian émigré cinematographer Boris Kaufman (the brother of Dziga Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman). Shooting clandestinely on scraps of film saved from his job as an assistant cameraman, Vigo pushed Kaufman through town in a wheelchair with a camera hidden on his lap to obtain much of the film's beautiful photography. Though the project began with a detailed script written by the two couples, this was soon abandoned. Instead, Vigo juxtaposed the seaside idyll's extravagant, wealthy elite with their counterparts in the little-seen, impoverished local underbelly to create one of cinema's most poetic and political works.

News From Home (1977, color, 85 mins. Directed by Chantal Akerman, pictured.) Gorgeous empty alleyways, scowling strangers, and sprawling, seedy urban decay make Chantal Akerman's vision of New York City one of the era's finest. She visits the downtown streets and subways that were brought to life in narrative films such as Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, Abel Ferrara's *Driller Killer*, and James Toback's *Fingers*, while letters from her mother in Belgium add intimate detail to the soundtrack. Rare English subtitles on this newly-released European DVD version provide rare translation of this crucial element of the film, a displaced and distant audio foil to the director's distinct visual experience in America.



Program Three: Agnès Varda *L'opéra Mouffe and The Gleaners and I*

Tuesday, July 22 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 23 at 7:30 p.m.

L'opéra Mouffe (1958, black and white, 17 mins. Directed by Agnès Varda, pictured.) Pregnant with her first child, the sole female auteur to hold her own during the French New Wave here records her neighborhood on the rue Mouffetard in glorious black and white. The voiceover is Varda's own, contemplating her body's changes and life in Paris with characteristic insight, sensuality and humor. Young lovers, street vagrants, and the vibrant local vegetable market are all captured with her keen eye for texture and detail in this rich, sensual, and rarely-seen film.

The Gleaners and I (2000, color, 82 mins. Directed by Agnès Varda.) "Rather than a "road movie" [this is] a "wandering-road-documentary," explained Agnès Varda of personal exploration of the practice and history of "gleaning" in many different regions of southern France. Resourceful, opinionated interviewees wrest food and art from trash and refuse, acts which Varda sees as part of a long tradition dating back to the 1500s, when King Henry IV legalized "the right to glean." Varda finds further historical evidence of gleaning in celebrated rural paintings by Jean François Millet ("The Gleaners," 1857) and Vincent Van Gogh, and she speaks with her countrymen and women about their versions of the practice. In a perfect counter-point to Varda's early ruminations and travels in *L'opéra Mouffe*, this in turn prompts the filmmaker's ruminations on her country, the process of aging, and her place in the world.



Program Four: Jean Painlevé *Four Rare Painlevé Films and U.S. Premiere of Jean Painlevé: A Dream for Marine Biology*

Tuesday, July 29 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, July 30 at 7:30 p.m.

Four Rare Painlevé Films:

The Love Life of the Octopus (*Les Amours de la pieuvre*, 1928, 13 mins., pictured.)

The Sea-horse (*L'hippocampe*, 1933, 13 mins.)

The Vampire (*Le Vampire*, 1939, 9 mins.)

Freshwater Assassins (*Assassins d'eau douce*, 1947, 25 mins.)

Elegant, formal and fearless, these four lilted, rarely-seen documentaries by Jean Painlevé take an experimental approach to scientific exploration. Filming non-human environments that sometimes appear otherworldly, and at other moments are remarkably familiar, Painlevé explored everywhere from bat caves to the grottos of sea horses, creating over 200 nature films over the course of his career. In the whimsical, humorous and sometimes savage moments between the inhabitants of seemingly inhospitable landscapes, Painlevé captures the sublime.

Jean Painlevé: A Dream for Marine Biology (U.S. Premiere, 2005, 52 mins. Directed by François Lévy-Kuentz.) Jean Painlevé's life was every bit as fascinating as his films, as this wonderfully-researched and entertaining documentary reveals. The son of the France's prime minister, learn of the way his childhood rebellion against his powerful father slowly morphed into his career; the techniques that he employed to capture rare scientific moments that are still used today; and the technological innovations he designed and inspired in the fields of scuba diving, marine biology, and cinematography. This film also examines the changing reactions to Painlevé's work by the film and science communities over time, and the many friends—from Luis Buñuel to Alexander Calder, May Ray, and Jean Vigo—that he collaborated with, providing live ants or bizarre scientific specimen upon request.



Program Five: Jean Epstein

Finis Terrae

U.S. Premiere of Imported Restoration

Tuesday, August 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, August 6 at 7:30 p.m.

(U.S. Premiere, 1929, black and white, silent film accompanied by a new score, 88 mins. Directed by Jean Epstein.) Shown for the first time in the U.S. in a new restoration by Gaumont-Pathé Archive, Jean Epstein's remarkable film weaves documentary footage of coastal life on Ouessant Island, Brittany, with the tale of a wounded fisherman's journey for medical assistance. Born in Poland, Epstein began making narrative films with *Pasteur* in 1922; Luis Buñuel was Epstein's assistant *Fall of the House of Usher* (1928). Epstein he was also a noted critic, film theorist, novelist; *Finis Terrae* or "Ends of the Earth" was one of several films Epstein shot on the islands off the coast of France. *Finis Terrae* showcases its director's artist's eye for landscape, technician's prowess at special effects, and documentarian's loving attention to intimate detail.



Series curated by Livia Bloom, Museum of the Moving Image. Organized with Philip Maysles (Maysles Cinema) and Delphine Selles-Alvarez (The French Embassy in New York). Special thanks to Agnès Bertola (Gaumont-Pathé Archives); Sandrine Butteau (The French Embassy in New York); Sarah Finklea (Criterion Collection/Janus Films); Charlotte Garson (Cahiers du Cinéma); Tomoko Kawamoto (Museum of the Moving Image); Lawrence Levi (Nextbook/Flaneur.org); Paradise Films and Jake Perlin (BAM Cinematek/The Film Desk); and Clemence Tallendrier (Zeitgeist Films).

More information at www.mayslesfilms.com / cinema@mayslesfilms.org / (212) 582-6050. Maysles Cinema is located at 343 Lenox Avenue/Malcolm X Boulevard, between 127th and 128th Streets, New York, NY 10011. Subway: Take the 2/3, 4/5/6, A/B/C/D trains to 125th Street.

The Maysles Institute is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA).



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