

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME

An Icarus Films Release Directed by Yannick Bellon & Chris Marker

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—Elvis Mitchell, The New York Times

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FILM SYNOPSIS

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME, the latest "cine-essay" of Chris Marker, is dense and demanding, a splendid reminder that his nimble, capacious mind has lost none of its agility, poetry, and power. Ostensibly a portrait of photographer Denise Bellon, focusing on the two decades between 1935 and 1955, the film leaps and backtracks, Marker-style, from subject to subject, from a family portrait of Bellon and her two daughters, Loleh and Yannick (the latter co-authored the film), to a wide-ranging history of surrealism, of the city of Paris, of French cinema and the birth of the cinémathèque, of Europe, the National Front, the Second World War and Spanish Civil War, and postwar politics and culture.

Full of Marker jokes (a great one about artists and cats), word play (Citroen/citron), filmic homages (Musidora makes a memorable appearance), peculiar art history, a consideration of the 1952 Olympics, and astounding segues from French colonialism in Africa to women in the Maghreb, to a Jewish wedding and gypsy culture in Europe, to Mein Kampf and the Nazi death camps (Birkenau, Auschwitz), the film opens with Dali and ends with Mompou, traversing in its short time a world of thought, feeling, and history.

A small masterpiece of montage, REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME is from moment to moment reminiscent of Resnais, Ivens, even Kubrick, but in its deployment of still photographs (as in *La Jetée*), its theme of history and memory, its subject-skipping montage and rapid shuttle of wit and philosophy, REMEMBRANCE is pure, marvelous Marker.

—James Quandt, Cinematheque Ontario

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

Gone to never again return

And being nothing more for myself

Than the memory of a future

That thought itself of the human race

—Claude Roy

This is not an "art film". Nor is it an exposition of titled photographs on a wall.

Our intention, basing ourselves on one photographer, Denise Bellon,'s archives,

(approximately 25,000 negatives), is to try and analyze the manner in which we perceive an already old photograph. We believe that the way we look at a photograph from forty or fifty years ago, (and this is even more apparent with a truly old photograph), is entirely different from the way the way we look at a current photograph.

An old photo has an implicit time-span. Looking at the image, time unravels, between the image and the present, between the photo and us. A cliché of the 1937 fair shows the Soviet pavilion facing the German pavilion. In 1937, a sickle and hammer facing the swastika was a snapshot. However, looked at in the year 2000, we unconsciously add to it the war of 1939-40, the German-Soviet pact, the invasion of Russia in 1941, the fall of the Berlin wall, etc. We bring to this ten or fifteen-year-old photograph a gaze that religions often lend to the Omniscient Being, a gaze that sees the past, the present, and the future. Put simply, the gaze of God.

Looking at the tens of thousands of shots in the archives of Denise Bellon, a certain number of themes became evident. A construction was organized, of which we are only able to (and only want to) give some samples of here, in order to suggest the tonality and emotional mood of the film.

The first part of the film shows the smiling and peaceful images of Paris in the thirties.

Yet little by little, the eyes of the young photographer are opened, by what she has seen in her travels and through her work, and under the influence of a group of friends, the surrealists. The surrealists not only limited themselves to announcing the disasters to come, but went one step further, exposing the causes, destroying the roots.

The vision of the artist, more and more true-to-life, becomes gradually crueler and more penetrating. Denise Bellon learned that reflecting images like a mirror was not sufficient; it was also necessary to reflect upon them. Reality always has multiple sides to it, an outer facade and an inner reality. Paris was beautiful luxurious cars and pretty women dressed by the best couturiers, but Paris was also the ghetto and the slums. It was the model day nurseries but also "The Broken Mouths" (disfigured veterans of World War I), living and frightening remains of the war. It was the triumphant fair of 1937, but also prostitution, poverty, and misery.

The secret of the art of photography is when photography itself is able to read the future, in the images that it produces of the present.

The following sequence organizes the material from Denise Bellon's large trips before the war to Maghreb, Africa, Finland, and the Baltic Islands.

Traveling through Africa, Denise Bellon gives us a glimpse of the actual future, of the revolts that will occur. Through insurrections and colonial wars, the colonies will destabilize the domination of their rulers.

Later in Finland, Bellon hears the noises of riding boots, and the thunder of bombardments rising up from the horizon.

In effect, it is war that awaits the photographer upon her return to Europe. Or rather, an "un-war".

Who would have thought that, for a big nation, having a war consisted of demanding everyone to turn themselves into a ragman, gathering old scrap iron, old papers, old rags, in order to proclaim: "With this scrap iron, we will form victorious steel"?

This French campaign of scraps, this mobilization of bric-a-brac, could this bring a victory?

Despite the elegant uniforms of these brilliant soldiers of propaganda, despite the American volunteers of the American Feld Service, the rampart of scrap iron and old rags did not contain the German army.

The Ferrand Marshall of our villages became, under Pétain, once again an important character of daily life. Without gas, people contented themselves with horses and gasogenes.

A water town became the laughable capital of half of France.

Food went into shortage; ration cards appeared.

The lesser jobs once again flourished in the misfortune, as people mended, fixed up, patched up, glued back together. People managed as much as they could, as much as was possible. But not much was possible.

The precious treasures were hidden, be they the films that Henri Langlois piled up in his ground-floor box, (a makeshift movie-theatre), or a bit of sheep fleece to be later made into the treasure of a string of wool.

As we approach the present, the gap between the immediacy of the photographic image and its future diminishes. If we continued all the way to the moment of filming, this gap would almost entirely disappear.

Paris is finally freed from cold, hunger, and shortage. There are once again lines in the street, and the schools are filled with rickety children. And yet the shores are not freed from mines, nor are the ports from sunken shipwrecks, or the rivers from the half-destroyed bridges that must be cleared. The cities and villages have not been freed from the ruins of the war.

Nevertheless, life resumes. Old friends find each other after years of combat, captivity, deportation, and exile. The young photographer finds once again André Breton and Jacques Prévert, Brauner, Yves, Tanguy and Toyen. She

finds Henri Langlois, who can take his reels out of hiding. She also finds André Masson who, after exile in America, again begins his work in France. Having formed a friendship with Joseph Delteil, she meets new faces from theatre and cinema, from Jean-Louis Barrault to Gérard Philipe, from Serge Reggiani to Roger Blin. She has met André Gide, Picasso, and Pagnol.

But above all she has explored without fail ordinary people, the common actors of common life...Peasants from the Drôme...Passer-bys from the streets of Paris...A stone-cutter from Montpellier...Sailors from Marseille and fishermen from Sète...Housewives and schoolteachers...She has listened to the female fishermen of Oléron, and the workers of the community factory of Valence, to the miners of the Aude, and to the peasants, the Herald, and the mountainmen of the Pyrénées.

Denise Bellon has seen in her life as a woman and as a photographer many countries and many landscapes; magnificent landscapes of beautiful countries. She has seen them and photographed them in all kinds of colors and ways. But when she leafs through her photos, the wealth of images from her life, she asks herself: Is the most beautiful and varied landscape of the earth not the human face?

Yannick Bellon Chris Marker

IN THE PRESS

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-Elvis Mitchell, The New York Times

"The mode is discursive, descriptive, quick-witted, dense. The tone is at once tender and stoic. A certain tough-guy nostalgia is somehow enhanced by the fact that Marker's narrator is a woman (Alexandra Stewart) with a calm, lucid voice. As if emboldened by an air of feminine/feline amusement, intimate asides telescope into riffs of wide-ranging speculation."

-Michael Almereyda, Film Comment

"A dizzying, quicksilver imbrication of histories: artistic, political, domestic, cinematic, and (this being Marker) Olympic."

—James Quandt's Best Films of 2003, Artforum

"Less discursive and more prescribed - albeit by an extraordinary single archive of pictures - than many of Marker's efforts, REMEMBRANCE is foremost a tribute to a proud career."—Jessica Winter, The Village Voice

"Mr. Marker is an unusually perceptive critic with a razor-sharp, aphoristic turn of mind. [He] proceeds through hundreds of Dellon photographs...teasing out associations, making connections, reading prophecy in reportage. Though it's ultimately addressing the tragedy the 20th Century, this slender little film is a joy."—Nathan Lee, The New York Sun

"An ingenious use of still photographs. Marker and Bellon not only prompt us to re-imagine the past, but to rethink what the past means, and grasp that our futures are always with us, in embryo."—LA Weekly

"A dazzline montage of images." —Los Angeles Times

FILM CREDITS

Title: "Remembrance of Things to Come"

French title: "Le Souvenir d'un Avenir"

Photographs: Denise Bellon

Film: Yannick Bellon & Chris Marker

Voice: Alexandra Stewart

Soundthread: Michel Krasna

Music: Federico Mompou

Still Photography: Daniel Marchetti

Post Production: Jean-François Naudon

Mixer: Florent Lavallée

Laboratory: Centrimage

Auditorium: Aura films – Digison

Line Producer: Eric Le Roy

Produced by les Films de l'équinoxe and ARTE France

Program Unity: Thierry Garrel

With the support of: PROCIREP

Centre National de la Cinématogrphie

And the Ministry of Culture

With Pierre Arditi

Country of Production: France

Year of Production: 2001

Running time: 42 minutes

Black & White

Aspect ratio: 1.60:1

An Icarus Films Release



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