



SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST 2021

The Story of Looking

+ *Pre-recorded Q&A*

As he prepares for surgery to restore his vision, award-winning filmmaker Mark Cousins explores the role that visual experience plays in our individual and collective lives. Turning the camera on himself in a deeply personal meditation on the power of looking in his own life, Cousins guides us through the riches of the visible world, a kaleidoscope of extraordinary imagery across cultures and eras.

At a time when we are more assailed by images than ever, *The Story of Looking* draws on art history, biology, neuroscience, psychology, poetry and philosophy, to reveal how looking makes us who we are, lying at the heart of human experience, empathy, discovery and thought.

Cousins shares the pleasure and pain of seeing the world, in all its complexity and contradiction, with eyes wide open. Visually the film draws heavily on Cousins' own personal archive of shots, taken over decades of his global travels, his own private treasure chest of brilliantly caught fragments of time and memory – his own private looking library. These are intercut with film clips, stills, stock footage and found images from the great and dark panorama of the internet.

The film also explores the expressive power of the smartphone, the most powerful and democratic looking technology yet invented, and considers the meaning of the selfie and its relationship to the history of self-portraiture. Filmed from his own bed, the film is both a selfie and a self-portrait, a personal manifesto shot by Cousins' of himself with raw intimacy.

As the Covid-19 pandemic brings another dramatic shift of perspective during the film's making, Cousins reaches out to other lookers for their vision from lockdown, and travels to the future to consider how his looking life will continue to develop until the very end.

'It's a great privilege to work with Mark again, on his most intimate film to date, and to bring his extraordinary vision to audiences across the UK and Ireland', said producers Mary Bell and Adam Dawtrey.

Modern Films' Eve Gabereau adds that she is 'very happy to be working with Mark, Adam and Mary on such an extraordinary film that brings out the essence of our being at a time when we really need to reflect on it, while also being exhilarating, beautiful and personal. We are also excited about connecting with audiences through the book, talks and special screenings as part of the release campaign.'

The film *The Story of Looking* follows on from Mark Cousins' acclaimed book of the same name, first published in 2017, which will be released in paperback this Autumn by Canongate Books: 'Brilliant and eclectic, *The Story of Looking* is a photo album and an art gallery, a road movie and a visual grammar: once you've read it, you'll never see things the same way again.'

The unique film poster artwork is created by Cuban artist Giselle Monzon, a leading figure in Havana's latest wave of innovative graphic design.

Director's Statement

This is the story of something astonishing. It is everywhere, everyday, yet we don't think of it as having a story. It's epic and global. It's a story about our homes, relationships, adventures, creativity, art, science, sport, loves and deaths, but we take it for granted. This thing is almost invisible, and yet it's central to human experience. This is the story of looking. We talk about our family lives, our work lives and love lives, but more fundamental than these, for most of us, are our looking lives. It begins with what we saw when we were children, how we looked at our parents, and homes, and then our cities, and lovers. It then becomes the tale of how our nations looked. How discoverers and scientists saw the world. It ends with the overwhelming looking of the last 200 years, the age of photography, cinema, television, modern celebrity, and Skype. Telling this story will feel like putting on a new set of glasses. It will see life in a new way. How did Homer look? Or Akhenaten, Cezanne, Kahlo, Riefenstahl? What was looking like for our ancient ancestors, and how does that compare to looking in the urban jungle today? What was it like for Ray Charles to have sight taken away in childhood? What did telescopes, microscopes and cinema do to looking? And how is the smartphone, the most powerful looking technology ever invented, transforming our visual consciousness? The story of looking is vast and compelling. In the age of the internet, of smart phone and drones, of Virtual Reality and augmented reality, it's time to tell, for the first time, the epic tale of the visual world.

Mark Cousins is an Irish-Scottish director and writer. His films – including *The First Movie*, *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, *What Is This Film Called Love?*, *Life May Be*, *A Story of Children and Film*, *Atomic*, *Stockholm My Love*, *I Am Belfast* and *The Eyes of Orson Welles* – have premiered in Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Venice film festivals and have won the Prix Italia, a Peabody, the Stanley Kubrick Award, the European Film Award for Innovative Storytelling, and many other prizes. He has filmed in Iraq, Sarajevo during the siege, Iran, across Asia and in America in Europe. He has honorary doctorates from the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling.

Mark's books include *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*, *The Story of Film* and *The Story of Looking*. They have been published around the world. He has collaborated with Tilda Swinton on innovative film events, and tried to find new, passionate, filmic ways to explore his themes: looking, cities, cinema, childhood, and recovery.

He is the Chair of the Belfast Film Festival, a Patron of the Edinburgh International Film Festival and an advisor to Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. His 14 hour documentary *Women Make Film* tries to rethink cinema. It is narrated by Jane Fonda, Tilda Swinton, Sharmila Tagore, Kerry Fox, Debra Winger, Adjoa Andoh and Thandie Newton. His newest films are *The Storms of Jeremy Thomas*, *The Story of Looking* and *The Story of Film: A New Generation*. He has walked across Los Angeles, Belfast, Moscow, Beijing, London, Paris, Berlin, Dakar and Mexico City. He drove from Edinburgh to Mumbai, and loves night swimming.

THE STORY OF LOOKING

Directed, Filmed & Written by: Mark Cousins
Producers: Mary Bell, Adam Dawtrey
Executive Producers: Mark Thomas, Catherine Benkaim, Barbara Timmer
Additional Camera: Diego Almazán de Pablo
Editor: Timo Langer
Composer: Donna McKeivitt
Sound Editor: Ania Przygoda
Sound Designer: Maiken Hansen

UK 2021
90 mins

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Relaxed Screenings: The Reason I Jump

Fri 18 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildfire

Sun 20 Jun 18:40 (+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady); Mon 21 Jun 18:10;
Tue 22 Jun 14:40; Wed 23 Jun 20:50; Thu 24 Jun 14:45

Member Picks: Rumble Fish

Fri 2 Jul 17:30

Projecting the Archive: Trottie True (aka The Gay Lady)

+ intro by BFI Curator Josephine Botting

Tue 6 Jul 18:00

Silent Cinema: Nell Gwyn + intro by BFI Curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 18 Jul 15:30

Seniors' Free Archive Matinee: Cabin in the Sky

+ intro by writer Marcus Powell

Mon 19 Jul 14:00

Experimenta: Born in Flames + discussion

Thu 22 Jul 18:00

Relaxed Screening (tbc)

Tue 27 Jul 18:00

Terror Vision: Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things

Thu 29 Jul 21:00

BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

LIFF Opening Night: WOMB (Women of My Billion)

+ on stage Q&A with Srishti Bakshi and film critic Anna Smith

Thu 17 Jun 17:20

My Beautiful Laundrette

Fri 18 Jun 20:20

The Warrior + on-stage career interview with writer-director Asif Kapadia

Sat 19 Jun 20:30

Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless

Sun 20 Jun 15:00

Searching for Happiness...

Tue 22 Jun 20:50

Nazarband Captive

Wed 23 Jun 20:45

A'hr Kayattam

Thu 24 Jun 18:00

The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo

Sun 27 Jun 15:00

LONDON SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

UK Competition 1: I Forgot More than You'll Ever Know

Sat 26 Jun 21:00

UK Competition 3: Close Quarters

Fri 26 Jun 21:10

UK Competition 2: The Double Life Of...

Mon 28 Jun 17:45

UK Competition 4: Lessons in Survival

Tue 29 Jun 21:10

UK Competition 5: The Devil's in the Details

Wed 30 Jun 17:50

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IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Censor + Q&A with director Prano Bailey-Bond

Thu 1 Jul 20:45

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 5 Jul 18:00

African Odysseys Present: European Premiere: The Milkmaid + Q&A with writer-director Desmond Ovbiagele and producer Oluseun Sowemimo

Sat 10 Jul 14:00

Black Lens Festival Opening Night: UK Premiere:

How to Stop a Recurring Dream + Q&A with director Ed Morris and actor Ruby Barker

Fri 16 Jul 18:00

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Girlfriends

Fri 16 Jul 18:15

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

First Cow From Fri 28 May

After Love From Fri 4 Jun (Q&A with director Aleem Khan and actor Joanna Scanlan on Sun 13 Jun 18:40)

Gunda From Fri 4 Jun

Fargo From Fri 11 Jun

The Reason I Jump From Fri 18 Jun

Nashville From Fri 25 Jun

Ultraviolence From Sat 26 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor Janet Alder

Supernova From Fri 2 Jul

Another Round From Fri 9 Jul

Jumbo From Fri 9 Jul

Deerskin From Fri 16 Jul

Girlfriends From Fri 23 Jul

Mandabi From Fri 23 Jul

CHINESE VISUAL FESTIVAL

Opening Night: UK Premiere: Drifting + intro

Thu 15 Jul 17:50

UK Premiere: Love Poem + intro

Sat 17 Jul 12:00

Spring Tide + intro

Sun 18 Jul 15:00

Back to the Wharf + intro

Wed 21 Jul 17:50

Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue + intro

Sat 24 Jul 14:00

Closing Night: UK Premiere: Shadows + intro

Sun 25 Jul 15:10

BFI PLAYER

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