

*But there on the sunny sands, a human shadow, not unlike my own, slid past, wandering alone and seemingly strayed from his Master. This sight awakened in me a powerful drive: shadow, thought I, are you looking for thy Master? Your Master I will be.*

*'Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story' by Adelbert von Chamisso*

## **Chamisso's Shadow** **A Journey to the Bering Sea by Ulrike Ottinger in Three Chapters**

***Chamisso's Shadow* (2016), German avant-garde director Ulrike Ottinger's filmic journey to the lands and people of the Bering Strait region will receive its UK premiere at the Regent Street Cinema over the weekend of Friday 20 – Sunday 22 July 2018. Divided into three chapters, the twelve-hour long film will be shown over three consecutive days and be complemented by introductions.**

Inspired by the sea expeditions and writings of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers and their accompanying naturalists, particularly Adelbert von Chamisso, this epic travelogue combines grand cinematography, detailed observations and a many-voiced commentary to create a unique ethnographically inflected documentary essay on the interplay of culture, politics and nature in this remote northern region between the Eurasian and American continents.

Known for such daring and outlandish films as *Madame X – An Absolute Ruler* (1978), *Ticket of No Return* (1979) or *Freak Orlando* (1981), **Ulrike Ottinger** has for many years also pursued a passionate interest in travelling and exploring the daily lives, customs, myths, and histories of different cultures across the globe, whether for example in Mongolia (*Taiga* 1991/92), eastern Europe (*South East Passage* (2002), or Korea (*The Korean Wedding Chest*, 2007). ***Chamisso's Shadow*** is the result of one of her most recent voyages. In 2014, she undertook a **three-month journey between Alaska and the Kamchatka Peninsula and north and south of the Bering Strait** with the aim of learning more about the different ethnic groups in the region such as the Yupik, Itelmen, Evens, Chukchi, and the Aleuts, who all share living from and with the sea. An outstanding still photographer and camera woman, Ottinger captured people's daily activities such as working, singing or dancing, taking her time to focus on recording old techniques and customs, while also filming plants and animals and opening up the perspective to take in breathtaking landscape views. Adding to the visual feast it provides, the film also offers the pleasure of letting us hear the sounds of nature and of the many indigenous languages spoken by the locals giving vivid accounts of their daily lives and histories.

The filmed and recorded material, maps and photographs Ottinger has gathered as well as quotes from her logbook are juxtaposed with the observations and thoughts of some of the explorers that inspired her journey, such as **Alexander von Humboldt, Vitus Jonassen Bering, Georg Wilhelm Steller, Reinhold and Georg Forster, William Anderson, James Cook and the eponymous Adelbert von Chamisso**. Passages spoken by actors and taken from logbooks and other writings by these travelling researchers open up the gap between the past and the present. Their records and poignant reflections made in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century highlight the impact that changing political systems, technical progress and economic developments have had on the region. Ottinger shows how subsistence fishery survives next to industrial fishing, how centuries interweave, time passes and yet stands still. Twelve hours of cinema float by and gain us centuries.

Organised by the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image (BIMI), The Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM) at Westminster University, the Goethe-Institut London and LUX with support from Open City Documentary Film Festival and in association with the German Screen Studies Network. With special thanks to Ulrike Ottinger Film Production and The Regent Street Cinema.



CREAM



## Venue and Tickets

The Regent Street Cinema, 307 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW, [www.regentstreetcinema.com](http://www.regentstreetcinema.com)  
T 020 7911 5050 Call us (12pm – 10pm)

**Tickets** are £7 per screening, and will automatically discount to £20 total if all four are purchased together.

## Screening Schedule

**Fri, 20.07.2018, 7:00 PM**

**Chapter 1 –Alaska and the Aleutian Islands (193 min)**

**- Introduced by Helen de Witt -**

This first part of *Chamisso's Shadow* takes us from Alaska to and across the Aleutian Islands, which form a chain of larger and smaller islands extending from Alaska along the southern limits of the Bering Sea to the Kamchatka Peninsula. This section is interspersed with passages from *Peter Schlemihls Miraculous Story* (1813). In this novella by the poet and naturalist Adelbert von Chamisso (1781 – 1838), the protagonist, having sold his soul to the devil and being shunned by his fellow men as a result, travels the world in seven-league boots and devotes himself to the study of nature. Two years after the publication of this story von Chamisso himself was appointed as botanist to the three-year long 'Rurik Expedition' (1815 – 1818) to the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea, which he documented in several publications of varying formats and styles.

**Sat, 21.07.2018, 2:15 PM**

**Chapter 2 –Part 1: Chukotka (192 min)**

**&**

**Sat, 21.07.2018, 7:00 PM**

**Chapter 2 – Part 2: Chukotka and Wrangel Island (156 min)**

In this second section which consists of two parts, Ottinger's ongoing journey takes her to Chukotka located in the Far Eastern region of Russia and Wrangel Island north of the Bering Strait. Ottinger establishes links to the ancient and recent histories of the surrounding islands, where the stories of characters as disparate as Roman Abramovich and Charles Cook are interlinked in the fabric of the islands' memories. A recurring motif is the logbook, about which Ottinger says: "The logbook of imagination that accompanied me on my journey and the logbook of reality that I encountered turn into a new creation: a spatial, poetic, and cinematic reality." These new creations also allow for a temporal fluidity as demonstrated by this section's engagement with the Yupik people. Known as Russia's Inuits from a small village called Novoye Chaplino, they perform dances taking inspiration from moments in their everyday life.

**Sun, 22.07.2018 2:00 PM**

**Chapter 3 – Kamtchatka and Bering Island (177 min)**

**- Introduced by Jean McNeil -**

The final section of *Chamisso's Shadow* leads us from Bering Island to the coast of Kamchatka. The journey is the same previously taken by the German botanist, zoologist, physician and explorer Georg Wilhelm Steller and along the route Ottinger films beautiful natural landscapes dominated by the Kronotsky Volcano. This section of the film retains the previous chapters' way of capturing a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, an approach which Ottinger explains: "On this trip, I collected everything I encountered that seemed noteworthy: pictures and original footage of people who still speak indigenous languages, songs, dances and nature." The materials, stories and experiences gathered by Ottinger throughout her journey allow the filmmaker to present the multifaceted cultural, linguistic and geographic changes which occur over time.

## Film Credits

*Chamisso's Shadow (Chamissos Schatten)*, Germany 2016, colour, *Dolby 5.1*, 718 mins. DCP, With English subtitles.

Screenplay, Direction & Camera: Ulrike Ottinger, Camera Assistance & 2<sup>nd</sup> Camera: Stefan Gohlke, Editor: Bettina Blickwede, Sound: Sascha Heiny, produced by Ulrike Ottinger (Ulrike Ottinger Filmproduktion), Udo Bemer (Commissioning Editor ZDF/3Sat), Jens Stubenrauch (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg), Production Company: Ulrike Ottinger Filmproduktion (Berlin). Voices: Hanns Zischler (Adelbert von Chamisso), Burghart Klaußner (Georg Wilhelm Steller), Thomas Thieme (Captain James Cook), Ulrike Ottinger.

## About the Director

**Ulrike Ottinger** (\*1942) is a multiple award-winning filmmaker, artist, photographer, writer, theatre, opera and radio director. Born in Konstanz (Germany) in 1942, she moved to Paris at the age of twenty, where she lived for six years as a freelance artist and attended lectures by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu in art history, religious studies and anthropology. In 1966 she wrote her first screenplay entitled *The Mongolian Double Drawer*. After her return to West Germany, she founded a "filmclub visuell" as well as a gallery and press in her native Konstanz, where, together with Tabea Blumenstein, she also shot her first film *Laocoon & Sons* (1972-1973). After moving to Berlin in 1973 she continued making films, creating a variety of experimental feature films including *Madame X – An Absolute Ruler* (1977) and the 'Berlin trilogy' comprised of *Ticket of No Return* (1979), *Freak Orlando* (1981) and *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press* (1984) that confirmed her as a strong unorthodox voice in German cinema.

Starting with *China. The Arts – The People* (1985), she pursued her interest in foreign cultures, her travels to Asia and Eastern Europe resulting in documentaries such as *Taiga* (1992) or *South East Passage* (2002) as well as feature films such as *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia* (1989) or *Twelve Chairs* (2004). Other films, such as *Under Snow* (2011), filmed in Japan, combine both documentary and dramatized elements to explore ancient myths and contemporary customs, or follow more recent historical traces such as *Exile Shanghai* (1997) about exiled Jews, and *Prater* (2008), her visually vibrant portrait of the Viennese amusement park. Ulrike Ottinger's films have been screened at international festivals from Cannes to Toronto as well as retrospectives including at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. They have received many awards, such as the audience award in Montréal and the German Film Prize (Gold, for *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia*) in 1989 and the German Film Critics' Award in 1986 (for *China. The Art – The People*) and 2008 (for *Prater*).

Ulrike Ottinger's filmmaking practice has always run parallel to her work as a photographer, her still images often setting the focus while filming. Her photographs have been shown in major art exhibitions including at the Biennale di Venezia, the Documenta, and the Berlin Biennale. She has had solo exhibitions at, among other places, the Witte-de-With Museum in Rotterdam, the Museo Nacional Reina Sofia in Madrid, Kunst-Werke Berlin, and the David Zwirner Gallery in New York. Her artist's book "Bildarchive," collecting a selection of photographs from 1975 through 2005, was published in 2005. In her artist's book "Floating Food", published in 2011, Ulrike Ottinger created a comprehensive collage from four decades of her artistic production. In 2011 she was awarded the Hannah-Höch-Prize of the State of Berlin for her creative work.

**As part of Glasgow International the Hunterian Art Gallery is currently showing *Still Moving: the Films and Photographs of Ulrike Ottinger* which continues until Sunday, 29 July 2018.**

[glasgowinternational.org/artists/ulrike-ottinger/](http://glasgowinternational.org/artists/ulrike-ottinger/)

## About the Speakers

**Helen de Witt** is an independent lecturer and curator. She teaches at Birkbeck University of London, University of the Arts London, and the National Film and Television School. She is programme advisor for the BFI London Film Festival Experimenta section for international artists' moving image. Previously she was Head of Cinemas at the BFI, and prior to that Festivals Producer for the BFI London Film Festival and BFI Flare. She is also a director of The Service Co-op, an independent production company dedicated to making films about social justice, the arts and creative collaborations. She has published on independent cinema and artists' film.

**Jean McNeil** was writer-in-residence with the British Antarctic Survey for a year in 2005-6, when she spent four and a half months in the Antarctic. She has also worked with BAS as a writer in residence aboard a ship-bound expedition to Greenland, and has held residencies in the Falkland Islands and in the Svalbard Archipelago in the Arctic and has journeyed by polar icebreaker across the Atlantic twice. She has published four books on the polar regions, including *Ice Diaries*, a memoir/travel narrative that won the Grand Prize (and also the Adventure Travel category) at the Banff Mountain Film Festival in Canada in 2016. She teaches at the University of East Anglia where she is Reader in Creative Writing.

## Press Contacts:

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**Trailer and Clips:** [Trailer](#), **Clip:** [Cold Bay: Aleuten](#), **Clip:** [Alma Smithhisler in Teller](#)