



Coinciding with the retrospective film series **East Meets West: The Films of Ulrike Ottinger** (streaming at bampfa.org from November 20, 2020, through July 18, 2021), **MATRIX 276** is BAMPFA's first exhibition of Ottinger's photographic work. The works on view, a broad selection of images made over a period of decades and often in far-flung locations, display Ottinger's abiding interests in portraiture and landscape. Often, but not always, her photographic work runs parallel to her film projects. As a filmmaker, Ottinger takes on the dual responsibility of director and cinematographer: Ottinger is the eye behind the camera lens. Her visual art excels in the aesthetic qualities of image-making, be it still photography or time-based cinematic works. Both media reveal her talent as a cameraperson—her eye for detail, frame composition, color, and light—and her worldview.

The three earliest images in this exhibition are portraits Ottinger made between 1975 and 1980 of fellow artists in Berlin: Tabea Blumenschein, Christoph Eichhorn, and Magdalena Montezuma, all of whom are also known for their work as actors. *Oriental Fantasy* (1975), picturing Eichhorn in costume, is an expressive example of Ottinger's interest in transformation and the world of the imaginary. Blumenschein, who poses as the sci-fi character Aelita in a 1976 photograph, was the subject and muse of many portraits Ottinger made during the seventies. She also collaborated extensively with Ottinger on her early films: she was a lead actor as well as the costume and makeup designer for *Laocoon & Sons* (1972–73), *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* (1977), and *Ticket of No Return* (1979). Ottinger made the 1980 photographic series *Distortion Studies* at the time when Montezuma (known for her roles in the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, and Werner Schroeter) played a lead role in Ottinger's *Freak Orlando* (1981). These three portraits and the way each uses costuming and character bear a direct connection to Ottinger's work in the area of narrative cinema.

The other images in this exhibition relate more directly to the documentary impulse in her work. Ottinger's photographs are at once intimate and direct. The portraits of people she encounters on her travels offer a sense of the subject in dialogue with the photographer—often through the subject's direct gaze at the camera. This is beautifully expressed in *Cowboy with Light Pattern* (2004), an image taken in San Antonio, Texas, and *Inspectors* (1987), a striking group composition of five men that Ottinger shot in Pushkar in northwestern India. The remarkable sense of engagement is a characteristic quality of her work in both photography and film.

Ottinger's work as a visual artist is tied to all that she has learned from her travels and studies, from her years spent living in Paris in the 1960s to her European travels and longer journeys to places like China, Mongolia, India, and the Bering Sea region. As a photographer, Ottinger is witness to a world in transition. She documents places and settings that are imbued with a sense of history and distinct cultural customs. This is especially true of the photographs she took in China in 1985 that memorialize an old world and old ways. Her images of China reveal striking moments of a society transforming before our eyes. *Stone Sorting in the Riverbed*, *Teahouse of the Moving Dikes*, and *Convicts Build a Dam on the Chengdu Route*, all shot in Sichuan province in southwest China and exhibited here in large-format prints, depict changes in rural and urban landscapes, while *Photographer and Retoucher in the Old Hutong District of Beijing* and *Delegations Room* show a

China that has all but vanished.

Ottinger is often inspired by her expeditions to remote reaches of the world. She made three trips to Mongolia in 1987 and 1988 in preparation for and to shoot her narrative feature *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989). She returned in 1990 to film her ethnographic documentary *Taiga*—a fascinating journey into timelessness. Shown here are three photographs from the second project, featuring the vast Mongolian landscape and the animal life she encountered there: *The Yurts of the Old Shaman Suren and Her Daughter Bajar*; *Herd of Camels at Altrag Gol*; and *If You Have a White Reindeer, You Do Not Need to Be Afraid of the Deep Snow* (all 1991). Ottinger's epic-length documentaries, *Taiga* (1991–92) and the magnificent and virtuosic *Chamisso's Shadow* (2016), which logs a voyage to the Bering Sea region, are streaming in the film retrospective.

Ottinger's photographs always emphasize form and we see this especially in her appreciation of color, light, and composition. While filming the documentary *Southeast Passage* in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, she photographed *Odessa Market* (2000), a playful patterning of floral printed textiles. Yet another example of foregrounded form is *The Dismembering of the Bait*, with its brilliantly saturated silver and reds, an image Ottinger made while filming scenes for *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press* on the Canary Islands in 1982. In addition to its vibrant use of color photography, the close-up framing and large-format print add to the power of this image.

Ottinger has a flare for capturing moments that are authentic and rich in meaning. *The Guardsmen on the Pushkar Border* (1987) is an exceptional image for its composition, use of color, and expression. Likewise, *Table Tennis* (1985), which offers another perspective on life in Chengdu, China, circa 1985, poignantly contrasts the youthfulness of the children at play with rough-hewn inanimate surfaces. Ottinger is an independent spirit—ambitious and adventuresome—whose accomplished photography and films exhibit great range of experience and curiosity about history, geography, culture, and the natural world. It is easy to see why her work is celebrated and, as one gets to know her as an artist, one can't but be struck by her wisdom, talent, and aesthetic choices as a creative intellect.

Susan Oxtoby
DIRECTOR OF FILM AND SENIOR FILM CURATOR

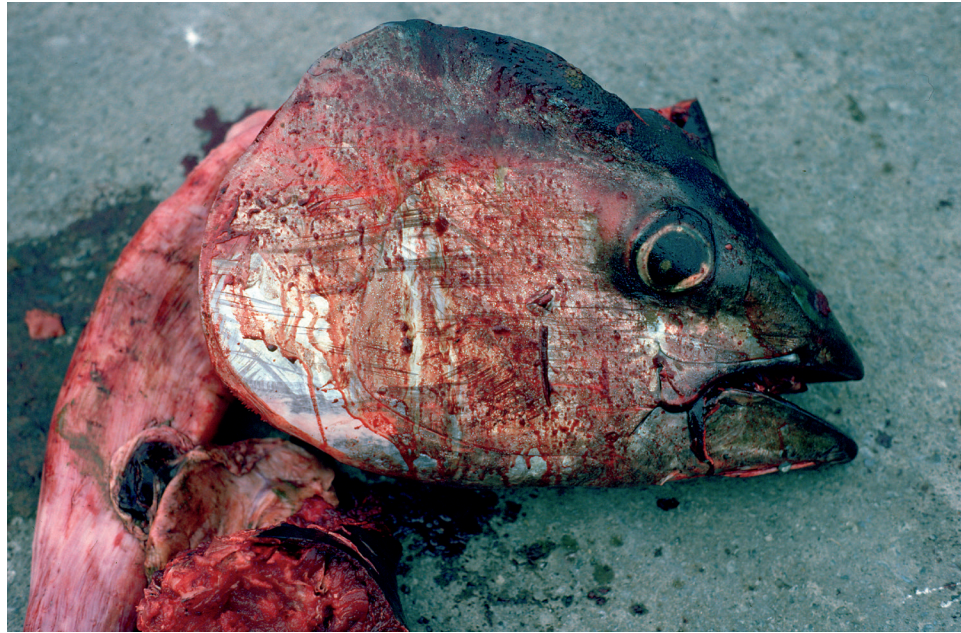
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Ulrike Ottinger MATRIX 276 APRIL 30–JULY 18, 2021
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM • PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

East Meets West: The Films of Ulrike Ottinger
November 20, 2020–July 18, 2021

Streaming at bampfa.org/ottinger

Artist's Talk
bampfa.org/ottinger



Biography

Ulrike Ottinger (b. 1942, Konstanz, Germany) lives in Berlin, where she works as a filmmaker, visual artist, and director of theater and opera. From 1962 until 1968, Ottinger 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, *The Mongolian Double Drawer*. Ottinger's most recent film, *Paris Calligrammes* (2020), is about this transformative period of her life. She has taken part in major art exhibitions, presenting her photography at the Venice Biennale, 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 Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid; and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, among others.

FRONT
Inspectors, 1987

BACK
The Dismembering of the Bait, 1982
The Yurts of the Old Shaman Suren and Her Daughter Bajar, 1991

ABOVE
Odessa Market, 2000

ABOVE RIGHT
Oriental Fantasy, 1975

Checklist

All works courtesy of the artist.

Inspectors, 1987; digital color print; 31½ × 47¼ in.

Mr. Nakataya Bleaches the New Crepe Fabrics, 2011, from *Under Snow*; digital color print from transparency; 19¼ × 29⅞ in.

Oriental Fantasy, 1975; digital black-and-white print from transparency; 25 × 17¼ in. (framed).

Distortion Studies, 1980, from *Freak Orlando*; silver gelatin print; 20⅜ × 15 ⅞ in.

Aelita, 1976; silver gelatin print; 24¾ × 20¾ in.

Cowboy with Light Pattern, 2004, from *Faces, Found Objects and Rough Riders*; silver gelatin print; 36¼ × 52½ in.

Stone Sorting in the Riverbed, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; silver gelatin print; 33½ × 47¼ in.

Photographer and Retoucher in the Old Hutong District of Beijing, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; digital color print from transparency; 35 × 51¼ in.

Delegations Room, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; digital color print from transparency; 27 ⅞ × 40 ⅞ in.

Teahouse of the Moving Dikes, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; color print from transparency; 27 ⅞ × 40 ⅞ in.

Convicts Build a Dam on the Chengdu—Kunming Route, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; color print; 27⅞ × 40⅞ in.

Table Tennis, 1985, from *China. The Arts—The People*; digital color print from transparency; 35 × 51¼ in.

The Yurts of the Old Shaman Suren and Her Daughter Bajar, 1991, from *Taiga*; color print from transparency; 30¼ × 44 ⅞ in.

Herd of Camels at Altrag Gol, 1991, from *Taiga*; digital color print from transparency; 24⅜ × 36 in. (framed).

If You Have a White Reindeer, You Do Not Need To Be Afraid of the Deep Snow, 1991, from *Taiga*; color print from transparency; 30¼ × 44⅞ in.

The Dismembering of the Bait, 1982, from *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*; digital color print from transparency; 37 × 54¼ in.

Guardsmen on the Pushkar Border, 1987; color print from transparency; 32⅝ × 48⅞ in.

Odessa Market, 2000, from *Southeast Passage*; digital color print from transparency; 25⅝ × 37¼ in.

