

software, toys, biotech and PR in the sphere of the 'creative industries' bolstered the employment metrics to the point at which 'econometric' arguments stacked up. In the process, however, definitional power was handed over to the arch-bullshit job: the consultant. We have ceded so much ground in this regard that radical proposals that depend on a justice-based argument for art and culture, such as a universal basic income (UBI) for artists, face a steep uphill struggle for legitimacy.

In this interregnum O'Connor is concerned by the peripheral role of art and culture in the radical future imaginaries that are emerging, by which he means concepts like Kate Raworth's 'doughnut economics' model of sustainable development that incorporates ecological and social justice. Speaking to this failing, he makes the 'bread and roses' argument to suggest that art and culture should sit in the pantheon of fundamental social goods such as housing and health-care, without being made reducible to them (as they often are in the 'social prescribing' speak, for example). His is an argument that will find many sympathetic ears, perhaps especially from those who peddle the 'creative industries' while nursing a private sense of creative dissatisfaction.

For O'Connor, making art and culture an essential pillar of democratic living is epitomised by the idea of collective consumption. Where the business models of streaming platforms force us to consume culture alone, he advocates for common spaces to engage with art, and with each other. In this, his focus on international organisations (UN and UNESCO, Disney and other cultural multinationals) obscures the spaces in which art and culture is – and has always been – operating outside the cultural hegemony of the 'creative industries': independent, often artist-led grassroots activities, such as record labels putting out music without any hope of returns, art exhibitions in apartments etc. Too off-grid to quantify, and often mounted by those living precarious lives, these, nonetheless, are examples of art and culture operating in common. They show that the hegemony of the 'creative industries' has never been complete, and they offer us spaces to weather the raging interregnum together.

Justin O'Connor, *Culture is Not an Industry – Reclaiming art and culture for the common good*, Manchester University Press, 2024, 304pp, pb, £14.99, 978 1 526171 26 9.

**Laura Harris** is a sociologist based in Liverpool.



## Film

### Chantal Akerman: Travelling

The first films visitors encounter in 'Chantal Akerman: Travelling' form a quartet of recently rediscovered shorts that the artist shot in 1967 for her application to the Brussels films school, INSAS. Made when Akerman was a teenager on holiday with her family in the Belgian coastal resort of Knokke, they star Marilyn Watelet, her lifelong friend and professional ally, with whom she would later establish the production company Paradise Films. In the looped projections, Akerman sits in a convertible, grins and waves at the camera; Watelet wanders through town, looking into shop windows before stealing cash from a lady's purse (played by Akerman's mother, Natalia). These formative pieces contain the threads that Akerman would weave through nearly five decades of storytelling across film and installation works: travel, friends and family, fascinating female characters, unruly energy and humour, and, most of all, the use of a camera to reveal extraordinary facets of ordinary life.

Akerman was offered a place at INSAS, but she managed just a few months there, disappointed with the school's scientific approach to filmmaking, so out of tune with her desire to play and have fun with it. She pursued that inclination with *Saute Ma Ville (Blow Up My Town)*, 1968, a 13-minute anarchic, burlesque manifesto for feminine liberation. In a typical Brussels apartment kitchen, to a soundtrack of exuberant vocal improvisation, Akerman frenetically cooks and eats spaghetti, drinks red wine, cleans, scrubs black polish into her shoes and, unexpectedly, to her legs, and gazes intently in the mirror. To conclude this domestic tragicomedy, she switches on the gas, leans over the stove, and blows herself and the whole thing up. Soon after making the film, Akerman left Belgium for Paris, a city then saturated with its own revolutionary spirit.

Along with 'Histoire de ne pas rire: Surrealism in Belgium' and 'James Ensor. Maestro', 'Chantal Akerman: Travelling' is part of a trio of shows at Bozar focusing on Belgian artists which marks Belgium's 2024 presidency of the EU Council. Although Akerman lived in New York and Paris for much of her adult life, and travelled widely to make her work, she kept coming back to Brussels, casting the city as a character in her films, notably the peerless *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, 1975, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, one month shy of her 25th birthday (the film is part of

Title	<i>don't worry i won't forget you</i> wanawal
Curated by	ÉVAR HUSSAYNI & SARAH HAMED
Presented by	THE WEST ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S ART LIBRARY
Tues - Sat 11am - 5pm 14th June - 10th Aug Forma HQ, Great Dover St, London, SE1 4GW	
<div> <div>FORMA</div> <div>SWISS cultural fund UK</div> <div>ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND</div> <div>Supported using public funding by</div> </div>	





Chantal Akerman, *Les Années 80* (*The Eighties*), 1983, contact sheet

a complete retrospective of Akerman's films organised by the Brussels Cinematek). In the exhibition this film is represented by archival material including set photographs and the 17-page script – a model of concision for a film so profoundly concerned with duration and with a running time of 201 minutes. The exhibition also includes *Woman Sitting after Killing*, Akerman's haunting 2001 revisiting of *Jeanne Dielman*, which loops the final scene across seven slightly out-of-sync monitors on plinths arranged in an arc.

The piece is one of seven video installations and around a dozen films included in the exhibition, ranging from shorts to TV films and features across an array of genres: documentary, drama, musical, portrait and self-portrait. A timeline with descriptions of projects runs along the wall alongside and between the works; together, they chronicle Akerman's career, concluding with her final installation, *NOW*, 2015, in which five screens hang from the ceiling and two floor projections present looped footage of deserts shot from moving vehicles, with a cacophonous soundtrack of engines and wheels, gunshots and shouts. Archival material relating to projects is also presented on the wall, behind glass, a curatorial choice that chimes with the vertical plane of cinema. Film treatments, scripts, location and production shots, press kits and handwritten notes give a sense of Akerman's work and a glimpse of Akerman herself across the decades: we read her handwriting, see her on set in her role as director and, frequently, as actor.

Like *Woman Sitting after Killing*, several of Akerman's installations incorporate material from pre-existing films, reworked to affect viewers in new ways, and to explore their spatial and non-linear potential. For Akerman, creating installations involved sculpting film, and she wanted to make viewers aware of their physical experience of time. Nowhere are these sculptural and temporal concerns more affecting than in *D'Est, au bord de la fiction* (*From the East: Bordering on Fiction*), 1995, an impressionistic tour de force commissioned as a reflection on the reunification of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was the first installation in a loose trilogy exploring what Akerman described as her obsession with 'history, the big and the small, fear, mass graves, hatred of the other, of oneself, and also the dazzle of beauty'. Also included in the show are *Sud* (*South*), 1999, which recounts the 1998 lynching of James Byrd Jr in Texas, and *De l'autre côté* (*From the Other Side*), 2002, partly filmed at the US-Mexico border, which explores the plight of Mexican migrants crossing into the US and their forced relocation to Arizona.

*D'Est* was shot during several road trips in 1992 and 1993, when Akerman and her team drove across East Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine, with Akerman stopping along the way to film 'whatever moves me'. Akerman's spontaneity, her trust in her own powers of observation, and her ability to recognise and act on emotions has resulted in a treasure trove of vignettes of post-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe. The footage was first presented as a feature-length documentary; the main part of its sculptural incarnation consists of 24 monitors set on plinths around one-metre high, grouped in triptychs. Moving through and between these films brings the viewer face to face with people walking and standing outdoors on a winter's night, in church, waiting at a train station, or at home slicing bread and sausage. Ambient sounds layer up: opera and pop, a cello playing classical music, car horns and traffic, speech and birdsong. On the final, 25th screen, set on the floor of a small cubicle at the far end of the installation, Akerman muses on the importance of writing when making a film, of persevering, even when one doesn't know what the film is about, only to discover that 'in the end', her work is always about the same thing: her own inescapable 'primal scene', which she describes as 'images of evacuation, of walking in the snow with packages toward an unknown place, of faces and bodies placed next to one another'. Akerman was the eldest daughter of Polish Jewish refugees who settled in Belgium after the Second World War: her father spent the war in hiding while her mother survived internment in the Auschwitz concentration camp, an experience about which she never spoke. Their move to Belgium was yet another form of travel for Akerman to reckon with and transmute into film.

Chantal Akerman's exhibition 'Travelling' is at Bozar, Brussels to 21 July.

**Ellen Mara De Wachter** is a writer based in London.

## Reports

### Keith Piper at Tate Britain

'You'd never see a white woman depicted like that: up a tree!'

'I don't know,' I demur, 'white women are depicted in some pretty degrading positions ... but I wouldn't expect to see a white child dragged along by the rope tying their hands together!'

'Children were cable-tied only last week in Australia – just for swimming in a swimming pool,' she muses. We reflect on the recent news story of three Aboriginal children forcibly restrained with self-locking nylon zip-ties, and imagine plastic cutting into skin.

I am having a conversation with two women I barely know; the conversation that Keith Piper wants us to have in front of his new work *Viva Voce*, a two-screen video installation almost the width of Tate Britain's former restaurant for which it has been commissioned, a dining room I had only ever glimpsed through its glass doors. Notably, it has been closed since 2020 in response to an unresolved controversy surrounding its site-specific mural by Rex Whistler (1905–1944) (Artnotes AM454). My black companions express the opinion that the mural, *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats*, 1927, depicting exotic beasts and human figures travelling through a fantastical landscape