

May 8 – August 2, 2009

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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. Akerman has made more than twenty-five films, opening a window on to the shifting frames between fact and fiction, experimental and narrative film, and history and memory. Through Akerman's lens, *Moving Through Time and Space* explores the politics of territorial borders, recent histories of racism, and the poetics of personal journeys, reimagining the cinematic possibilities for image, the gaze, space, performance, and narration.

### CHANTAL AKERMAN

(Born in 1950 in Brussels. Lives and works in Paris)

Akerman has made more than twenty-five films over thirty years. She has been awarded a Lumiere Award (France's Academy Award) and a FIRPRESCI Prize (International Federation of Film Critics), was nominated for the Golden Lion (Venice Film Festival), and was artist in residence at Harvard University. She has exhibited her films and installations internationally.



#### Cover image:

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

Video installation (still)

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris

*Chantal Akerman: Moving Through Time and Space* is a collaborative effort of four institutions: Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston; the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge; Miami Art Museum (a MAC@MAM presentation); and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

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*Là-bas (Down There), 2006*

Video (still)

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris



CONTEMPORARYARTMUSEUMSTLOUIS

## 1 — Main Galleries

# Chantal Akerman

Moving Through Time and Space

Born in Belgium and living in Paris, Chantal Akerman is widely recognized as one of the most important directors in film history. Since the 1970s, she has navigated the vast expanse of cinema—from ambitious documentary form to the avant-garde to narrative feature-films. The five projects of this touring exhibition span more than two decades of Akerman's career. From her first museum installation, *D'est: Au bord de la fiction (From the East: Bordering on Fiction)* (1995), to her most recent *Les femmes d'Anvers en Novembre (Women of Antwerp in November)* (2007), she has expanded her cinema-based practice into the spaces of art, deconstructing her films and reimagining them in installation form. In a large scale exhibition that takes over the Contemporary's Main Galleries, *Moving Through Time and Space*

spotlights the crossover genres of film and visual art.

The exhibition begins with Akerman's newest commission *Femmes d'Anvers en Novembre*. A collage of twenty short stories—equal in number to cigarettes in a pack—plays out over the course of a twenty-minute loop, where woman and cigarette share each screen. Touching on Akerman's foundation in feminist filmmaking and her deep connection to a highly personal, yet distant, cinematic point of view, this double projection remains ambiguous and fraught with tension.

Her largest multi-part installation to date, *De l'autre côté (From the Other Side)* (2002) offers an unsentimental look at the plight of illegal Mexican immigrants as they attempt the dangerous crossing from Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico to Douglas, Arizona. Akerman approaches the documentary from an unobtrusive and objective standpoint, evident from the lack of an omniscient narrator and the long takes that capture miles of dividing fence along the Mexico-Arizona border. Another large-scale installation, *D'est: Au bord de*

*la fiction*, is a collection of striking images of Eastern Europe and its citizens in the transition period following the end of the Cold War. Eighteen monitors retrace a journey that extends from the end of summer to the deepest winter, from East Germany, across Poland and the Baltics, to Moscow—capturing the essence, if not the historical particulars, of a region on the move.

*Sud (South)* (1999) initially began as a "meditation on the American South" inspired by Akerman's love for the work of writers William Faulkner and James Baldwin. The film's direction quickly shifted after the racially motivated murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas in 1998. Byrd, a black man, was killed by three whites who chained him to their truck and dragged him three miles through predominantly black parts of the county until one of his arms came off and he was decapitated. What began as an elegant meditation on the South became a passionate documentary capturing the emotionally tumultuous aftermath of Byrd's murder.

In *Là-bas (Down There)* (2006)

Akerman approaches a subject directly linked to her own history. Shooting the film while teaching and living in Tel Aviv, Akerman limits the frame to the confines of her apartment. Voice-over narration serves as the framework for her reflections on family history, her Jewish identity, and her childhood. She wonders whether normal everyday life is possible in this place and whether filming is a realistic option. With no intentions defined in advance, the film takes its natural course.

Since *Sainte ma ville (Blow up My Town)* (1968), Akerman has continued to create powerful films that picture women at work and home, their interpersonal relationships with family and friends, and the universal themes of food, love, sex, romance, art, and storytelling. Akerman worked briefly in New York in 1972, returning to France the next year to make her first feature film, *Je, tu, il, elle (I, You, He, She)* (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



*Sud (South)*, 1999

Video (still)

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris