

Agnès Varda's Paris, from here to there

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PRESS
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Agnès Varda, *Self-portrait in her studio on the rue Daguerre*
Paris 14th arrondissement, 1956
© Agnès Varda Estate

The exhibition *Agnès Varda's Paris, from here to there* explores the work of Agnès Varda (1928-2019) from a fresh angle. It showcases the artist's still little-known photographic work and highlights the important role of her courtyard-studio on the rue Daguerre in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, in her life and creation, from 1951 to 2019. On a broader level, the exhibition reveals the importance of the French capital in a free and prolific body of work that never took the easy way out but skilfully wove a dialogue between documentary and fiction.

The result of more than two years of research, this exhibition is based primarily on Agnès Varda's photographic collection and Ciné-Tamaris archives. It compares her photographic and cinematic work through an ensemble of 130 prints, many of which have never been seen before, as well as excerpts from films shot entirely or partly in Paris. It also presents publications, documents, objects belonging to the artist, posters, photographs from various film shoots, and even a sculpture of her cat Nini.

After shedding light on Agnès Varda's fledgling steps as a photographer, the exhibition immerses visitors in her courtyard-studio, at a time when it was both a photography studio, a development and printing laboratory, and the site of her first solo exhibition in 1954.

The same courtyard is then revisited from the 1960s. By then, Agnès Varda was sharing it with filmmaker Jacques Demy, and it was frequented by well-known names from the cinema, after also having attracted figures from the world of theatre.

In the next section, the exhibition presents an ensemble of photographs that highlight the offbeat, humorous, and eccentric gaze through which the artist observed the people and streets of the capital. Although Agnès Varda responded to numerous commissions, notably for portraits but also for reports, she treated each project in her own unique and original fashion.

The filmmaker's view of Paris is evoked in a chronological thematic sequence, showing films shot entirely in Paris, beginning with *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962). In it, the city is filmed in such a way that it resonates with the female protagonist's emotions. This part of the exhibition also evokes two other films where Paris is used to express or reflect the sentiments of the characters on screen: an excerpt from the short film *The Lovers of MacDonald Bridge* (1962) and photographs from the set of the documentary film *Far from Vietnam* (1967). Through a selection of excerpts from her various feature and short films, some unreleased or unfinished, the exhibition questions the way in which Agnès Varda's camera explores the city and shows her passion for the urban details only visible to those who really take the time to look.

The exhibition examines themes dear to the artist, such as her attention to people and more specifically to women and marginalized figures, while weaving links between her work as a photographer and filmmaker. For the film *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977), which tells of the emancipation of two women on a quest for freedom and truth, Agnès Varda recreated the boutique of a Parisian photographer. To do this, she herself created a series of female portraits, twelve of which are exceptionally included in this exhibition. The public may also discover the photographic book project known as *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, illustrated songs about the Mouffetard district in Paris, which in 1958 was turned into a short film exploring the contradictory feelings experienced by the pregnant artist in one of the city's poorest districts. *Daguerréotypes* (1975) is also featured. This documentary was filmed on the rue Daguerre with Agnès Varda creating a series of portraits of her shopkeeper neighbours.

The exhibition culminates in the portraits of the artist photographed and filmed in her courtyard-studio, which later became a courtyard-garden, a place where her work reached its full potential, and where she could express her own colourful personality.

A catalogue featuring essays written by the curators and members of the scientific committee has been published by Éditions Paris Musées.

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