

## Inspiration, creation and sharing: Agnès Varda's guiding principles for filmmaking are explained at Qumra

- *Richard Peña sheds light on the techniques and creative processes of the 'grandmother' of the French New Wave*

**Doha, Qatar: 16 March 2019:** Inspiration, creation, sharing. These are the three words that guide Agnès Varda every time she makes a film. In a masterclass of the Qumra Master's body of work presented by Richard Peña, first- and second-time filmmakers learned more about Varda's hybrid approach to filmmaking at Qumra 2019. Peña provided an analysis of clips from five of her films: **La Pointe Courte** (1955), **Cleo from 5 to 7** (1962), **Vagabond** (1985), **The Gleaners & I** (2000), and **The Beaches of Agnès** (2008).

The 'grandmother of French New Wave cinema' is renowned for her unique short films, feature narratives and documentaries, and her unique artistic skill in combining all three formats in each of her projects. He said of her work: "Agnès Varda is unique among her contemporaries for the seamless way in which her work flows between documentaries, shorts and feature length films. She pioneered the convergence of genres and formats into what we now call 'research cinema'. Agnès was interested in very personal self-expression first and foremost, more than just entertainment."

In the masterclass, Peña demonstrated how Varda revolutionised techniques such as discontinuity between shots, handheld camera work, low lighting, and later embraced innovative digital camerawork and mixed media shots.

Born in Belgium in 1928 to a Greek father and French mother, she started out as a photographer in the 1950s. In 1954, she became interested in film and used her personal savings and contributions from friends to make **La Pointe Courte** (1955), which later achieved cult status and established her reputation in the French New Wave. Varda has maintained that the reason for the boldness of her first project was because "I had no idea how to make films".

On the topic of Varda's place within French New Wave cinema, Peña said: "The problem with French New Wave is that it is very difficult to define. Is it a group of directors, a period, or a style of filmmaking? Within the French New Wave movement there was a difference between Right Bank and Left Bank groups of directors, towards which Agnès leaned to the Left, seeing cinema akin to art, literature and music. She was also influenced by the French feminist movement, although she resisted defining herself through political orthodoxies."

Varda is much celebrated as a cinematic icon and is often a significant influence on some of today's most acclaimed filmmakers. Among the substantial recognition for her work is a Silver Bear Prize at Berlinale for **Cleo from 5 to 7** (1965); Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival for **Vagabond** (1985); Léopardo d'Onore at the Locarno Film Festival in 2014; Palme d'Or d'Honneur at Festival de Cannes in 2015; Grolsch Audience Award for Best Documentary at Toronto Film Festival for **Faces Places** (2017); and an Academy Honorary Award® for her contribution to cinema. In 2003, she launched a third career as a visual artist, with her installations being exhibited at the world's most prominent galleries and museums.

“Through her films and her lifetime curiosity about self-consciousness, Agnès is ultimately telling us about herself,” said Peña. “The powerful disarming honesty of her films is what makes us trust her as a filmmaker.”

Richard Peña, an internationally renowned expert on film, was Professor of Film Studies at Columbia University and Director of the New York Film Festival from 1988 to 2012. He is a familiar face at Qumra, having contributed to previous editions in guiding up-and-coming filmmakers from around the world.

The fifth edition of Qumra brings together more than 150 acclaimed filmmakers, industry professionals and experts to nurture 36 Qumra Projects by first and second-time filmmakers that are in various stages of development. The six-day event takes place 15–20 March at Souq Waqif and the Museum of Islamic Art, and features Qumra Masterclasses, Qumra Talks and screenings in the Qumra Masters and New Voices in Cinema series.

Further details about ticket prices and sales for the screenings are now available on [www.dohafilminstitute.com](http://www.dohafilminstitute.com).

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## Note to Editors

### About Qumra

Directors and Producers attached to thirty-six projects in development and post-production are selected to participate in the event. They will include a number of emerging filmmakers from Qatar, as well as recipients of funding from the Institute’s Grants Programme. The robust programme will feature industry meetings designed to assist with propelling projects to their next stages of development, including master classes, work-in-progress screenings, bespoke matchmaking sessions and tailored workshops with industry experts. This creative exchange will take place alongside a programme of public screenings curated with input from the Qumra Masters.

The event is organised in three main sections: The **Qumra Master Classes** are daily sessions; each led by one of the Masters. The participating filmmakers have full access to these sessions, which are also open to accredited industry guests to attend in an observational capacity.

The **Qumra Meetings** are a series of one-on-one meetings, workshops and tailored mentoring sessions between representatives from the selected projects and seasoned industry experts.

The **Qumra Screenings** are open to the public and feature projects funded by the Institute through its grants and co-financing initiatives, as well as a series of films chosen by the Qumra Masters accompanied by Q&A sessions.



The Arabic term 'qumra' is popularly said to be the origin of the word 'camera', and to have been used by the scientist, astronomer and mathematician Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham, 965-c.1040 CE), whose work in optics laid out the principles of the camera obscura.

### **About Doha Film Institute**

Doha Film Institute is an independent, not-for-profit cultural organisation. It supports the growth of the local film community through cultivating film appreciation, enhancing industry knowledge and contributing to the development of sustainable creative industries in Qatar. The Institute's platforms include funding and production of local, regional and international films; skills-sharing and mentorship programmes; film screenings; the Ajyal Youth Film Festival; and Qumra. With culture, community, learning and entertainment at its foundation, the Institute is committed to supporting Qatar's 2030 vision for the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Doha Film Institute

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