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TRAVELLER IN TIME:

"Our unknown cosmonaut"

Jean Quevel

"A kind of one-man total cinema"

Richard Roud

"The films of Chris Marker are unequalled in contemporary cinema for their beauty, complexity, influence and inventiveness"

James Quandt

THE FILM & VIDEO WORK OF CHRIS MARKER

SEPTEMBER 26 - OCTOBER 25, 1997

PRESENTED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FRENCH CULTURAL SERVICES

Chris Marker's films are the kind of miracle you'd stopped hoping for long ago, a Travelogue of Pure Mystery where "images appear like confessions" (LA JETÉE), where his beloved cats and owls materialize to remind us just how far we have to go, how much we have to remember. His favorite medium is the cinema essay: a series of impressions, snapshots, postcards from distant lands (Japan, Africa, Russia, Greece), linked together by Marker's enigmatic voice, described as "the voice of an insomniac dreamer" (Bill Horrigan) or "a ghost whispering in your ear" (Terrence Rafferty.) Marker is in love with Memory, with its melancholy beauty, and his films are an altogether heroic, perhaps doomed attempt to trace its stain on our lives, like lifting rubbings from a gravestone — as Marker has said, "I claim, for the image, the humility and the powers of a madeleine."

Marker himself is even more elusive than his work, a quicksilver character in a world of klieg lights. He was born, apparently, in 1921 in the suburbs of Paris (although he's occasionally claimed his birthplace was Outer Mongolia.) A journalist, travel-writer and photographer before he took up filmmaking, Marker has consistently refused interviews and has rarely been photographed himself. His earliest films were made in collaboration with Alain Resnais, who shares Marker's preoccupation with time and memory; and while Marker's career parallels the French New Wave, his films have always been too singular to be easily grouped with Godard, Rivette and the others.

Ironically for a filmmaker of his stature, Marker's work has been nearly impossible to see — only a handful of his films have had U.S. release, and his favorite medium, the cinema essay, almost defies commercial distribution. (He's also against the idea of retrospectives as being "too post-mortem," which makes things even harder.) This is the largest assemblage, or cinema-carnival (we promised him we wouldn't call it a retrospective) of Marker's work ever presented in Los Angeles, and features many local premieres.

Our enormous thanks to James Quandt at the Cinematheque Ontario for his assistance in organizing this program. The Cinematheque Ontario presented major Marker series in 1993 and 1997.

SERIES COMPILED BY DENNIS BARTOK. PROGRAM RESEARCH BY GWEN DEGLISE.

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FRIDAY/SEPTEMBER 26

26A

7:15 PM

FRIDAY/SEPTEMBER 26

26B

9:45 PM

L.A. PREMIERE! LEVEL FIVE

1996, Argos Films, 111 min. With Catherine Belkhdja. A classic Marker labyrinth, LEVEL FIVE is a high-tech computer mystery, a historical board game and a noir-ish romance, all rolled into one (or better, happening simultaneously on different levels.) Laura, a computer programmer (her name is borrowed from the Otto Preminger film), inherits the job of finishing a computer game that recreates the Battle of Okinawa in WWII — a terrifying blood-bath that left over 250,000 casualties, and one that history has neatly forgotten. Tracking down witnesses to the battle over the Internet (including Japanese director Nagisa Oshima), Laura finds herself drawn deeper and deeper into the infinite maze of time past, present and future.