

Ulrike Ottinger

Screenwriter – Director – DOP – Photographer



Ulrike Ottinger grew up in Konstanz, where she opened her own studio at an early age. From 1962 until 1968, she lived and worked as an artist in Paris, where she exhibited at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture and elsewhere. She studied etching techniques at the studio of Johnny Friedlaender and attended lectures at the Sorbonne on art history, religious studies, and ethnology with Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. In 1966, she wrote her first screenplay, entitled “The Mongolian Double Drawer.”

After returning to West Germany, she founded the “filmclub visuell” in Konstanz in 1969, as well as the “galeriepress” gallery and press, presenting Wolf Vostell and David Hockney, among others. With Tabea Blumenschein, she realized her first film in 1972-1973, LAOCOON & SONS, which had its premiere at Arsenal Berlin. She moved to Berlin in 1973, where she filmed the happening documentation BERLINFEVER – WOLF VOSTELL. After THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE BLUE SAILORS (1975), with Valeska Gert, came the female pirate film MADAME X (1977), a coproduction with the ZDF television network. The film was a sensation, and prompted substantial controversy.

Her “Berlin trilogy” began with TICKET OF NO RETURN (1979), followed by FREAK ORLANDO (1981) and DORIAN GRAY IN THE MIRROR OF THE YELLOW PRESS (1984). Collaborating on the films were Delphine Seyrig, Magdalena Montezuma, Veruschka von Lehdorff, Eddie Constantine, and Kurt Raab, as well as the composer Peer Raben. In the short film USINIMAGE (1987), she revisited imagery derived from industrial wastelands and alienated urban landscapes.

CHINA. THE ARTS – THE PEOPLE (1985) is the first in a series of long documentary films made in the course of Ulrike Ottinger’s travels through Asia. She made the narrative film JOHANNA D’ARC OF MONGOLIA in Mongolia in 1989, followed three years later by the eight-hour documentary film TAIGA. Alongside her journeys to the Far East, she applied a virtually “ethnographic” attention to the changes taking place in her own city between the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification in the documentary film COUNTDOWN. After the documentary film EXILE SHANGHAI (1997), her travels took her to southeast Europe, where she once again created a documentary film and a narrative film: SOUTHEAST PASSAGE (2002) and TWELVE CHAIRS (2004).

After the documentary PRATER (2007) about the traditional Viennese amusement park, Ulrike Ottinger returned to Asia for her next two documentary films. THE KOREAN WEDDING CHEST (2008) shows the South Korean society balancing between tradition and modernity. UNDER SNOW (2011) uses the elements of kabuki, poetry and documentation in a magical way to describe life in Japanese snow land Echigo. For CHAMISSOS SHADOW (2016), Ulrike Ottinger traveled for months on the trail of Adelbert von Chamisso through the far-flung regions of the Bering Sea. Her longest documentary (12 h) so far, interweaves beautiful landscapes with ethnological insights and personal experiences. Like many of her previous films, CHAMISSO'S SHADOW had its premiere at the Berlinale.

Ulrike Ottinger's films have been shown at the world's most important film festivals, among others in Toronto, Amsterdam, Moskau, London, Montréal, Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro. They were appreciated in retrospectives around the world, including the Cinémathèque Française and Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv. They received numerous awards, including the Audience Jury Prize in Montréal and the German Bundesfilmpreis (Visual Design) for JOHANNA D'ARC OF MONGOLIA (1989), and the German Film Critics Award for the documentary films CHINA. THE ARTS – THE PEOPLE (1986), PRATER (2008) and CHAMISSOS SHADOW (2016).

Ulrike Ottinger has worked in photography throughout her career as an artist. With her photographs, created largely in parallel with the film works, she has identified her own visual points of emphasis. She has taken part in major art exhibitions, presenting works at the Biennale di Venezia, the Documenta, and the Berlin Biennale, among others.

Solo exhibitions of her photographic and cinematic works have been shown at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art Rotterdam, the Museo Nacional Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Kunstwerke Berlin, the Gallery David Zwirner in New York, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin and the collection Goetz in Munich. Ulrike Ottinger participated in the legendary documenta 10 in 1997 within the series "100 Days - 100 Guests". Furthermore, she was invited to documenta 11 (2002) in Kassel and to documenta 14 (2017) in Athens. In 2017, the artist's NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore dedicated a comprehensive solo exhibition of her photographs and films made in Asia with accompanying artist talks, workshops, lectures, and performances. In 2018 a big solo exhibition of Ulrike Ottinger's films and photographs took place at the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow.

In addition, Ulrike Ottinger also worked as a director for theater and opera and staged, among others, in 2000 at the Berliner Ensemble the world premiere of "Das Lebewohl" by Elfriede Jelinek. Her artist's book "Bildarchive", collecting a selection of photographs from 1975 through 2005, was published in 2005. In her artist's book FLOATING FOOD, published in 2011, Ulrike Ottinger created a comprehensive collage from four decades of her artistic production. The same year, the n.b.k. honored the early artistic work with the exhibition "Ulrike Ottinger. Paris Pop", and a detailed catalog. The catalog "Weltbilder" of the Kestnergesellschaft Hannover comprehensively documents the artist's exhibitions from the 1960s to 2013. In the context of CHAMISSOS SHADOW, the elaborately designed publications "Weltreise", which was accompanied by an exhibition in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, and the artist's book "Chamissos Shadow" were produced.

In 2011, Ulrike Ottinger received the Hannah Höch Prize from the city of Berlin for an outstanding artistic life's work. The Concordia University in Montreal awarded her an honorary doctor of fine arts in 2018.

Filmography (selection)

- 2016 CHAMISSO'S SHADOW (DCP, colour, 720 min. in three parts)
- 2011 UNDER SNOW (35mm, colour, 103 min.)
- 2008 THE KOREAN WEDDING CHEST (35mm, colour, 82 min.)
- 2007 PRATER (35 mm, colour, 104 min.)
- 2004 TWELFE CHAIRS (35 mm, colour, 198 min.)
- 2002 SOUTHEAST PASSAGE. A JOURNEY TO THE NEW BLANK AREAS ON THE EUROPEAN MAP (Digital Betacam, colour and b/w, 363 min.)
- 1997 EXILE SHANGHAI (16 mm, colour, 275 min.)
- 1992 TAIGA. A JOURNEY TO NORTHERN MONGOLIA (16 mm, colour, 501 min.)
- 1990 COUNTDOWN (16 mm, colour, 188 min.)
- 1989 JOHANNA D'ARC OF MONGOLIA (35 mm, colour, 165 min.)
- 1985 CHINA. THE ARTS – THE PEOPLE (16 mm, colour, 270 min.)
- 1984 DORIAN GRAY IN THE MIRROR OF THE YELLOW PRESS (35 mm, colour, 150 min.)
- 1981 FREAK ORLANDO (35 mm, colour, 126 min.)
- 1979 TICKET OF NO RETURN. ALLER - JAMAIS RETOUR (35 mm, colour, 107 min.)
- 1977 MADAME X – AN ABSOLUTE RULER (16 mm, colour, 141 min.)
- 1975 THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE BLUE SAILOR (16 mm, colour, 50 min.)
- 1972/73 LAOKOON & SONS. THE STORY OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF ESMERALDA DEL RIO. (16 mm, b/w, 50 min.)
(sowie diverse Kurzfilme)

Exhibition (selection)

- 2018 The Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow
- 2017 NTU Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore
- 2015 Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
- 2013 kestnergesellschaft, Hannover
- 2012 Sammlung Goetz, München
Das Verborgene Museum, Berlin
- 2011 Neuer Berliner Kunstverein
Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
- 2010 Goethe-Institut, Paris
- 2009 National Gallery of Art, Washington; Harvard Film Archive, Boston; Brandeis University
Cinematheque, Waltham; Redcat, Los Angeles; University Mass. Amherst
- 2008 Brussels Biennale, Brüssel; Cobra Museum, Amsterdam; Shanghai Biennale
- 2007 Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York; Jeu de
Paume, Paris
- 2005 Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal-Unteröwisheim; Salzburger Kunstverein
- 2004 Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam; 3. berlin biennale für
zeitgenössische kunst
- 2002 documenta 11, Kassel
- 2000 Anthology Film Archives, New York; David Zwirner Gallery, New York; Goethe-Institut, New
York
- 1993 Filmmuseum Düsseldorf; Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim
- 1987 steirischer herbst, Graz; Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
- 1982 Cinémathèque française, Paris
- 1981 daadgalerie, Berlin
- 1967 Kunstverein Konstanz; Galerie Werkstatt, Bremen; Salon de la jeune peinture, Paris
- 1965 Galerie ars nova, München ; Kunstverein Konstanz

Books (selection)

- 2015 Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, U. Ottinger: Weltreise. Forster – Humboldt – Chamisso - Ottinger (Exh.-Cat.)
- 2013 kestnergesellschaft: Weltbilder | Ulrike Ottinger. (Exh.-Cat.)
- 2012 Sammlung Goetz: Ulrike Ottinger. (Exh.-Cat.)
- 2011 Neuer Berliner Kunstverein: Paris Pop, n.b.k. Ausstellungen, Bd. 11 (Exh.-Cat.)
Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Ulrike Ottinger. Floating Food. (Exh.-Cat.)
- 2008 Rickels, Laurence A., Ulrike Ottinger: The Autobiography of Art Cinema
- 2005 Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kunsthalle Wien und Witte de With: Ulrike Ottinger. Image Archive. Photographs 1970–2005