LUMA
WESTBAU

Press Release
Zurich, 3 May 2024

Hans-Ulrich Obrist Archive
Agnès Varda

'A day without seeing a tree
is a waste of a day'.

7 June – 8 September 2024
schwarzescafé | Luma Westbau, Zurich

Press Preview:
Friday 7 June 2024, 11.40am – 12.20pm



Agnès Varda: *'A day without seeing a tree is a waste of a day'.*

Following the inaugural presentation on Édouard Glissant from the Archive of Hans Ulrich Obrist last year, Luma Westbau is pleased to announce its upcoming exhibition dedicated to the late **Agnès Varda** (1928 - 2019). Renowned as a filmmaker, feminist, and pioneering artist, Varda was a central figure in the French New Wave film movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The exhibition highlights Obrist's crucial role in introducing Varda to the art world. In her own words, Varda's artistic trajectory spans three distinct but interconnected lives as a photographer, filmmaker, and visual artist. In 1991, he travelled to Paris for a residency at Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Jouy-en-Josas, invited by Jean de Loisy and Marie-Claude Beaud. Over a three-month stay, Obrist visited over 300 artist studios, averaging five per day, where he met Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, who spoke at length about Agnès Varda and the scope of her work between fiction and documentary. From that moment on, he nurtured the dream of meeting her.

In 2002, thanks to Christian Boltanski and Annette Messager, Obrist finally had the opportunity to meet and film Varda at her magical house at 86 rue Daguerre, Paris. After this interview, Molly Nesbit, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, invited Agnès Varda to participate in *Utopia Station*, a section of the 50th Venice Biennale directed by Francesco Bonami in 2003. Varda's proposal marked her debut as 'an old filmmaker, but a young artist' with the installation of her video triptych *Patatutopia*, which celebrates the sprouts and roots of heart-shaped potatoes. As she said: 'I celebrate the resistance of this vegetable. I have the utopia of thinking that one can see the beauty of the world in a sprouted potato.'

After half a century of cinema, *Utopia Station* opened the door for Agnès Varda to explore new possibilities for engaging with multiscreen displays of moving images, multisensory experiences, and tactile elements. She continually experimented with exhibitions throughout the last 15 years of her life, as is evident in some of the unique works loaned by Rosalie Varda, Mathieu Demy, and Ciné-Tamaris. The starting point of her first major solo exhibition, *L'Île et Elle* [The Island and Her], at Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in 2006, was the island of Noirmoutier that she discovered thanks to Jacques Demy.

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The friendship between Varda and Obrist grew through numerous interviews and projects, with Obrist attending nearly all her exhibitions and Varda participating in the Serpentine conversation marathons in London. Obrist regularly visited her on rue Daguerre in Paris, sometimes with Maja Hoffmann, with whom Varda shared a deep affinity for Arles, photography, cinema, and contemporary art.

During their last meeting on March 3, 2019, Varda invited artist friends and close ones to participate in the making of her last work, *Les Mains complices* [Partnering Hands], featuring intertwined hands of couples surrounded by heart-shaped potatoes, a celebration of love.
Her spirit continues to inspire artists who crossed her path, as well as those who share her thirst for freedom, adventure, curiosity, and audacity.

Her thoughts, forever, exalt the beauty of life's simple things: 'A day without seeing a tree is a waste of a day.'

Curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Senior Advisor, Luma Arles) and Arthur Fouray (Archivist and Curator, Luma Arles).

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Hans-Ulrich Obrist Archive
The archive of Hans-Ulrich Obrist (b. 21 May 1968 in Zurich, Switzerland) documents his curatorial and conversational practice. Since the late 1980s, the Swiss-born curator has been developing a multifaceted practice that is shaped, first and foremost, through interactions. His archive is about listening, since it contains a multitude of encounters with some of the most influential figures of our times.

In 1986, Obrist visited the studio of Peter Fischli & David Weiss in Zurich, on the eve of the production of their film *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*, 1987), featuring a series of chain reactions involving ordinary objects set in motion where one thing leads to another. From this meeting onwards, he began visiting artists' studios, travelling by night train, each encounter leading to another, each artist sending him to others. This is how in 1987 he visited the studio of Alighiero Boetti in Rome, a momentous meeting during which the artist gave him certain tasks. The most famous of these was to ask artists about their unrealised projects, which he now does in every interview.

What Obrist calls his Interview Project began in earnest in the early 1990s, when Jonas Mekas encouraged the young curator to film his conversations with artists. His first filmed interviews with artists such as Vito Acconci and Félix González-Torres date from 1991 and were shot in a TV studio as part of the Viennese project museum in progress. Afterwards, the oral historian Studs Terkel advised him to make improvised videos without using fancy equipment that could stop the flow. Etel Adnan told him later on that the 20th century was about manifestos, and that the 21st century should be more about listening. To date, the Interview Archive contains around 4,000 recorded conversations, not only with artists but also with architects, musicians, writers, filmmakers, philosophers, scientists. The wider archive consists of many other layers, such as publications, photographs, handwritten and electronic correspondence, notes, sketches, drawings, and projects.

This agglomeration of media and documents, which has been gradually growing since the late 1980s, first piled up in Obrist's student apartment in St. Gallen, where he had organised in 1991 his first exhibition, *Küchenausstellung* (*The Kitchen Show*). The archive then went on the move. In 1997, the artist Joseph Grigely began the *Nodes + Networks* project with the archive of Obrist's publication projects, which continues today under the umbrella of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). At the same time, the entire archive from St. Gallen was housed in the attic of the University of Lüneburg (Germany). This gave rise to the *Interarchive* project, which was the first time the archive was made public. In 2006, Obrist rented an apartment in Berlin to relocate the archive, which remained private until it was hosted by Luma in Arles.

Together with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Maja Hoffmann proposed a format that reveals different aspects of the archive over time, such as a project or an encounter. At the core of these series of presentations are the documents from the Interview Archive, which, more than an accumulation of interviews, constitute an infinite conversation connecting people, cultures, languages, and

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disciplines. The presentation format is based on a series of viewing stations consisting of monitors and SANAA-designed 'Rabbit Ear' chairs, reproducing the scenography conceived by the architect Kazuyo Sejima for the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale that the Luma Foundation supported in 2010. This intimate layout was originally created for *Now Interviews* by Obrist and featured a series of live public interviews filmed and broadcast in situ upon the invitation of Sejima to realise a portrait of the Biennale. At the heart of each episode of this long-term project is the idea of learning to listen and listening to learn.

About Agnès Varda
Arlette Varda, named in honour of the city of Arles, where she was conceived, was born on May 30, 1928, in Ixelles, Brussels. With a Greek father and a French mother, this cultural blend profoundly influenced her personal and creative life. At 18, she swapped her given name, Arlette, for Agnès. In 1940, war compelled her family to flee Belgium and take refuge in Sète, where she spent her adolescence aboard a boat anchored in the port. Starting in 1951, she made her home on rue Daguerre in Paris's 14th arrondissement. A few years later, she met the actor Antoine Bourseiller, with whom she had a relationship. On May 28, 1958, she gave birth to their daughter, Rosalie Varda and decides to raise Rosalie on her own. Later, she married filmmaker Jacques Demy (who died in 1990), raising with him Rosalie Varda-Demy and their son, future actor and director Mathieu Demy. Agnès Varda passed away at home on March 29, 2019, at the age of 90, after a battle with cancer, surrounded by her family, collaborators, friends, and cats. Her passing prompted many tributes from significant figures in global cinema, including Martin Scorsese. A public homage was paid in her honour on April 2, 2019, at the Cinémathèque française, attended by her family, close friends, and numerous celebrities, including Catherine Deneuve, Sandrine Bonnaire, Dany Boon, and JR.

About Hans Ulrich Obrist
As a member of the Core Group, Hans-Ulrich Obrist (born in 1968 in Zurich, Switzerland) was involved in a collective brainstorming process on the Parc des Ateliers and the LUMA manifestation (definition) in Arles (France) from 2010 to 2018. Today, he is Senior Advisor alongside Tom Eccles (Executive Director of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, USA).
He is currently the Artistic Director of the Serpentine in London. Since his first show World Soup (The Kitchen Show) in 1991 he has curated more than 400 exhibitions. Most notable amongst these are the *Do It* series (1993–), *Take Me (I'm Yours)* in London (1995), Paris (2015) New York (2016), and Milan (2017); and the Swiss Pavilion at the 14th International Architecture Biennale in Venice (2014). Obrist has also co-curated the *Cities on The Move* series (1996–2000), *Laboratorium* (1999); the operatic group exhibition *Il Tempo del Postino* in Manchester (2007) and Basel (2009), and the *11, 12, 13, 14, 15 Rooms* series (2011–2015).
Obrist's recent shows include *IT'S URGENT* at Luma Westbau in Zurich and Luma Arles (2019-2021), and Enzo Mari at Triennale Milano (2020). *The Handwriting Project*, which protests the disappearance of handwriting in the digital age, has been taking place on Instagram since 2013 (@hansulrichobrist).

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About Luma Westbau

Situated within the Löwenbräukunst contemporary art complex in Zurich, Luma Westbau, along with schwarzescafé, serves as a prominent exhibition space for the Luma Foundation. Opening its doors in 2013, Luma Westbau has been presenting international projects, exhibitions, and events commissioned and produced by the Foundation.

The Luma Foundation was established in 2004 by Maja Hoffmann in Zurich, Switzerland, to support artistic creation in the fields of visual arts, photography, publishing, documentary films, and multimedia. Considered as a production tool for the multiple initiatives launched by Maja Hoffmann, the Luma Foundation produces, supports, and funds artistic projects that aim to deepen the understanding of issues related to the environment, human rights, education, and culture. Further information: www.westbau.com and www.luma-arles.org.

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Curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Senior Advisor, Luma Arles) and Arthur Fouray (Archivist and Curator, Luma Arles).

Dates
- **Exhibition on view**: 07.06.- 08.09.2024
- **Press preview**: Fri 7 June 2024, 11.40am – 12.20pm
- **Opening**: Fri 7 June 2024, 6-10 pm

Press Images
For downloadable press images click here.

Venue

schwarzescafé | Luma Westbau
Löwenbräukunst
Limmatstrasse 270
8005 Zurich, Switzerland
www.westbau.com

Opening Times
Tue – Sun: 11:00 – 18:00
Thu: 11:00 – 20:00
Mondays closed

Special opening times:
Fri 7 June: 11am – 10pm
Sat 8 June: 11am – 8pm
Sun 9 June: 11am – 6pm
Mon 10 June: 11am – 6pm

Free admission

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