



Maya Deren



Biography

- Born Eleonora Derenkovskaya on May 12th, 1917 in Kiev, Ukraine
- Fled Ukrainain SSR
- Syracuse, New York
- Attended Syracuse University
- Finished at New York University
- Masters at Smith College
- New York Art scene 1937-1939 (poetry fiction, editorialist)
- Los Angeles - 1940
- Guggenheim Fellowship in 1946 – Haiti
- Died 1961, aged 44

Films

- *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)
- *At Land* (1944)
- *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945)
- *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946)
- *Meditation on Violence* (1948)
- *The Very Eye of Night* (1955)



Other works:

Witches' Cradle (1943), *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1954)

Influences

- Haitian Voodoo
 - Katherine Dunham
- Dance
- Subconscious and psychology
- Poetry



Meshes of the Afternoon (1943)

“the inner realities of an individual and the way in which the subconscious will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience.”



w/ Alexandr Hackenschmied

Meshes of the Afternoon (1943)

- Subjective POV shots
- Bending reality angles
- Slow motion
- Duplication and splicing in film
- "Ripping through the frame"



w/ Alexandr Hackenschmied

At Land (1944)

"a constancy of personal identity."

- Inspired Stan Brakhage's Blue Moses
- Dream-like narrative
- Featuring: Alexander Hammid, composer John Cage, film critic Parker Tyler, graphic designer Alvin Lustig, poet Philip Lamantia



At Land (1944)

- Reverse motion
- Intercut – messing with reality
- Disorienting shots
- Extending of time and actions



Creating Reality

“ If realism is the term for a graphic image which precisely simulates some real object, then a photograph must be differentiated from it as a form of reality itself”

Deren, Maya. “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality.”

“The images with which the camera provides him are like fragments of a permanent, incorruptible memory; their individual reality is in no way dependent upon their sequence in actuality, and they can be assembled to compose any of several statements.”

Deren, Maya. “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality.”

““a truly creative work of art creates a new reality”

Deren, Maya in Cinema as an Independent Art Form, August 1945

A Study in Choreography for Camera (1945)

- Starring Talley Beatty
- "Choreocinema" - focusing on human motion and cinema itself



"As Beatty leaps from space to space across Deren's film splices, a new geographical reality is created, one where great distances can be covered within the span of just four minutes."

Steven Higgins, *Still Moving: The Film and Media Collections of the Museum of Modern Art*

A Study in Choreography for Camera (1945)



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• Each of these frames is from a different shot of the leap sequence; but the homogeneity of the sky background and the directions of travel within the frame combine the four shots into the equivalent of a single slow motion shot which might be understood to "pan" with the dancer as he takes off, floats through the air and finally lands. However, this technique extends the duration time of the film leap to about five or six times that of a leap in reality, and so creates suspension and tension.



Ritual in Transfigured Time (1946)

- Starring Rita Christiani
- Mixing the choreography focus with the bending of reality



Ritual in Transfigured Time (1946)

- Freeze framing
- Slow motion
- Negative image



Rituals

"A ritual is an action distinguished from all others in that it seeks the realization of its purpose through the exercise of form. In this sense ritual is art; and even historically, all art derives from ritual. In ritual, the form is the meaning. More specifically, the quality of movement is not merely a decorative factor; it is the meaning itself of the movement. In this sense, this film is dance."

Maya Deren in Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film

Meditation on Violence (1948)

- Starring Chao-Li-Chi
- Music by Teiji Ito
- Wu-Tang ritual



The Very Eye of Night (1955)

- Metropolitan Ballet School
- Projected in the negative
- Score by Teiji Ito
- Deren's final completed film



Negative Image

“This is not a direct white-on-black statement but is understood as an inversion of values.”

Maya Deren “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality.”



More Interesting Deren Quotes...

“This very profusion of potentialities seems to create confusion in the minds of most film-makers, a confusion which is diminished by eliminating a major portion of those potentialities in favor of one or two, upon which the film is subsequently structured.

An artist, however, should not seek security in a tidy mastery over the simplifications of deliberate poverty; he should, instead, have the creative courage to face the danger of being overwhelmed by fecundity in the effort to resolve it into simplicity and economy.”

Deren, Maya. “Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality.”

"I make my pictures for what Hollywood spends
on lipstick."



- [*Meshes of the Afternoon*](#) (1943)
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- [*Meditation on Violence*](#) (1948)
- [*The Very Eye of Night*](#) (1955)

IGNORE ANY NON-MAYA ENDORSED SOUNDTRACK!!!!!! Teiji Ito is the only one who has composed a score for her. Everybody else is doing their own thing.

Deren, Maya. "From the Notebook of Maya Deren, 1947." *October*, vol. 14, 1980, pp. 21–46. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778529>. Accessed 3 Oct. 2024.

Deren, Maya. "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality." *Daedalus*, vol. 89, no. 1, 1960, pp. 150–67. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026556>. Accessed 3 Oct. 2024.

MoMa Exhibition – Maya Deren's Legacy May 14-Oct 4 2010

MoMa Exhibition – Steven Higgins, *Still Moving: The Film and Media Collections of the Museum of Modern Art* Nov 29, 2006-Mar 31, 2009