

VARDA / CUBA

11 NOVEMBER 2015 – 1 FEBRUARY 2016

In late 1962, Agnès Varda was in Cuba. It was four years, in fact, since Fidel Castro and his Movimiento 26 de Julio had overturned the pro-US dictator Fulgencio Batista. After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, the imposition of an economic embargo and the missile crisis, tension between Cuba and the US was at its height.

While she was there, Varda took thousands of photographs, with a view to making a film of them.

She documented the fervent support aroused by the Revolution, and was alert to visible signs of change, while remaining critical of the blind alleys and contradictions of the regime.

Varda was also fascinated by the sheer vitality of the Caribbean island, capturing the swaying gait of Cuban women, the corpulent sugar cane cutters and spontaneous dancing in the streets. She found Cuba a striking mixture of omnipresent politics and natural sensuality – an unexpected

meeting between "socialism and cha-cha-cha".

Back in Paris, Varda filmed her photo series using an animation stand.

Arranged in sequences, the still images found themselves reanimated to the rhythm of the congas and accompanied by a text read by Michel Piccoli and Varda herself.

The 30-minute film *Salut les Cubains* was released in May 1964.

Here, for the first time, the Centre Pompidou exhibition unveils to the public Varda's astonishing photographs of Cuba, which recently entered the museum's collections. By placing them in dialogue with the film (screened in a loop in the main area), the exhibition recreates the tension between the fixed and moving image which is central to Agnès Varda's work.

Centre
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TIMELINE

1899-1902: American occupation of Cuba.

26 July 1953: failure of the Moncada Barracks attack (Santiago de Cuba) led by Fidel Castro against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

1955: exiled to Mexico, Castro organises a guerrilla force and starts up the "Movimiento 26 de Julio" (26th of July Movement) in memory of the Moncada attack.

1956-1959: Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, Che Guevara and 79 others set out for Cuba from Mexico. The expedition is a failure. Only a dozen barbudos (Castro's supporters) escape, taking refuge in the Sierra Maestra in the southern part of the island. They organise successful military campaigns, and by the end of two years have taken over the island.

8 January 1959: Castro's triumphal entry into Havana.

May 1959: introduction of the agrarian reform laws, which entail the nationalisation – without compensation – of farming land owned by American companies.

Late October 1959: the CIA orchestrates measures designed to destabilise the new Cuban regime economically and politically.

June 1960: Trade agreements signed between Castro's government and the USSR.

August 1960: Castro announces the nationalisation of American-owned oil refineries, sugar factories, power plants and telephone companies.

October 1960: America tightens its embargo. Washington prohibits all exports to Cuba, apart from foodstuffs and medicines.

January 1961: the US cuts diplomatic ties with Cuba and closes its embassy in Havana.

Castro launches a massive literacy campaign.

17 April 1961: trained and funded by the CIA, 1,500 Cuban counter-revolutionaries land in the Bay of Pigs, in southern Cuba, with the aim of overthrowing Castro's government. The campaign is a failure, and the expeditionary corps is defeated in three days.

October 1962: beginning of the Missile Crisis between the US and the USSR: an extremely tense situation that ends in the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.

Late December 1962: Agnès Varda arrives in Cuba at the invitation of the ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) in order to make her film *Salut les Cubains*. She remains there until late January 1963.

THERE AND BACK FROM PHOTOGRAPHY TO FILM

Agnès Varda likes to say that she has had three lives – one as a photographer, another as a film maker, and a third as a plastic artist – the first is surely the least known. She studied photography in the early Fifties, then worked professionally for several years in documentary, staged and portrait photography.

Why Cuba? First of all, she found the social, political and historical context particularly fascinating. Varda arrived in Havana at the end of 1962, exactly four years after Fidel Castro had toppled the pro-American dictator Fulgencio Batista. When she set out for Cuba, she intended to make a film entirely composed of photo shots. In one of her pictures, Castro is shown as a colossus with wings of stone.

After she returned to Paris, the film was released in 1964. *Salut les Cubains* is a singular film not only for its use of alternating still and animated images and adoption of an innovative documentary language, but also because of its feminine viewpoint, its play on stereotypes and the skilful political positioning that avoided problems with Cuban censorship. All these things made it a key documentary of the Sixties. However, the success it enjoyed because of its formal inventiveness, highly original point of view and intoxicating rhythm should not overshadow the quality of the photographs used for the film. These were far from being simple travel notes, documentary records or mere supports for voice-over commentary. Their spontaneous compositions, sophisticated structures and selective focal points reveal a true photographer's eye.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO AGNÈS VARDA

Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska - What gave you the idea of going to Cuba?

Agnès Varda - Chris Marker, the film maker, inspired me to go when he returned in 1961. He had made a film called *Cuba si*.

KZ-L - Did he show you the rushes or did you only see the finished film?

AV - I saw the film, and he told me a lot about it. All around us, the French were very carried away by the Cuban revolution: a magnificent revolution against American imperialism. Che Guevara and Fidel Castro represented hope, freedom and democracy. Havana before Castro was one of America's whorehouses, where people went to party and for the girls. Things were changing, and I found their idealism really inspiring.

KZ-L - Did you prepare for your trip before leaving? Did you contact anyone?

AV - I told ICAIC (the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) that as well as people in the street, I wanted to meet film directors and writers, artists like the painter René Portocarrero, the writer and film-maker Eduardo Manet, the writer Alejo Carpentier and the poet Roberto Retamar. I wanted to meet city and country people alike, as you do when making a documentary. I also relied on chance. In the streets, I walked around and spoke to people, either alone or with other ICAIC students.

KZ-L - Was there great freedom of speech?

AV - Yes, of course. Castro said "Khrushchev condemned abstract painting, but in Cuba you can do what you like. If you want to do abstract painting, then do it. Be revolutionary." There was this idea that revolution was a state of mind that could be expressed in art. There were large dance companies, painting schools, and a lot of poetry and abstract painting. Raúl Milian, for example, and Wifredo Lam, who was already living in France.

EXHIBITION

CURATORS

Clément Chéroux and
Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska
Assisted by Damarice Amao

PRODUCTION

Véronique Labelle

In partnership with

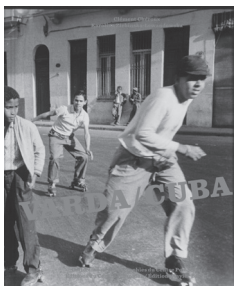


CATALOGUE

Varda / Cuba

Edited by Clément Chéroux and
Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska
Interview with Agnès Varda
Essays by François Hourmant
and Valérie Vignaux
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INFORMATIONS

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www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

from 11 November 2015 to 1 February
2016

Galerie de Photographies, Forum - 1
Every day except Tuesdays,
11 am to 9 pm
Free admission

TWITTER

#VardaCuba
@CentrePompidou

NEXT EXHIBITION

The Unbearable Lightness – 1980s,
photography, film
9 March – 30 May 2016

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

GUIDED TOURS

Sunday 15 November at 3.30 pm

Thursday 26 November at 7.30 pm

Thursday 10 December at 7.30 pm

€4.50; concessions: €3.50

Meet at the entrance to the exhibition

VARDA / CUBA / CINÉMA

Agnès Varda presents five of her films,
together with several Cuban films
she has selected. *Une minute pour une
image*, a collective series initiated by
the film maker and composed of 170
commented photographs grouped in
14 "albums imaginaires", is also being
screened for the first time.

11 to 20 December 2015, Cinéma 2

11 December

8 pm – *L'Album imaginaire d'Agnès*

Varda#1; Agnès de ci de là Varda

(2011, excerpt), *Ulysse* (1982, 22'),

Salut les Cubains (1963, 30'), by Agnès Varda.

Session introduced by Agnès Varda

12 December

5 pm – *L'Album imaginaire de Robert*

Doisneau; L'Une chante, l'autre pas

(1976, excerpt), *Ydessa, les ours et etc.*

(2004, 44'), by Agnès Varda

8 pm – *L'Album imaginaire de Christian*

Caujolle; De cierta manera,

by Sara Gómez, Julio García Espinosa

and Tomas Gonzales Perez (1977, 78').

Session introduced by Agnès Varda

13 December

4 pm – *L'Album imaginaire*

d'Henri Cartier-Bresson; Las Doce Sillas,
by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1962, 94')

7 pm – *L'Album imaginaire de Samia*
Saouma; El Otro Cristóbal, by Armand
Gatti (1963, 115')

17 December

8 pm – *L'Album imaginaire*

de Marc Garanger; El Joven Rebelde,
by Julio García Espinosa (1961, 83')

18 December

8 pm – *L'Album imaginaire de Nadja*

Ringart; Strawberry and Chocolate,
by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1993, 108')

19 December

5 pm – *L'Album imaginaire*

de Jean-Michel Folon; Cuba Baila,
by Julio García Espinosa (1961, 87')

8 pm – *L'Album imaginaire de Sarah*
Moon; Salut les Cubains, by Agnès Varda
(1963), *Chronicle of my family,*
by Sara Gómez (1966, 14').

Session attended by Agnès Varda

20 December

4 pm – *Une minute pour une image,*

L'Album imaginaire de Jacques Monory,
de Georges Fèvre, de Robert Delpire,
de Claude Nori and d'Agnès Varda#2
(1982, circa 72')

For more details, please see
the free leaflet and the website:
www.centrepompidou.fr

Contact: lescineamas@centrepompidou.fr
Admission: €6 / concessions: €4 /
free for pass holders (within the limit
of seats available)

MOBILE APP

In French, English and Spanish
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exhibition with the Centre Pompidou's
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