

Faces Places [12A] 2017 | France | 94 min

UK release date **14th September 2018**

Director **JR, Agnès Varda**

Screenplay **JR, Agnès Varda**

Cinematographer **Joshua James Richards**

Cast **Roberto De Angelis ; Claire Duguet ; Julia Fabry ; Nicolas Guicheteau ; Romain Le Bonniec ; Raphaël Minnesota ; Valentin Vignet**

Cinema has always been a medium that worships the top dog with only drops of recognition trickling down to the anonymous armies whose assists are integral. Directors are more often than not content to bask in their perceived roles as superhuman magicians. Faces Places is a subtly self-reflexive documentary that swims against this tide, inviting audiences to see that filmmaking is a process of having conversations with people, and enveloping each individual and their private creativity within the wider collaborative process. Art is a form of social work or, rather, it can be with the right people at the helm.

Those people are Varda and her unlikely kindred spirit, the French photographer and muralist JR. They make an endearing and striking duo – an odd couple forged before a word of dialogue has even been spoken. At the time of filming, she is 88, while he is 33. Varda is short and roundish, with her trademark white bowl-cut fringed with amber. A lifelong lover of colour, her outfits are bright. JR is lanky, bald and styled like a blind jazz musician, all in black, complete with black hat and black shades. He is teased by Varda about the perma-present sunglasses, and this low key ribbing paves the way for as emotionally heavy a moment as this playful film has to deal. Eyes – what they see, who they see and how these visions land – are the lenses which connect to the filmmaker's soul.

Faces Places, and its French title Visages Villages, aptly bears out Varda's 'down-to-earth' mission. For these two elements make up the film's core

ingredient list: faces and places. A sprightly narrated overview delivered by the two filmmakers explains how they were both magnetically drawn to one another. They meet, bond, play and eat chocolate éclairs. Then they hit the road in a van equipped with a giant mobile poster printer. They search for people to photograph. Each subject is then blown up and printed out big enough to paste onto the nearest empty wall.

Every face-owner is given space to talk about the particulars of their life and pass comment on how it feels to see a giant image of themselves, or a loved one, looking out across their locale. In a village in Northern France, Jeannine, a woman who refuses to leave the row of miners' cottages where her childhood memories live, begins to cry. A shy waitress in Bonnieux, Southern France is severely weirded out when her image goes viral. There is no narrative agenda to angle what is happening and how it is affecting people. It is just happening and it is being documented.

The Beaches of Agnès from 2008 is nominally Varda's big autobiography, but this more streamlined work distills in a disarmingly breezy fashion the DNA of who she is as a human, as an artist, and as a humane artist.

After: Sophie Monks Kaufman, Little White Lies, 22 July 2018

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