

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: *Memories of Utopia: Jean-Luc Godard's "Collages de France" Models*
Dates: January 14 – February 25, 2018
Reception: Sunday, January 14, 6 – 8PM
Events: Screening of Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) and *Tout Va Bien* (1972)
36 Orchard Street (day and time to be confirmed)

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,” noted Lee, “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.” Talk had long circulated of a challenging project conceived in collaboration with Dominique Païni, the then director of cultural development at the Pompidou Center and the curator of the show. “It was to have been called ‘Collage(s) de France,’” *The New York Times* 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)* an exhibition about an exhibition — and thus quintessential Godard.”

Having reinvented cinema by systematically questioning its conventions, Godard should have been expected to engage in a battle with the museum. “Such a rebel artist can’t behave in the frame of a cultural institution,” noted film critic and historian, Nicole Brenez.

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,” says Lee, “the sketch, the graveyard of Godard’s original conception, the score of a symphony forever unperformed.”

It seems probable in hindsight that Godard decided, ultimately, that there was nothing to be gained by revealing the workings of a theorem whose formulation he had already explored. The maquettes solidly said what needed to be said and allowed all the concepts to be considered in one glance, while enlargement would disperse the ideas and misdirect the gaze. From the point of view of conception, the exhibition ended with the completion of the maquettes, since the work of thought was there achieved. And unlike the shooting of a film, where the encounter of actors and director with reality can produce unexpected effects, in the montage of an exhibition made up of objects the opportunity for serendipity was limited. The maquette is not the equivalent of the cinematographic screenplay; it is already the conceptual and material enactment of the project.

As Anne Marquez states in *Godard, le dos au musée – histoire d'une exposition*, her thoroughly researched study on the evolution of the exhibition, "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."

In a small room near the entrance of the exhibition, one can see *Reportage Amateur*, a 46-minute video by Jean-Luc Godard and his longtime collaborator, Anne-Marie Miéville. It constitutes a precious source of information for our understanding of what binds the filmmaker to his models. Miéville's camera scans the maquettes from above, while Godard describes each room. In this very simple staging of the objects, Godard stands over his creations with a certain jubilation. Like a model-maker, he comments on his work, walking his hand around the interior of the spaces he has composed. The image of the marveling little boy is overlaid with that of the teacher: for all we see of the filmmaker is his hand, extended by a wooden ruler which points out each element as he exhibits his vision of the world.

At 36 Orchard Street, along with the presentation of documents pertaining to the "Collages de France" models, publications on Godard and his work and DVD's of select films, *Souvenir d'Utopie*, a short video by Miéville is on view. In this work, the initial maquettes are filmed a second time, here with tighter, static shots, without commentary, punctuated with cuts to black. Made a few months after *Reportage Amateur*, which is an audiovisual documentation of a project "in the process of being made" (or rather "in the process of unmaking itself"), *Souvenir d'Utopie* records a realized miniaturized proposition. The video 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 the upcoming exhibition (utopia). Distinguishing itself from *Reportage Amateur*, which captures the maquette on the fly in long takes and features just a few impromptu cuts, the montage of *Souvenir d'Utopie* is abrupt and rapid, and features only fixed images. The film presents the "Collages de France" models chronologically, simulating a visitor's path from "Myth" to "Tomb." The soundtrack for each room is constructed autonomously, something that could not have been accomplished in the life-size exhibition, because the sound would bleed between the different spaces. As Marquez observes, "the video as a whole 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:

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