

VARDA BY AGNÈS

Written and directed by Agnès Varda

France 2019, 115 mins, Cert TBC

A BFI release

"I never wanted to say anything. I just wanted to look at people and share."

Agnès Varda, January 2019



UK premiere at Edinburgh International Film Festival on 22 June 2019
Opening 19 July 2019 in cinemas UK-wide including BFI Southbank, Picturehouse Central, Ciné Lumière, DocHouse, HOME Manchester, Filmhouse Edinburgh, Glasgow Film Theatre, IFI Dublin, Duke of York's Brighton, Cambridge Arts Picturehouse, Crouch End Picturehouse, Hackney Picturehouse, FACT Liverpool, Phoenix Oxford, West Norwood Picturehouse, Arthouse Crouch End, Watershed Bristol, Tyneside Cinema, Showroom Sheffield and Chapter Cardiff

14 June 2019 – In this inspirational and affecting documentary, the great visual storyteller **Agnès Varda** shares her observations on cinema, art and life. Still making films at 90 years old, she completed **Varda by Agnès** earlier this year and it premiered Out of Competition at the Berlin Film Festival in February this year. Sadly it became her final work as she passed away on 29 March, but it is also a joyous celebration of a life in film, that the BFI will take to cinemas UK-wide from **19 July 2019**.

Whether behind the camera, or in front of it as she often was, Agnès Varda always defied a conventional approach. In *Varda by Agnès*, this multi-award-winning and iconic filmmaker takes the audience on a journey through her remarkable life and career in her characteristically open and contemplative yet playful way. Recordings of public appearances and conversations with her collaborators are weaved in with film clips and gallery installation footage as we're guided through her rich and varied work and hear her reflections on her creative process and her talents as a photographer, filmmaker and installation artist.

Among those in conversation are Sandrine Bonnaire, who played Mona in Varda's heart-breaking 1985 film *Vagabond*, the filmmaker and director of photography Nurith Aviv who shot for Varda on *Daguerréotypes* (1976), *Jane B. for Agnès V.* (1987) and *Mur Murs* (1981) and Hervé Chandès, General Director of the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Paris.

Agnès Varda was actually born in Ixelles, Belgium, in 1928, but her family moved to the south of France during World War II. After studying philosophy and art in Paris she became a documentary photographer, holding her first exhibition in 1954.

Without any formal practical training or film study, she moved into filmmaking and set up Ciné Tamaris, a co-operative film production company. Her first feature, a precursor to the French New Wave, was *La Pointe Courte* (1955) set in a working-class fishing village. In 1962, *Cleo from 5 to 7*, starring Corinne Marchand as a pop singer anxiously awaiting medical results, became a New Wave classic (at one time set to be re-made by Madonna) and Varda was the only female director in the development of the radical French movement. She went on to make both fiction and documentary films, features and shorts – she has over 50 director credits listed. She moved to Hollywood with her husband, filmmaker Jacques Demy (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*), for a few years in the late 1960s, but returned to France in the early 70s. Among her best-known films are *Le Bonheur* (1964), *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1977), *Vagabond* (1985), *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), *The Gleaners and I* (2000) and *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008).

From the year 2000, as technology evolved, Varda found that working with the new small digital cameras enabled her to film people far less intrusively than with a big film crew – ideal for her empathetic documentaries like *The Gleaners and I* and last year's Oscar-nominated *Faces Places*, co-directed with Parisian street photographer and artist JR. She also became a visual artist, creating imaginative art installations such as her cinema shacks, made out of waste reels of 35mm film.

In 2015 she was presented with an honorary Palme d'Or at Cannes for her life's work and in 2017 received an Honorary Academy Award, the first female director to receive one. When *Faces Places* was nominated for an Oscar, she became the oldest nominee ever. At the Berlin Film Festival this year she received the Berlinale Camera award for lifetime achievement. Last summer the BFI celebrated her long career with a two-month retrospective season at BFI Southbank which she attended and took to the stage for an In Conversation event.

A long-time activist for women's equality, at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival she and 2018 jury president Cate Blanchett led the silent red carpet protest by 82 women at the lack of female directors at the festival; afterwards, a collective statement from the group called for equal pay and safer working conditions for women.

In her personal statement for *Varda by Agnès*, Varda said:

"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 colour or not in colour? Creation is a job. The third word is sharing. You don't make films to watch them alone, you makes films to show them."

Full of illuminating wisdom, moving stories and amusing anecdotes, *Varda by Agnès* is an unmissable self-portrait of a talent with an uncompromising vision, a deep curiosity and empathy for other people – 'real people' she once said – and a spirited, life-affirming outlook. Newcomers to her work will enjoy it just as much as long-time fans.

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- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
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- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

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