

Around Town

Agnès Varda's Refuge

The filmmaker explores her island life through installations

By Carol Berens

To enter the world of Agnès Varda, we must wait patiently (or not) for videoed tides to recede, the road to reemerge, the “drawbridge” of plastic strips to part and the crossing guards to lift. We're now in the proper frame of mind to walk through the representation of “Le Passage du Gois,” the only road onto the Île de Noirmoutier, which is just off the western coast of France in the Atlantic Ocean, and into “L'Île et Elle,” Varda's exhibition at the Fondation Cartier.

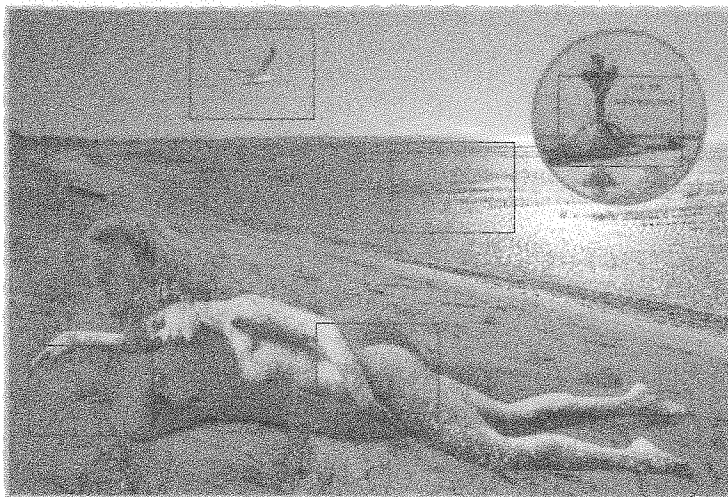
Through photographs, videos, recorded sound, and interactive features, we experience Varda's refuge where she first stayed during the 1960's with her husband, the filmmaker Jacques Demy, who died in 1990. Expanding upon an exhibit she originally created for the 2003 Venice Biennale, she explores with a critical eye and sense of humor the many layers of life on the island. From a memorial to her cat to a cabin lined with headshots of 60 Noirmoutiers—pictures of men on one wall, women on the other, facing them—we experience intersecting lives.

We can take things as they appear or we can delve further. A large photomural recalls a 1950's postcard and gives us the choice whether to merely appreciate the surface—an idyllic

tourist view of a naked blond sunbather and benign shore scenes— or, if we rather, we can press some buttons to reveal another side: the seagull or the oil-crippled bird; the sunbather or a floating body.

In the “Widows of Noirmoutier,” one wall of a room filled with simple wooden chairs shows video portraits of 14 women around a large image. On each chair are earphones through which we can hear the reflections of each as interviewed by Varda—widow to widow.

Since making her first film in 1954, Ms. Varda has led a rich artistic life, from being part of the New Wave to making *The Gleaners*, her latest movie, in 2000. She has recently combined installations with her film



The Large Postcard or Souvenir de Noirmoutier, 2006

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career quite literally with a one-room cabin whose walls are composed of reclaimed strips of film from one of her husband's early films, *Les Créatures*, a bomb.

In Agnès Varda's world, nothing is wasted. ■

**Though October 8. Everyday except
Monday from 12 - 8pm. 6.50€.
Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain**