TATE FILM

MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE: RECONSIDERED
Friday 11 – Sunday 13 April 2014

Dziga Vertov: A Sixth Part of the World
1924. Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum
INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the ambitious exhibition Magiciens de la Terre opened in Paris, presenting the work of over one hundred artists, half of whom were described as non-Western. In a daring bid to open up the art world centred in West Europe and North America, Magiciens de la Terre argued for the universality of the creative impulse and endeavoured to offer direct and equal aesthetic experience of contemporary works of art made globally. In the 25th anniversary year of what proved to be a hugely controversial show, this long weekend of screenings and talks revisits and expands on the exhibition’s remarkable film programme.

The selection of films to be screened offers reflection on the cinematic history of colonialism and postcolonialism, on ethnographic film and its legacy and on the discourses of globalisation just emerging at the time. The diverse programme includes works by David Byrne, Maya Deren, Len Lye, Chris Marker, Claes Oldenburg, Alain Resnais, Jean Rouch and Dziga Vertov, together with significant contributions by filmmakers who are less well-known in the UK, such as Al Clah, Geraldo Sarno and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra. The films will be contextualised through discussion with original contributors to Magiciens and independent respondents.

Curated by Lucy Steeds, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London and George Clark, Assistant Curator: Film, Tate Modern.

Magiciens de la Terre: Reconsidered is a partnership between Afterall Books and Tate Film, to mark the recent publication of Making Art Global (Part 2): ‘Magiciens de la Terre’ 1989, 2013, and in conjunction with the MRes Art: Exhibition Studies course at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London.
Magiciens de la Terre took place in Paris in 1989 and was promoted as ‘the first worldwide exhibition of contemporary art’. While that claim must be examined and contextualised, the show undoubtedly challenged the Western art system radically from within and prompted heated critical debate. The film programme that accompanied the exhibition, curated by Jean-Michel Bouhours and Gisèle Breteau, presented in the cinema of the Centre Georges Pompidou, has been less discussed to date, yet is no less interesting. Revisiting some of the films it brought together, at Tate Modern today, we may assess the legacy of colonialism and signs of globalisation as conveyed by the moving image.

This opening session will introduce the 1989 exhibition and its film programme with illustrated talks and discussions. Lucy Steeds will expand on her core contribution to the recent book Making Art Global (Part 2): ‘Magiciens de la Terre’ 1989 (London: Afterall Books, 2013) and Jean-Michel Bouhours, Curator of Modern Art at the Centre Georges Pompidou and formerly of the cinema department will discuss the exhibition, curated by Jean-Michel Bouhours and Gisèle Breteau, presented in the cinema of the Centre Georges Pompidou, has been less discussed to date, yet is no less interesting. Revisiting some of the films it brought together, at Tate Modern today, we may assess the legacy of colonialism and signs of globalisation as conveyed by the moving image.

In the ensuing panel discussion, these speakers will be joined by Mark Francis, co-curator of Magiciens de la Terre, and Elvira Dyangani Ose, Curator of Modern Art, Tate Modern, who will chair.

**Magiciens Reconsidered 1: From Exhibition to Screen**
Friday 11 April, 19.00–22.00

**Les Statues meurent aussi / Statues Also Die**
Chris Marker & Alain Resnais, France 1952–53, 16mm transferred to video, black & white, 30 min

Commissioned by the Parisian journal Présence Africaine, this film offers reflections on the significance of African objects as gathered in ethnographic museums in Europe and as originally produced. Chris Marker’s memorable script opens with the words, ‘When men die, they enter into history. When statues die, they enter into art…’

**Magiciens Reconsidered 2: Hybridity in the 1920s**
Saturday 12 April, 15.00–17.00

The earliest films included in the programme for Magiciens de la Terre were made in the 1920s. The two presented here offer disparate yet equally remarkable reflections on cultural diversity and cohesion, shifting from Len Lye’s abstract animation, Tusalava, to Dziga Vertov’s A Sixth Part of the World, an epic exploration of the vastness and variety of the Soviet Union.

**Tusalava**
Len Lye, UK 1929, 16mm, black & white, 9 min

Tusalava is a Samoan word suggesting that ‘in the end everything is just the same’. In order to make this animated film, Len Lye produced more than 9,500 drawings between 1926–8. He has described having ‘imagined I was myself an Australian witchetty grub who was making this animated ritual dance film.’

It subsequently turned out that all the images I drew are images which have been subsequently found with an electronic microscope. In actual life my witchetty grub was the spiriting image of an antibody [without my] even seeing them, because electronic microscopes weren’t around then I don’t think. Whether or not they were around doesn’t matter because I hadn’t seen them. As a matter of fact I only work with the feeling of something magical, something seemingly significant. And to keep it magical I don’t want to know the story involved, I just want the hypnotic effect of it somehow seeming significant without knowing why.

– Len Lye, originally published in Art New Zealand, 17, Spring 1980

**A Sixth Part of the World**
Dziga Vertov, USSR 1926, 35mm, black & white, 73 min.

Music by Michael Nyman, 2010

If I had to choose the ten best documentaries of all time I’d call it preposterous but if there’s one to choose: A Sixth Part of the World.

– Chris Marker

Vertov employed eight teams of documentary filmmakers – known as Kinoks, or ‘cinema-eyes’ – in order to produce a reflection on the full cultural and economic diversity across the vast expanse of the USSR. He has written of this work: ‘Whether it is a newsreel, a comedy, an artistic hit-film, A Sixth Part of the World is somewhere beyond the boundaries of these definitions; it is already the next stage after the concept of “cinema” itself… Our slogan is: all citizens of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics from 10 to 100 years old must see this work. By the tenth anniversary of October there must not be a single Tungus who has not seen A Sixth Part of the World.’

Programme duration: 82 minutes
One of the many themes grouping films screened at the Pompidou during Magiciens de la Terre was ‘Cults of Possession’. The two films rescreened under this same title today reflect on ritual practices and forms of spirituality in South America, while allowing us to consider the rituals of cinema and the desire to possess as well as to become possessed. In the original ‘Cults of Possession’ programme at the Pompidou, David Byrne’s documentary Ilé Aiyé 1989, was also screened, exploring the musical culture of Candomblé and including footage originally shot by Geraldo Sarno for his film Ião.

MOONBLOOD: A YANOMAMO CREATION MYTH AS TOLD BY DEDÉHEIWA
Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon, USA/Brazil 1976, 16mm transferred to video, 14 min

In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, filmmaker Timothy Asch and anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon collaborated on a documentary project focused on Yanomamo Indians, a group of indigenous people who live in the Amazon rainforest on the border between Venezuela and Brazil. In this film the shaman Dedeheiwa retells a Yanomamo creation myth that accounts for the origin of human beings and for their ferocity.

Images (clockwise from top left):
Chris Marker and Alain Resnais Les statues meurent aussi/Statues Also Die 1924
Courtesy of Communauté Africaine de Culture
© Revue Présence Africaine
Len Lye Tusalava 1929
Courtesy of LUX
Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon Moonblood: A Yanomamo Creation Myth As Told By Dedéheiwa 1976, video still
Courtesy of DER Documentary Educational Resources
Courtesy of the artist and Centro Tecnico Audiovisual, Rio de Janeiro
Dziga Vertov A Sixth Part of the World 1924, film poster
Courtesy of the Austrian Film Museum

Long ago, when people ‘like us’ lived in a village ‘over there’, Moon lived there too, and ate the souls of children. The villagers became very angry, especially because when Moon descended to consume the ashes of children, hanging from the roof in gourds, he crunched and chanted as he gloated over his evil tricks. So the ancestor Suhirina, who was very beautiful and tall, shot the moon with a bamboo-tipped arrow, and Moon’s blood spilled all over the earth. Human beings came from this blood: strong and fierce people from the center where the most blood spilled, and weaker people from the Moon’s droplets. My own village is weak, as we are descended from the droplets. It is because of Moon’s blood, that men fight and kill each other.
– Dedeheiwa talking to Napoleon Chagon in Moonblood, DER programme notes

IÃO / IAWO: INITIATION IN A GEGE-NAGO TEMPLE
Geraldo Sarno, Brazil 1976, 16mm, 70 min

This rare film by Brazilian documentary filmmaker Geraldo Sarno examines the initiation rites for entry into a Gege-Nago Temple of the Candomblé house of worship in Bahia, Brazil. The film traces the transformation of three young women into iãois, or brides of the spirit Orisha. In exploring the Yoruba cult of Orisha brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans, the film offers a reflection on the religion and culture, as well as its ideology and social meanings. It was inspired by the influential 1972 text The Nago and Death by anthropologist Juana Elbein dos Santos. Together with her husband, artist Mestre Didi (who participated in the Magiciens de la Terre exhibition), Juana Elbein dos Santos pioneered the study of African-Brazilian art and culture and the origins of Candomblé.

Programme duration: 84 minutes
ARTISTS ON MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE

The reflections by the four artists below give a mixed impression of what it meant to participate in Magiciens de la Terre. Previously unpublished, they represent an element of the contextual research that went into the book Making Art Global (Part 2); Magiciens de la Terre’ 1989 (London: Afterall Books, 2013).

Esther Mahlangu

I think the title of the exhibition was very fitting as it gave credit to all the artists each as a master or magician of his or her craft… At first it was a bit overwhelming to see my house standing there, all in white, inside this huge museum [the Grand Halle at La Villette], but then I just started doing what I know best and what my mother and grandmother taught me to do. I started painting… My house was my canvas and they [the curatorial team] wanted me to show the people coming to the exhibition, who could not come to South Africa, what Ndebele house painting looks like… To see all the different works from all the artists was very inspiring to me. As this was my first experience with this kind of formal setting for my work it made me feel very special. I am not an academic, as I never went to school and therefore it is not for me to feel very special. I am not an academic, as I never went to school and therefore it is not for me to give judgment about the exhibition and how it was done. I thought it was very beautiful and well presented… It was a difficult time, when not many artists from South Africa had the opportunity to travel. The exhibition opened up many doors for me as an artist.

(28 February 2009)

Hans Haacke

I have always been critical of the exhibition title. I associate magicians with imagined supernatural powers, wizardry, witchcraft, the occult, and also with trickery… I believe it misrepresents the work of the majority of the artists in the exhibition. It promotes a notion of the exotic...

The ‘magic’ title undermines the significant difference between this and various colonial exhibitions of the past and also the more recent Primitivism show at MoMA [New York] in 1984. In Magiciens an equal number of artists from the so-called Third-World were presented on an equal footing next to artists from Europe and North America… As for the works from non-Western artists, I regretted that I had little to go by for understanding their meaning and the circumstances under which they had been produced. I don’t think the organisers of the exhibition could have provided sufficient background information without falling into the many traps associated with such enterprises. In fact, it is an impossible task, but not a reason to avoid mounting such a provocative exhibition.

(August 2008)

Cildo Meireles

The exhibition was about mix – the mixture that makes up global iconography. One positive aspect was its opening up discussion about hegemony – centre over periphery – in art production. The subject is still polemical; it prompts opinions and differences in opinion that are still discussed today… Magiciens was one of the first shows that attempted to operate on a planetary scale, to reach for planetary terms by setting production from around the world on a same platform, with religious art alongside conceptual art. It was a fundamental show, in this sense, locating local artistic production within a global context… An abiding memory of the exhibition for me is the special opening arranged by the artists: a meal shared before the official opening, to which many of us brought food and drink from our country of origin. This informal event was very appealing as a party celebrating all different ethnicities and cultures. It brought out one of the strong points of Magiciens de la Terre: the opportunity for exchange.

(19 June 2008)

© the artists
Celebrated immigrants to the US, artist Claes Oldenburg and musician David Byrne, offer playful if somewhat biting reflections on the culture of the nation that became their home in childhood.

**INJUN**
Claes Oldenburg, USA 1962 (edited 1971), 16mm transferred to video, black & white, 10 min
Filmed by Roy Fridge
Performers: Russell Adams, Ronnie Cole, Jim Daugirda, Howard Doolittle, Nancy Ellison, Janie Grisham, Martha Hamm, Carolyn Higginbotham, Joseph Hobbs, Sue Jacobson, Joan Key, Paul Koepp, Arthur McKnight, Gart McVean, Patty Mucha, Claes Oldenburg, Harold Pauley, Flore Reeder, Dennis Taylor, Peggy Wilson, Scott Wilson, Jim Woodson, Edward Zelenak

This film records a performance led by Claes Oldenburg, one of the artists included in both the Magiciens de la Terre exhibition and film programme. Staged in a disused house on the grounds of the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts in 1962, *Injun* involves Oldenburg in the title role and documents a series of actions: Injun (Oldenburg) staggers about, while a young man dressed as a Navajo (Byrne) guides us through the nation that became their home in childhood. **TRUE STORIES**
David Byrne, USA 1987, 35mm, 89 min
Co-written with Stephen Toblowsky and Beth Henley

David Byrne is the protagonist/narrator, as well as director, of this film set in the mythical US town of Virgil, Texas. Byrne guides us through this fictional community introducing characters and scenarios inspired by articles in supermarket tabloids. This multipart project encompassed the film together with an album and book of photography (with new work by William Eggleston, Len Jenshel and others) and drew on a diverse team of Byrne's collaborators from performance artists and choreographers to musicians and local non-actors. The soundtrack was produced by Byrne's band, Talking Heads, together with the film's cast. This work was made between the influential concert film *Stop Making Sense* 1984 and Byrne's documentary concerning Candомнлё, the African-influenced spirit cult of the Bahia region of Brazil, *Ilé Aiyé* 1989. As noted above, the latter film was also screened as part of the cinema programme for *Magiciens de la Terre*.

Programme duration: 99 minutes

The influence of visual anthropology on cinema and the visual arts is explored in this screening and discussion. The two influential films present different approaches and methodologies that propose complex models for the relationship of filmmaker to their subject. We move from the work produced posthumously out of Maya Deren's influence and the history of ethnographic film.

This screening will be accompanied by an illustrated talk on the two works by curator Anselm Franke, Head of Visual Arts and Film Department, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

**DIVINE HORSEMEN: THE LIVING GODS OF HAITI**
Maya Deren (and Teji Ito), USA 1985, 16mm, black & white, 54 min

Drawing on footage Deren recorded during research trips to Haiti between 1947 and 1954, *Divine Horsemen* is a documentary about dance and Vodou possession, with a focus on the rituals of Rada and Petro services. Conceived as a 'film-poem', the work was completed twenty years after Deren's death, by her third husband, Teji Ito.

Programme duration: 99 minutes

**INTREPID SHADOWS**
Al Clah, USA 1966–69, 16mm, black & white, silent, 15 min

In 1966 Sol Worth and John Adair conducted an experiment involving residents of the Navajo Nation in Pine Springs, Arizona, with the aim of determining 'whether it is possible to teach people with a technically simple culture to make motion pictures depicting their culture and themselves as they see fit'. Participants received a salary and were instructed in the use of Bell and Howell Filmo 16mm cameras and in basic editing techniques. The series of seven short documentaries that emerged were originally distributed through Columbia University and later through MoMA New York, at which point *Intrepid Shadows* became known on the art film circuit, leading Margaret Mead to celebrate the work as 'one of the finest examples of animism shown on film'. Unlike the other films in the series, *Intrepid Shadows* deals with subjective aspects of Navajo life, attempting to reconcile the traditional Western notion of God with a traditional Navajo notion of Gods.

Programme duration: 69 minutes
These two ‘ethno-fictions’ reflect on the critical legacy of ethnographic cinema and the relationship between France and Africa. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra’s ground-breaking film *Afrique sur Seine* shows Paris in the 1950s from the perspective of a group of African immigrants, whereas *Cocorico Monsieur Poulet*, made by the international collaborative team of Jean Rouch, Damouré Zika and Lam Dia, depicts an absurd journey across Niger. *Afrique Sur Seine* was not included in the original *Magiciens de la Terre* cinema programme, but is included here for its historical importance and to view in contrast to *Cocorico Mounsieur Poulet*.

**AFRIQUE SUR SEINE**  
Directed by Mamadou Sarr & Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, France 1955, 35mm film transferred to video, 22 min

*Afrique sur Seine*’s narrations of French society beg questions of how colonial ethnographers and filmmakers had observed Africa, proposing a reversal of the perspective or indeed a ‘decolonisation’ of the gaze. While Africans were banned from making films in the French colonies prior to independence, Mamadou Sarr and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra were granted permission to shoot *Afrique sur Seine* in Paris. Both were members of the African Cinema Group, producing films in the colonial era as a gesture of resistance. Paulin Soumanou Vieyra was the first black African student at IHDEC [the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies]. His 1955 documentary short, *Afrique sur Seine*, portrayed young Africans in Paris, much along the lines of what Jean Rouch later tried to convey through the character of Landry in his 1960 feature-length documentary, *Chronique d’un été*.


**COCORICO! MONSIEUR POULET**  
Directed by Dalarou (Damouré Zika, Lam Dia, Jean Rouch), France/Niger 1974, 35mm film transferred to video, 90 min

*Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* follows three poultry sellers on a trip across the Niger bush, attempting to deliver a load of chickens to a market in Niamey. The film – credited to Dalarou, a name adopted by the collaborative team of Jean Rouch, Damouré Zika and Lam Ibrahim Dia – is based on Dia’s own experience as a poultry seller, and narrates everyday lives. With its whimsical, absurdist plot, the film is a surreal and magical road movie – and a prime example of the collaborative fictions Rouch made with his West African partners.

We wanted to show how a chicken dealer (Lam’s actual profession at the time) lives. The whole film unfolded in a bizarre way because we were overwhelmed by incidents in the improvisation. Lam’s car had no brakes, no headlights, and no registration. It was really a patience-mobile that forced us to stop when we least expected. The introduction of the character of the devil of the bush came up in Lam’s reflections when we broke down. There were no special effects; the dismantling of the car was effectively carried out in one day. The first river crossing, underwater, was Lam’s idea; the second, in the tarp, was mine; and the third, where we used the air tanks as floaters, was Damouré’s idea.


Programme duration: 112 minutes
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES


Mark Francis co-curated two exhibitions in Paris in 1989, Magiciens de la Terre, and Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps, which travelled also to London and Boston. He is currently a director at Gagosian Gallery in London, where he recently organised The Show is Over.

Magiciennes de la Terre, Reconsidered
11–13 April 2014
Curated by Lucy Steeds and George Clark
With thanks to:

Elvira Dyangani Ose, Curator (International Art) Supported by Guaranty Trust Bank Plc at Tate Modern. Elvira joined Tate in 2011, taking a leading role in developing Tate’s holdings of art from Africa and working closely with the Africa Acquisitions Committee. She is co-responsible for formulating Tate’s strategy in this region. She is also responsible for Across the Board, a two-year project supported by Guaranty Trust Bank Plc. Elvira has curated various interdisciplinary projects involving African artists and artist collectives, prior to joining Tate, where she has recently co-curated Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist at Tate Modern, 3 July – 22 September 2013.


SCREENING SCHEDULE

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 1:
FROM EXHIBITION TO SCREEN
Friday 11 April, 19.00–22.00

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 2:
HYBRIDITY IN THE 1920S
Saturday 12 April, 15.00–17.00

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 3:
CULTS OF POSSESSION
Saturday 12 April, 17.30–19.30

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 4:
The US Films Itself
Saturday 12 April, 20.00–22.00

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 5:
Artists at Work, Filming Magicians
Sunday 13 April, 14.00–16.00

MAGICIENS RECONSIDERED 6:
Ethno-Fictions
Sunday 13 April, 17.00–19.00

Anselm Franke is the Head of Visual Art and Film at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. In 2012, he curated the Taipei Biennial, Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction. His ongoing exhibition Animism has been presented in Antwerp, Bern, Vienna, Berlin, New York, Shenzhen, Seoul and Beirut in various collaborations since 2010. At the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, he co-curated The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside (with Diedrich Diederichsen), and After Year Zero. Geographies of Collaboration both 2013.