

Chris Marker

at Beaconsfield, curated by the Pier Trust

12 May - 13 June

In 1927 Warner Brothers released the first commercial feature film to contain synchronised dialogue and music. At the time many of the competing film studios believed that Warner would take a fall on the experiment, but within five years cinema had been revolutionised, careers of silent screen stars were destroyed and dozens of studios went to the wall. More importantly the era of cinema as a genuinely international medium came to an end. The main theme of Chris Marker's piece *Silent Movie* is the exploration of the original language of cinema, the compositional and narrative experiments of the silent era that were sidelined and ultimately extinguished by the development of the conventional narratives of American sound cinema. The belief in some quarters is that silent cinema held out for a time the promise of a truly international medium. Marker is described in the press release for this London presentation of the video installation '*Silent Movie*' as the most important of French filmmakers. It is arguable that on the development of video art as a discrete form Marker has been a key influence. In elements of his work, particularly the exploration of 'primitive' cinematic effects and the use of extreme montage can be seen the forerunner of the video work of Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon, Gary Hill, Steve McQueen, and Tony Oursler.

The main gallery at Beaconsfield is an impressive space, one of the best in London with a double height room and a series of windows along one side that fill the space with light. In the middle of this is a tower of five video monitors, a precarious looking structure that Marker associates with Russian Constructivism and so relates to one of the lost alternative traditions of cinema. The screens show a montage of black and white film and video images, some contemporary but most are from silent era films. Some of these images are recognisable as classic film images while others are purely abstract. The sources for these video clips are a series of laser disc players running through a computer that randomly selects the sequence to play, the only constant element of the piece is a soundtrack of piano music. Contemplating the unplanned composition of image and sound it is amazing to note how the elements move in and out of synch, creating pseudo narratives out of disconnected material.

At a time when mainstream cinema has become an overly artificial and alienating form, *Silent Movie* elicits from the viewer a re-enchantment with the language of film. Perhaps through this re-visiting of the more immediate sensorial impact of early film it is possible to see contemporary video-art work as a rediscovery of the wasted potential of the media.

Piers Masterson

The *Silent Movie* installation was originally commissioned by the Wexner Centre for the Arts in Columbus Ohio. Chris Marker is included in the exhibition *Notorious* at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford that opens on 7 July.



Silent Movie



Silent Movie
1995



Silent Movie