



FAR FROM VIETNAM

A film by Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch,
Chris Marker and Alain Resnais
An Icarus Films Release

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 1967
Official Selection, New York Film Festival 1967

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SYNOPSIS

Initiated and edited by Chris Marker, *Far from Vietnam* is an epic 1967 collaboration between cinema greats Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda in protest of American military involvement in Vietnam--made, per Marker's narration, "to affirm, by the exercise of their craft, their solidarity with the Vietnamese people in struggle against aggression."

A truly collaborative effort, the film brings together an array of stylistically disparate contributions, none individually credited, under a unified editorial vision. The elements span documentary footage shot in North and South Vietnam and at anti-war demonstrations in the United States; a fictional vignette and a monologue that dramatize the self-interrogation of European intellectuals; interviews with Fidel Castro and Anne Morrison, widow of Norman Morrison, the Quaker pacifist who burned himself alive on the steps of the White House in 1965; an historical overview of the conflict; reflections from French journalist Michèle Ray; and a range of repurposed media material.

Passionately critical and self-critical, and as bold in form as it is in rhetoric, *Far from Vietnam* is a milestone in political documentary and in the French cinema.

ABOUT THE FILM

Program Note from the Tate Modern Exhibition "William Klein: Films, 1958-99":

"On the corner of 42nd Street and 8th Avenue in New York, a guy is reciting a poem consisting of the syllables napalm. And no one knows what napalm is. It showed me how blind people become to something they hear referred to all day long. So, we decided to do something a little like Picasso confronted by the bombing of Guernica."
—William Klein

Far from Vietnam

This legendary agitprop feature was initiated and edited by Chris Marker at the height of the Vietnam War under the aegis of the French activist group SLON (Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles). Highly influential on subsequent political documentaries, it is constructed in eleven chapters (plus an introduction and epilogue), and rallies both fact and fiction to counter coverage of the Vietnam War by the mainstream media as well as propaganda by the U.S. government. [Klein's contribution is] a moving meditation on the self-immolation of American Quaker Norman Morrison in protest against the war. This searing cine-manifesto is a passionate and concerted protest against the U.S. war in Vietnam. Marking a crucial moment for political cinema and collective filmmaking, *Far from Vietnam* is also a multifaceted exploration of the global impact of war, cultural indifference and selective memory.

IN THE PRESS

"An important film, a beautiful film, a moving film.
The cinema at last has its 'Guernica.'" —Richard Roud, *The Guardian* (UK)

"A landmark in the European cinema."
—Michael Kustow, *The Times of London* (UK)

"Rich with humanity and indignation...This is a film nobody should miss.
Mirrors both the horror and the hope of our times." —*Sanity* (UK)

"This brilliant and moving picture should be compulsory Christmas viewing."
—*The Observer* (UK, 12/24/67)

"It is impossible to withhold admiration that the thing was has been done at all, that it so often affords such clear perceptions of connections not always apparent."
—*The Financial Times* (UK)

"Watch this, you become newly and horrifyingly aware of what it means to live in a country where war has, perforce, become a way of life...Chris Marker, who edited the film, has done wonders in fusing such contradictory material into a tangible whole."
—*Morning Star* (UK)

"The brilliantly instinctive editing of Chris Marker gives it the unity normally missing in this [compilation film] genre." —*What's On in London* (UK)

"A film about the war in Vietnam, but it is also about the conditions of political and nonfiction filmmaking more generally."
—Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film

"The displacement of the war into its repercussions throughout the world is reciprocated in the displacement of the illusionist documentary mode into varying degrees of abstraction, discursivity, and reflexiveness."
—David E. James, *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*

"The film represents a true collective endeavor, presented as a whole without singling out individual contributions...manifests the will to produce a film that cuts through the sensationalized media reports on Vietnam—the misinformation—while simultaneously joining the growing protest against the war."
—Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker*

“How Far From Vietnam?”

A review of *Far From Vietnam* by Richard Roud -- *Highly Recommended*
Published in *The Guardian* (UK) on December 28, 1967

Some people—perhaps those with guilty consciences?—have tried to dismiss *Far from Vietnam* (at the Paris Pullman cinema, London, from today) out of hand. Their line has been that propaganda films preach only to the converted; only to those who are already opposed to the American presence in Vietnam will go to see the film, and they—so the argument goes—don't need further convincing.

This is not quite true. There are many people who are vaguely against the war, who think vaguely that something ought to be done, who are sort of unhappy about the whole situation. It is to them that the film is really addressed, as an attempt to help them crystallize their attitudes, to make up their minds once and for all. I know, because I am one of them.

Far from Vietnam is a propaganda film; it is not, by and large, objective. Its six nominal directors (Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, William Klein, Joris Ivens, Agnes Varda, and Claude Lelouch), to whom one must add the conceptual organizer of the film Chris Marker, all feel very strongly about the war in Vietnam, and think that they, as artists, should have the right to express their feeling. Each in his own way, of course, and if only to compare Godard's way with, say, that of Resnais, the film is well worth seeing.

Resnais's is the only fictional episode—acted, dramatized, directed. Also, and typically, it is the most generous: his hero is very much like Resnais, a man with great feeling for Americans, gratitude to the liberators of 1944, an admiration for, and fascination in, American pop culture. His attitude is the one which will probably be shared by most British viewers, as will his pain at the role the Americans are playing today.

Godard's episode is the simplest, the most direct: Godard himself, half hidden behind a big camera expressing directly to the *real* camera his feeling about the war in a sequence that is as moving as Resnais's by its very simplicity and directness.

When the film was shown at the New York film festival, it was violently acclaimed by the audience and bitterly attacked by the press. What right, said the critics, did the French, of all people, to criticize us? And they all declared that although they were against the war, they still thought the film was Maoist, Communist (cries of “Moscow gold” were even heard). In any case, and above all, it was anti-American. But this is to criminally oversimplify for moments like the interview with Mrs. Norman Morrison (the widow of the man who burnt himself in front of the Pentagon) made one actually proud to be American.

Far from Vietnam is an important film, a beautiful film, a moving film. Rare, indeed, have been the occasions when contemporary art has successfully involved itself with politics. In this film, the cinema at last has its “Guernica.”

CREDITS

Title: *Far From Vietnam*
Copyright: 1967
Release: 2013
Running time: 115 minutes
Image: Color

Directors: Jean-Luc Godard
Joris Ivens
William Klein
Claude Lelouch,
Chris Marker
Alain Resnais

Music: Michel Fano
Philippe Capdenat
Georges Aperghis
Jacqueline Meppiel
Jean Ravel

Sound: Anthoine Bonfanti
Harald Maury

North American distributor: Icarus Films

YouTube Trailer: <http://bit.ly/1c7CYPj>

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