

About the Artist

Chantal Akerman was born in Brussels, Belgium in 1950. Jean-Luc Godard's landmark *Pierrot le fou* (1965) was her first exposure to the world of film, and in 1967 she enrolled in the Belgian film school INSAS; later she attended the Université Internationale du Théâtre in Paris, leaving shortly thereafter to pursue her own projects. By 1968 (she was 18), she had completed her first film, *Saute ma ville* (Blow up My Town), a low-budget, black and white short in which she stars as a young woman in a tragic-comic "day in the life" exposition. This small but powerful film set the stage for Akerman's later works in which she explores women at work and home, their interpersonal relationships with family and friends, and the universal themes of food, love, sex, romance, art, and storytelling, with a personal, immediate, and gripping point of view.

Akerman worked briefly in New York in 1972, returning to France the next year to make her first feature film, *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974), a study of the shifting boundaries of identity and sexuality. In 1975, she made her best-known and most influential film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. Three hours long and filmed largely in real time, Jeanne Dielman chronicles the mundane daily life of a woman who, facing the pressures of a lonely and isolated existence, snaps and commits a horrifying crime. Over three decades Akerman has made more than twenty-five films.

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Public Programs

Thursday, June 26, 6PM, Bartos Theatre

Akerman in Her Many Contexts, this talk by LVAC curator Bill Arning provides an in-depth examination of Chantal Akerman's work as a filmmaker and an artist.

Gallery Talks

Wed, May 7, 12:30PM	Jane Farver, LVAC Director
Sat, May 10, 2PM	Mark Linga, LVAC Educator
Wed, May 14, 12:30PM	Bill Arning, LVAC Curator
Sat, May 17, 2PM	Bill Arning
Thur, May 29, 6PM	Claire Grace, Ph.D. candidate, Harvard University
Wed, June 4, 12:30 PM	Mark Linga
Sat, June 7, 2PM	Claire Grace
Sat, June 21, 2PM	Mark Linga

MIT Public Art Tour, Sat, May 17, 10AM

Patricia Fuller, LVAC Public Art Curator

RAINDATE: Sun., May 18, 10AM

FILM SCREENINGS:

LVAC Film Nights, organized by John Gianvito

Thurs, May 15, Bartos Theatre, 7:30PM
Four Corners (US/1997/80min.) dir., James Benning
Europa 2005, October 27 (Italy/2006/12min.)
dir., Jean-Marie Straub & Daniel Huillet

Fri, June 27, Bartos Theatre, 7:30PM
Voyages (France/199/111min.) dir., Emmanuel Finkiel

The Films of Chantal Akerman

Presented by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in conjunction with Chantal Akerman: Moving through Time and Space. SCREENINGS TAKE PLACE AT THE MFA. For more information: www.mfa.org/film or 617-369-3306

Wed, May 21, 5:00PM *Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman*
(2001, 64 min); 6:30PM *Je Tu Il Elle* (1974, 90 min)

Thu, May 22, 2:00PM *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*
(1972, 200 min) 6:00PM *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1977, 127 min)

Sat, May 24, 10:30AM *Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman*
12:00PM *Je Tu Il Elle*

Sun, May 25, 10:30AM *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

Wed, May 28 5:40PM *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*

CineMental at the Brattle

Wednesday, June 18, 9:30PM, Brattle Theatre

40 Brattle Street, Harvard Sq. Cambridge

9.30pm, \$10

CineMental at the Brattle will be presenting short films inspired by the work of Chantal Akerman. More info: truthserum.org

Chantal Akerman: Moving through Time and Space

MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

May 2–July 6, 2008

 MIT List Visual Arts Center
E15, 20 Ames Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
617 253 4680
<http://web.mit.edu/lvac>



Chantal Akerman Moving through Time and Space

Since the 1970s, Chantal Akerman has been considered to be one of the great filmmakers of her generation. She not only works in ambitious documentary forms, but manages with equal adeptness a rigorous avant-garde film tradition as well as more entertaining feature-film narrative modes.

The five projects comprising *Moving through Time and Space* span more than two decades of Akerman's career. Each opens a window onto her central themes: the permeable border between creative domains of fact and fiction, experimental and narrative film, and a re-articulation of time in historical, linear, and memory contexts.

Beginning with her first museum installation, *D'est: Au bord de la fiction (From the East: Bordering on Fiction)*, 1995, and concluding with *Les Femmes d'Anvers en Novembre (Women of Antwerp in November)*, 2007, which is a new work commissioned for this survey exhibition, she has expanded her practice into the museum world, taking her films apart and reassembling them in installation form.

D'est: Au bord de la fiction (From the East: Bordering on Fiction), 1995

Chantal Akerman originally made her 16mm experimental documentary film *D'est (From the East)* in 1993. The film takes us on a compelling grand tour across Eastern Europe at a time when the Soviet Bloc was crumbling. The journey lasts from summer to winter, passing through East Germany, Poland, and Russia while traversing layers of past and present history.

An essentially visual film, with an audio track of ambient sound without dialogue or voiceover, *D'est* is a hypnotic inventory of people and landscapes recorded through a complex assemblage of images, sounds, and connected fragments.

Akerman's installation reiterates and interconnects various thematic and structural strategies of the film to finally unveil the parallel narrative concealed by the film's opacity. In the first gallery, twenty-four video monitors, placed at eye level and organized as eight triptychs, play various looped sequences excerpted from the film, each four minutes long. The movements of the viewers through the space echo the passages of people within the fragments of the film playing on the monitors. Viewers once again confront images from the film—people, places, cadences of color and sound—this time broken up and amplified as small, new narratives that continue to reinforce the mesmerizingly inconclusive effect of the film.

The second gallery—a more intimate space—contains a single video monitor and a pair of speakers on the floor. The monitor shows a single image from the film, a Moscow street at night, slowly fading to black. In contrast to the other room in which the film's ambient soundtracks plays, here, in a voiceover, Akerman recites two texts accompanied by a cello. As the viewers progress through the installation, a deconstructive process returns them conceptually to the narrative's origin, to the site and image effaced by film: the Shoah. *Adapted from the catalog essay by Rina Carvajal.*

Sud (South), 1999

Sud, 1999, is the second in a series of contemplative documentaries that Akerman began with *D'est*. In 1996, she wanted to make a movie about the United States. The America in question is a predominantly rural South, the farmland, swamps, and deserts that define the landscape between Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas. Her initial interest in this particular region was literary, inspired by William Faulkner's powerful evocation of southern life and James Baldwin's passionate advocacy for racial integration. The project was originally conceived as a meditation on nature and memory.

That changed when three young white men beat James Byrd, Jr., of Jasper, Texas, tied him to a pick-up truck, and dragged him to death. We watch from the back of a car as the road where Byrd found his death disappears behind us. The camera films the full three-mile stretch of the road, capturing every mark on its surface and haunting us with visions of bones broken and loosening flesh. It is painful to watch and in its quiet insistence it is probably one of the most violent images Akerman has ever created. *Adapted from the catalog essay by Claudia Schmuckli.*

De l'autre côté (From the Other Side), 2002

De l'autre côté is an unsentimental look at the plight of illegal Mexican immigrants as they attempt the dangerous crossing from Agua Prieta in Sonora, Mexico, to Douglas, Arizona. Many of them, abandoned by their "coyotes" (the Mexican smugglers of undocumented migrants), are dying every day from heat exposure or lack of water. There are no human settlements within 150 miles and temperatures can reach 130 degrees.

Akerman assumes an unobtrusive and objective standpoint and avoids an omniscient narrator. She uses long camera angles that capture the miles of fence along the Mexico-Arizona border. At first glance, Akerman's camera and voice appear completely objective but it soon becomes clear that subtle direction or editing does take place. This adds an emotional layer to her otherwise documentary-style interviews, especially as the positioning of Mexican interviewees in front of an open window or a running television set especially seems to suggest hope and faith. *Adapted from the catalog essay by Klaus Ottman.*

Lá-bas (Down There), 2006

In 2005 Akerman spent time in a pleasant apartment in Tel Aviv. She did not intend to make a film about Israel until she found an irresistible shot—the glowing rectangles of light made by windows blocked by matchstick blinds, and that shot led to others. The blinds shield the interior of the apartment from the harsh Israeli sun, making the inside/outside split palpable as she spies on her neighbors. That split structures both the film and the struggles of the protagonist to feel comfortable there.

Halfway through the film Akerman's voice describes her experience of a second trip outside witnessing the aftermath of a bombing. The facts are relayed via a cigarette seller: "Four dead." The walls Akerman inhabits change meaning after that from prison to safe haven.

Akerman conjures aspects of her family's history that could have landed her in Israel had her parents shared the dream of the first generation of settlers. She relates arriving in Israel and having the border guard offer to not stamp her passport. She says, "Why not?" If she needs to travel to Syria she could report it lost and pay the expensive 280 Euro fee; but she notes that, "The yellow star, it is written inside me." *Adapted from the catalog essay by Bill Arning.*

Les Femmes d'Anvers en Novembre (Women in Antwerp in November), 2007

Throughout the 20th century, cigarettes were closely associated with social interchange, intellectual conversations, erotic sensuality, and the consumption of coffee and alcohol. Akerman shares the tobacco habit with conceptual artist Jan Fabre, and in 2007 she created a film projection as part of his multi-media performance entitled *I'm a Mistake*. The piece culminated in an intense monologue that ends with the declaration, "I am faithful to the pleasure that is trying to kill me."

Using the same film segments, Akerman has created *Les Femmes d'Anvers en Novembre* a monumentally scaled, two-channel video installation concerning the social, psychological, and emotional connotations of smoking.

Akerman collages 20 short stories—equal in number to the 20 cigarettes that constitute a pack—that play out over the course of a twenty-minute loop. The same actors appear in several different scenarios. There are no men present, and women are seen alone, in pairs, or small groups. Still, they exude a sense of isolation because the relationship is always between the subject and her cigarette. *Adapted from the catalog essay by Terrie Sultan.*