

TO CHRIS MARKER, AN UNSENT LETTER (Emiko Omori 2012)

Filmmaker's statement

Who is, or rather, was Chris Marker? For ten years thinking about and creating this homage to him, it is hard for me to accept his recent return to the planet from whence he came, the stranger from the future that appears, observes, listens, creates, then vanishes. Fantasies about him fill the void.

We met in 1974 at a film conference. Like most film students, "La Jetee" had blown my mind. It was the only Marker film I had seen when we briefly crossed paths in that sumptuous upstate New York setting. After his screening of "The Train Rolls On" about the Russian filmmaker Alexander Medevkin, he related an anecdote about his surprise at encountering Medevkin, in Berlin I think, who he thought had not survived the Stalin purges. "La Jetee" and the brief encounter with the author of this magnificent work has stayed with me. Looking back I see that my path is littered with Marker-isms. This is most evident in my documentary/memoir "Rabbit in the Moon." We stayed in touch sporadically through faxes, then emails and occasional visits. He loved the immediacy of faxes and emails. He was not one to write letters except, of course, in his films.

I had thought about an homage for years. In 2002 I bought my first small digital video camera freeing me from the constraints of renting a camera. With this I felt I could finally do this project. That same year I met Chris for tea at his favorite cafe in Paris. As at other meetings, he ordered tea but never touched it. In fact, I don't remember ever seeing him eat. I summoned up my courage and asked his permission to make an homage. Taken somewhat aback, he said rather gruffly, "But I won't be in it." At least he didn't say no! Before I left Paris, he gave me a photo of himself looking through his camera next to his beloved cat Guillaume. That, I thought, was practically a yes. So I proceeded.

The original title was "Portrait of an Invisible Man" knowing that he would not be photographed or interviewed. I would assemble people who knew him and fans who knew him only through his films. The "portrait" would be built on the Rashomon principle - impressions and (imperfect) memories from various points of view - interpretations of their own reality while watching Marker's reality. During the editing, it became a kind of letter to him, the one I never wrote. "Portrait of an Invisible Man" became "To Chris Marker, An Unsent Letter."

I completed a version in 2003. We both had some misgivings about the project. His stern appearance disguised a shy man never wanting to be in the spotlight. I suspect he was not comfortable with being at the center of a film. The project went on the shelf until the fall of 2011. In the intervening eight years I collected images from my travels. Chris had mentioned that this was the way he worked collecting images, sounds and stories on his world travels that eventually

coalesced into a movie or a book or museum installation. Often the word "travelogue" is used to describe some of his works.

In early 2012 news arrived through friends that he was not well. This prompted me to send a package in April with a book of cat photographs by famous photographers, a DVD called "The Cats of Mirikitani" and a rough cut of the film. Around that time he went into hospital. In late July just as I finished editing, word of his death reached me. One of the last times we communicated, he said something like wait until I am on the "journey to paradise" before releasing the film. Coincidence or permission?

Ten years have passed since he wrote me "Seems we're not so lucky with technicals. Your fax is still better than a decidedly uncooperative email, yet your page is plagued with a long white strip on the left which makes at times your reading as tricky as the Rosetta stone. Yet I understood you had 'a project on me'...Perhaps you mentioned it already, and my unconscious simply erased it, for obvious reasons. If you knew how much I'd prefer to be forgotten now. The films are there, I did my share, the rest is silence."