



A star is born: by juxtaposing Catherine Belkhdja, above, with the likes of Garbo and Brooks, 'Silent Movie' renders her as a fictional vintage starlet

Silent Movie: Chris Marker

For the past four decades Chris Marker has created vivid and memorable signposts to an alternative cinematic destination. His richly textured, sharp-witted film essays – part documentary, part fiction, part self-portrait, part political intervention – stray well beyond the confines of mainstream narrative cinema and his work as a whole spills over into books, television and multimedia. *Silent Movie* is a beautifully assembled and deceptively simple installation that celebrates the centenary of cinema and connects with Marker's

past – his obsession with cinema and the mechanisms of memory – as well as such recent work as the film *Level Five* and the dazzling CD-Rom work *Immemory*.

Commissioned by the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University in 1995, the installation consists of five monitors stacked in an industrial metal tower playing laser discs of 20 minutes' duration sequenced at random by a computer interface programme. Framed still images from the monitors are hung on the surrounding walls while another room contains witty computer-designed posters for "imaginary films". On the soundtrack 18 solo piano pieces, ranging from Alexander Skryabin to Billy Strayhorn, are played in random order.

Four of the five monitors have themes – 'The Journey', 'The Face', 'The Gesture' and 'The Waltz' – while the central one displays silent-film intertitles intercut with images of eyes and occasional archive imagery. The intertitles articulate the monitor images' enigmatic inferences. Marker describes the device as: "the Kuleshov experiment extended to writing." The imagery is for the most part drawn from black-and-white films made before 1940 and includes close-ups of Clara Bow, Louise Brooks and Greta Garbo. Images of Catherine Belkhdja, the lead actress in *Level Five*, are woven into this parade, transforming her by association into a sort of fictional, vintage starlet.

The subtly shifting loop works and reworks Marker's personal canon of films and stars into multiple imaginary rewritings of the history of cinema. Though there's much wit, there's also a persistent sense of melancholy and a Proustian nostalgia as the piece activates the spectator's own memories. The feeling is magnified by the fact that the Beaconsfield Gallery, formerly a Ragged School for destitute children, holds its own memories and history. As in *La Jetée* (1962), Marker is pointing to a zone between the film, the photograph and the book where a future cinema could thrive.

John Mount
'Silent Movie' was at Beaconsfield Gallery, London SE11 from 12 May to 13 June