

BFI Southbank presents: Maya Deren: 50 Years On



October 2011 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of visionary filmmaker, choreographer and theorist **Maya Deren**. Her first film, **Meshes of the Afternoon** (1943), endures as one of the most widely exhibited films of experimental cinema. She famously announced that she '*made her pictures for what Hollywood spends on lipstick*', and through her films she challenged the rigid structures of studio films, playing with form and exploring poetry, dance, visual art and a fascination for Haitian voodoo. To celebrate the life and work of Deren, **BFI Southbank** will present a season of her films, including rare uncut footage, and events, opening with **Séance for Maya Deren** on 4 October. A **BFI Classic** of *Meshes...* will be published, accompanied by a launch event and lecture at BFI Southbank, while **Renewing Deren's Legacy: Daria Martin, Jayne Parker, Sarah Pucill** will bring together three London-based filmmakers who have been inspired by Deren.

Maya Deren was born Eleonora Derenkovskaya in Kiev in 1917, and moved with her parents to the US in 1921. *Meshes of the Afternoon* was made in collaboration with her then husband, Alexander Hammid, and may be seen alongside four more titles, all made between 1943 and 1955, including **Ritual in Transfigured Time** (1945-46) in the first part of the **Maya Deren Programme: Chamber Films**. She considered film making, with its unique facility to manipulate time, conjoin unrelated spaces and choreograph movement, could blend elements into a transcendent, ritualised form. In 1946, Deren was awarded the first ever **Guggenheim Fellowship** for Creative Work in the Motion Pictures with an application to film ritual activity in Haiti. Her observations of, and fascination with, the dance ceremony of Haitian Voudoun expanded her intense imagination. Deren wrote a seminal text on Voudoun, published a wealth of essays, articles and statements, and was a tireless advocate for the exhibition and valorisation of experimental cinema. She died in hospital in New York after a series of cerebral haemorrhages on October 13 1961, at the age of just 44.

In this dedicated season a varied programme of events pays tribute to the art of Maya Deren. Highlights will include **Invocation: Maya Deren** (1987), introduced by the film's director **Jo Ann Kaplan**, and a symposium entitled **New Reflections** – an exploration of her career. Deren's vision influenced a generation of filmmakers of the North American avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s, and her inspiration continues to resonate. With a focus on her contemporary legacy, and the relation of her work to women's filmmaking in Britain, the significance of Deren's legacy will be discussed, illustrated and explored, 50 years on.

- end -

Programme:

Opening Event: Séance for Maya Deren

Maya Deren's *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946) opens this programme, to be followed by work from Daria Martin, Jayne Parker and Sarah Pucill, three highly acclaimed experimental film artists inspired by Deren's vision and practice, each of whom have programmes included in this season. Martin's *Harpstrings and Lava* (2007), Parker's *I Dish* (1982) and Pucill's *Cast* (2000) accompany *Ritual in Transfigured Time* in something of a cinematic séance, invoking the living resonance of Deren's film art on screen and around the table. where there will be a post-screening discussion with Daria Martin, Jayne Parker and Sarah Pucill.

Tue 4 Oct 18:10 NFT3

Symposium: Maya Deren: New Reflections

A one-day symposium exploring the legacy of Maya Deren through the lenses of visual art, choreography, anthropology and film theory. Bringing together distinguished artists, writers and academics in the discussion of the contemporary resonance of her filmmaking and film writing, *Maya Deren: New Reflections* will reinvigorate dialogues around the work of one of experimental cinema's most intriguing and significant artists. Deren was fascinated with, and absorbed by, dance, poetry and ritual activity, and these forms structured and inspired her beguiling filmic optic. Focusing on the themes, forms and modes of expression Deren prioritised in her practice, this unique symposium will celebrate her life and work while offering up renewed perceptions of her extraordinary visual and intellectual legacy.

Organised by Elinor Cleghorn (The London Consortium). A collaboration between BFI and The London Consortium

Tickets £13, concs £9.75 (Members pay £1.50 less)

Sat 8 Oct 10:30-17:30 NFT3

Invocation: Maya Deren + Introduction by Jo Ann Kaplan

USA 1987. Dir Jo Ann Kaplan. 53min

An authoritative and beautifully composed biography of Maya Deren by acclaimed filmmaker Jo Ann Kaplan. Featuring interviews with those who knew Deren, reconstructions of her personal spaces, archived photographs and audio recordings, and extracts of each of Deren's completed films *Invocation* is a fascinating homage to a short but remarkable life. Narrated by Helen Mirren.

Introduction and Q&A with Jo Ann Kaplan. This event launches *Body of Work: Five Films* by Jo Ann Kaplan. Signed copies will be available at the Filmstore

Thu 6 Oct 18:30 NFT2

Maya Deren Programme 1: Chamber Films

'Chamber music is more than a form...it is lyric in character; it is abstract, rather than narrative... and it is dependent upon a meticulous exploitation of the virtuosity of the selected instrument.' (Maya Deren) In 1960, Deren introduced her works as 'chamber films', drawing upon a musical analogy to collectively describe their conceptual formation. This programme features five of Deren's seminal body of 'chamber films': *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, 14min), *At Land* (1944, 15min), *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945, 3min), *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945-46, 15min) and *The Very Eye of Night* (1955, released 1959, 15min).

Tue 4 Oct 20:30 NFT2, Sun 9 Oct 16:20 NFT3

Maya Deren Programme 2: Movement and Ritual

Deren's exploration of the parabolic quality of martial arts movement, *Meditation on Violence* (1948, 13min), accompanies the documentary *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1977, 52min, co-dir Cheryl & Teiji Ito), the posthumously compiled and edited selection of footage shot by Deren on trips to Haiti between 1947 and 1955 during which time she committed the dance-based ceremony of Voudoun ritual to approximately 20,000 feet of 16mm film.

Wed 5 Oct 18:30 NFT2, Tue 11 Oct 20:45 NFT3

Maya Deren Programme 3: Fragments and Outtakes

Maya Deren's completed body of work totals only around 76 minutes, yet she left behind hours of uncut, unrealised and unedited film footage. This selection of fragments of Deren's 'abandoned' films – including *Witch's Cradle* (1943) featuring Marcel Duchamp, and the Toronto film society workshop project *Ensemble for Somnambulists* (1951) – are accompanied by outtakes from her cinematic dance *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). The programme also includes the documentary *Invocation: Maya Deren* (1987, Dir Jo Ann Kaplan, 53min)

Wed 5 Oct 20:45 NFT2

Book Launch & Lecture by John David Rhodes: Meshes of the Afternoon

Tonight we launch the latest in the series of BFI Film Classics – *Meshes of the Afternoon*, John David Rhodes' illuminating study of Maya Deren's mesmerising short of 1943, which places the film in the context of European modernism and as a pivotal text for the pre- and post-war history of the cinematic avant-garde. Rhodes' book also explores the film's use of point of view, repetition and visual symbolism, and the author will give an illustrated lecture.

Tickets £5

Fri 7 Oct 18:30 NFT3

Renewing Deren's Legacy: Daria Martin, Jayne Parker, Sarah Pucill

In celebration of Deren's contemporary legacy, we are delighted to feature the work of Daria Martin, Jayne Parker and Sarah Pucill, three London-based, film artists each inspired by Deren in intriguing ways. Daria Martin (b.1973), for whom Deren's ability to connect disparate spaces and embrace embodied dream has been an inspiration, makes films composed of performed, hand-constructed scenarios with visual reference to mythology, and literature. Martin often works with dancers and performers, staging projections of desire and fantasy which tantalisingly reveal the artifice of their making. Jayne Parker (b.1957), who shares with Deren a fascination with the filmic potential of non-verbal arts, finds Deren's perceptually transcendent articulations of time and space enduringly striking. Parker's works explore the physical body, objects and acts of performance through the unique possibilities of the medium. For Sarah Pucill (b.1961), the female centeredness of Deren's work has been an important influence. The sensibility of Deren's poetics, and her vision of making speak elements that are typically perceived as passive, relates to Pucill's exploration of transformation and selfhood through sensuous movement and the attributing of agency to the inanimate.

Jayne Parker

I Dish (1982, 15min), *The Pool* (1991, 10min), *The Reunion* (1997, 9min), *Stationary Music* (2005, 15min), *Arc* (2006, 7min), *K* (1989, 13min)

Followed by the artist in conversation with William Fowler, curator, BFI National Archive

Fri 7 Oct 20:30 NFT3

Sarah Pucill

Mirrored Measure (1996, 10min), *Cast* (2000, 17min), *Swollen Stigma* (1997, 20min), *Phantom Rhapsody* (2010, 19min), *Backcomb* (1995, 6min)

Followed by a Q&A with Sarah Pucill

Tue 11 Oct 18:00 NFT3

Daria Martin

In the Palace (2000, 10min), *Birds* (2001, 7min), *Loneliness and the Modern Pentathlon* (2004/2005, 18min), *Harpstrings and Lava* (2007, 13min), *Minotaur* (2008, 10min) Followed by a Q&A with Daria Martin

Wed 12 Oct 18:10 NFT3

Maya Deren in Context: British Women's Filmmaking

A programme of films by artists working at the London Filmmakers' Co-op, and involved with Circles, the distribution organisation focused on women's practice formed in the late 1970s. Circles played an important role researching and re-examining the contributions of pioneering filmmakers such as Maya Deren, and sought to locate their work within, in the words of Lis Rhodes, 'the context of their own concerns'. Seminal works featuring dance, performance and rituals of play accompany poetic articulations and calls to the materiality of film. Introduced by Elinor Cleghorn

Sun 9 Oct 18:30 NFT3

- End -

PRESS CONTACT:

BFI Southbank:

Ilona Cheshire Tel: 020 7957 8986 email: ilona.cheshire@bfi.org.uk

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

Booking information

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £6.65 Members pay £1.40 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Filmstore

The BFI Filmstore is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank /September October 2011