



# Faces, Places

**Director:** Agnes Varda

**Country:** France

**Date:** 2018

A review by Ann Hornaday for *The Washington Post*:

Just when your feelings about film culture and human nature couldn't get any grimmer, along comes a film like "Faces Places" to restore your faith in both.

A collaborative project between the legendary director Agnès Varda (best known for her influential French New Wave film "Cleo From 5 to 7" and, later, the tough, uncompromising "Vagabond") and the French street artist JR, this documentary takes the shape of a road trip infused with equal parts whimsy, artistic experimentation and awe-inspiring monumentality. The film opens with Varda, 89, meeting up with JR, an anonymous photographer whose habit of superimposing massive images of faces and eyes on such public surfaces as walls, streets and rooftops has made him a star on a par with Banksy. They discover a mutual fascination with people and their environments and embark on a tour de France in JR's customized van — complete with large-format camera and printer — to see what they can see.



What Varda and JR discover — and what "Faces and Places" celebrates with such brio and bracing humor — are the farms, factories and shipping docks where everyday people make their living and create their lives. Inviting these citizens into their project, they paste their enormous portraits onto houses, trains, barns, town squares and, in one memorable instance, an abandoned German pillbox, creating homages to shared history and human connection

that are both intimate and epic. While Varda and JR ply their trade as visual troubadours, they contemplate their own ideas of what constitutes artistic vision, with Varda's eyesight compromised by age and disease, and JR's obscured behind the dark sunglasses he wears like a self-protective totem.

Harking back to Varda's most definitive work — including the feminism of "Cleo," the restlessness of "Vagabond" and the creative energies of her 2000 documentary "The Gleaners and I" — "Faces Places" often plays like a particularly poignant summa of her extraordinary and underrecognized career. That tone is captured in the film's most wrenching passage, when an encounter with a figure from her New Wave past is hijacked by what looks suspiciously like a fit of male ego, insecurity and reflexive competitiveness. Varda doesn't hide her heartbreak, but the moment soon gives way to a small but moving victory. She's the one who has survived, and who has continued to push herself creatively in ways that are bold, risky and utterly of a piece with the past of the medium she loves and has come to embody. "Faces Places" is a film of sheer joy, its exuberance surpassed only by its tenderness and purity of purpose.

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