

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: *Memories of Utopia: Jean-Luc Godard's "Collages de France" Models*
Organized by Miguel Abreu and Aurélien Poitrimoult

Dates: January 14 – February 25, 2018

Reception: Sunday, January 14, 6 – 8PM

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Dan Talbot.

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening on Sunday, January 14th, of *Memories of Utopia: Jean-Luc Godard's "Collages de France" Models*. The exhibition will be held at both our 88 Eldridge and 36 Orchard Street locations.

As Nathan Lee wrote in his 2006 *New York Times* review, “the Georges Pompidou Center [Paris] began a retrospective devoted to a man synonymous with cinema itself: Jean-Luc Godard.” Now 87, the consummate filmmaker has been transforming motion pictures for over 60 years. From his 1955 documentary, *Opération Béton*, to his latest still unfinished work, *Le Livre d'Image*, Godard has tirelessly experimented with images, sounds, and language, and is regarded as one of the greatest visual intelligences at work and one of the most significant artists of our times.

“For the Godard cult,” Lee continued, “the Pompidou Center exhibition is epochal; the mother ship of mise-en-scène has landed.” The full film retrospective, however, was “only foreplay to the main seduction. *Travel(s) in Utopia, Jean-Luc Godard 1946 – 2006, In Search of a Lost Theorem*, is the unwieldy title of an unruly installation that sprawls throughout the large south gallery of the museum. Designed and executed by Godard, the show opened amid much controversy.” Indeed, rumor had it before the opening “that relations between the artist and the museum had soured, and that the project would not be realized. The nature of what, if anything, would take its place remained an enigma until the moment of its unveiling.”

The intended exhibition was “to have been called *Collage(s) de France*,” Lee pointed out, “and to have functioned as a kind of elaborate, three-dimensional montage of Godard’s methods and motifs. The visitor would proceed through a series of thematic rooms. ‘Myth’ would give way to ‘Humanity’ and ‘The Camera,’ pass through ‘The Unconscious’ and end with ‘Murder’ and ‘The Tomb.’ Giant reproductions of paintings (by Delacroix, Goya, Nicolas de Staël) would adorn the walls alongside printed quotations and blown-up movie stills. Films and videos would flicker on televisions, screens and even a video iPod. Sculptural and environmental objects would allude to Freud, the Middle East and cinematic technologies. *Collage(s) de France* was to have carried the subtitle ‘Archaeology of the Cinema,’ an apt phrase given that all that remains of this fabled creature are its bones. Detailed scale models of the original conception are scattered throughout *Travel(s) [in Utopia]*, an exhibition about an exhibition — and thus quintessential Godard.”

The eighteen maquettes produced by Godard between 2003 and 2005 for *Collages de France*, are exhibited here for the first time since their initial presentation at the Pompidou Center. Meticulously designed dollhouse-like rooms buzzing with electric motors and small lights, “they are the depository,” Lee concludes, “the sketch, the graveyard of Godard’s original conception, the score of a symphony forever unperformed.”

In *Godard, le dos au musée – histoire d'une exposition*, Anne Marquez’s monumental study on the evolution of the exhibition, she argues that “the maquette remains the most important element to have survived Godard’s great museographical experiment. [...] It is to *Collages de France* a little as Tatlin’s *Tower* is to his *Monument to the 3rd*

International, designed to be realized in iron and glass, but existing only in the form of a wooden maquette: miniaturizations of a political or artistic utopia of which they remain the emblem. The ultimate fate of these ‘works of the spirit,’ however, was contrary to the properly artistic dimension that should be their defining characteristic.”

At 36 Orchard Street, along with the presentation of documents pertaining to the models at hand, publications on Godard and his work and DVDs of select films, *Souvenir d’Utopie*, a short video by Anne-Marie Miéville is on view on a monitor along with Godard film excerpts. In this work the maquettes are filmed with tight, static shots, without commentary, punctuated with cuts to black. The montage is abrupt and rapid, and features only fixed images. The film records a realized miniaturized proposition and unfolds in a time and space that is now gone, at once a regretful look back at *Collages de France* (memory) and a reference to what became the exhibition (utopia). “The video as a whole,” Marquez notes, “is an almost abstract visit to a *Collages de France* without scale, a fictional walk through an exhibition that one could almost believe had actually taken place.”

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

Miguel Abreu Gallery

88 Eldridge Street (between Hester & Grand) / 36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester)

New York, NY 10002

Telephone 212.995.1774 • Fax 646.688.2302 • post@miguelabreugallery.com

Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 10:30AM to 6:30PM and by appointment

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street; J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street

Excerpts from **According to JLG...**

by Dominique Païni

Jean-Luc Godard, Documents, Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006, pp. 420-426

3. The unprecedented character of this exhibition project lay in part in its environmental allure, which might at first sight evoke the film set, usually reconstructed in the studio [...] Through the use of space, a temporal process was to be described, that of *thought itself*. As they walked through the exhibition, the visitors were invited to reflect on the time-matter of cinema, that which visually incarnates thought in a film. As they walked the visitors would progressively rediscover the process of cinematographic conception: just as Maurice Denis said painting is a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order, so a film is a set of durations assembled in a certain order. The visitor’s journey would therefore be the inverse of the filmmaker’s: where the filmmaker conceives in order to try and make something perceptible, the visitor must perceive in order to try and reconstruct the activity of conception. This explains the meaning of the titles given to each room: Myth (allegory), Humanity (image), The Camera (metaphor), The Films (homework/duty), The Alliance (the unconscious, totem, taboo), The Bastards (parable), The Real (rêverie), Murder (Sesame, Theorem, Montage), The Tomb (fable). The sequence of the rooms did not respect any didactic order designed to re-enact the creation of a film. Instead the visitor was confronted with a sort of huge puzzle that he had to solve mentally.

[...]

Collage(s) de France instead absorbed the world into its own space. Past and present history were engulfed in the traversal of the exhibition; traces and testimonies accumulated, coming together, attracting each other, and

adhering in a furious confrontation of images. Here it was not shooting that captured an environment, it was the environment that entered like a torrent, to be concentrated in the exhibition, ideally realized in a number of maquettes.

Successive maquettes of the route through the exhibition were made to condense the meaning, to finalize the thinking. And the result was beyond any gratuitous aesthetic effect: it was more like throwing a firework into the museum institution. That which only distantly cohabited on the scale of external reality burst into flames in the clashing together and the *friction* of documents forced together. So the filmmaker turned architect had every reason to be wary of the enlarged realization of his maquettes, and to be tempted to disown them when they had returned to the scale of the rest of the world (*Archeology of cinema 'according to JLG'...*).

[...]

Collage(s) de France perhaps more than ever, offers a total fusion between a spectacle and that which presided over its conception.

[...]

6. From the outset this exhibition project was related to a moral essay. But its environmental part simultaneously emitted the effects of a fiction whose main character was JLG himself. Or more exactly, his thought in movement, organized into a path through an exhibition.

[...]

Collage(s) de France was an invitation to an intimate journey permeable to the upheavals of the world. It is from the tension between these two poles—autobiographical fiction/investigation—that poetry emerged.

[...]

Collage(s) de France was a response to a frequent criticism of the filmmaker: that he does not tell a story. On this subject, one day he humorously recalled the scolding he received as a child—'Don't tell tales'—and his present life as a filmmaker constantly asked by producers to do just that. In fact, he had always sought a balance between fiction and the ethical gesture. In his work the Goethe of *Werther* and the Mallarmé of *Igitur*, the political impetus of David and the scrupulous nominalism of Duchamp, are brought together. Undergoing the trial of the exhibition, the filmmaker told a story where it was the viewers who became the fictional characters, or the frames of a film which the strip would string together. This exhibition project extended the reflection of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which had already taken history in the direction of poetry and of the essay.

[...]

7. Each of the rooms had been conceived so that the viewer himself might make collages out of a forest of images. The visitor was therefore put to work, had to make the effort to assemble, had to do his 'duties' in the exhibition (to use the name of one of the rooms).

Collage(s) de France was a utopia that would be unachievable through film. This utopia sought a tempestuous balance between fiction and aesthetic and ethical judgment, between belief and the lesson taught. This utopian possibility of cinema was cinema making itself thought.

Recall that JLG had always been interested in that which was divided. For example, in the first room we read: 'Hollywood, the Mecca of cinema'. Hollywood is placed on the side of belief, faced on the opposite wall by the documentary image of an Algerian family.

Fiction sings to the tune of belief, documentary to the tune of facts. From this division is born the theme of the character of the filmmaker divided between the project and its outcome, conception and perception, the exception and the rule... film and cinema.

[...]

In fact he has long been located on an island between the worlds of the museum and of cinema, where he has incarnated the tension in the relationship between cinema and the other arts. The exhibition project registered this tension with the installation on the museum's walls of the ontological given of the art of film, reproduction: a film is a recorded copy of the real; it is also a copy of a negative, and it is distributed via the duplication of copies. On every scale, therefore, the fact of reproduction is embedded in the cinematographic art. *Collage(s) de France* was the exhibition of reproduction, the very material of cinema. Photography, reportage, video, the photocopy, were all used, because, in effect, reproduction gives its testimony by enlarging and reducing, the change of format being another patent sign of the fact of reproduction. So the filmmaker enlarged, reduced, broke up, in other words he did the work of the art historian: he *scrutinised and explained*—but remained an editor in his approach to cutting things up and reassembling them differently. This is what reproduction makes possible.

Supposing that we describe modern art, and more particularly contemporary art of the last forty years, as a generalised procedure of recycling (Pablo Picasso and his collages, Marcel Duchamp and his readymade...). Then Jean-Luc Godard also proposes a new and exemplary demonstration of this in his films, through his generalised art of citation. At one time he dreamt of a film where everything would be taken from elsewhere; perhaps the exhibition *Collage(s) de France* made this dream come true.

This experiment in reproduction exhibited at a museum may be just as shocking as at the cinema, where Jean-Luc Godard gave such an illusion of only imitating and critiquing. His art of *reuse* has been linked with his origins as a critic, but today, in his exhibition maquette, he unveils what, for him, was at stake in this reuse.

By 'exhibiting', he comes close to André Malraux and his Imaginary Museum whose artworks, brought together by means of reproduction, could be compared—that is to say, very simply—could be *viewed*.