

## Fresh Takes on Director Wim Wenders

Ed Lachman, Martin Scorsese and others share thoughts on director Wim Wenders and his work



Solveig Dommartin in 'Wings of Desire,' a 1987 Wim Wenders film. PHOTO: ORION PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION

Wim Wenders has been making movies since the late 1960s, which means the Museum of Modern Art had a lot to choose from when curating the career-spanning retrospective of his work that opens Monday.

The German director is known for his existential road movies ("Alice in the Cities"), romantic dramas of lyrical melancholy ("Wings of Desire") and Academy Award-nominated documentaries—such as the new "Salt of the Earth," about Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado.

"The time is right for a number of reasons" to revisit his work, said Josh Siegel, film curator at the museum. Among them: Mr. Wenders has completed digital restorations on several earlier films that had been out of circulation and are ripe for fresh appreciation.

The director will introduce screenings throughout the opening week, joined at times by a frequent collaborator, Austrian novelist and playwright Peter Handke.

The Wall Street Journal asked a few of the director's collaborators and friends to talk about their experiences with Mr. Wenders and his work.

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY



A man plays in a pachinko parlor in "Tokyo-Ga" (1985). PHOTO: WIM WENDERS/WIM WENDERS STIFTUNG

## Ed Lachman , Cinematographer

*Mr. Lachman worked with Mr. Wenders on "The American Friend" (1977), "Lightning Over Water" (1980) and "Tokyo-Ga" (1985). He talks about the latter, one of Mr. Wenders's so-called notebook films, a homage to the great mid-20th-century Japanese filmmaker, Yasujirô Ozu.*

EL: It's the film I feel closest to because it was just Wim and me. We were the whole crew. For me, he's a philosophical anthropologist of images. He's always telling stories through lost and found images.

We see these people in pachinko parlors, in parks dancing with themselves. He portrays people engaged in these isolated activities, escaping themselves. It was just us responding to what we experienced and felt.

Every day was a kind of discovery. We found the images as we went. It was a search to find what images could be left that Ozu was looking at, and looking at the images that were changing in contemporary life in Japan. Wim took over a year in editing the film, and it became a beautiful diary of our experience.

## JAMES COHAN GALLERY



Chris Thomas King performs as Blind Willie Johnson in "The Soul of a Man" (2003). PHOTO: COURTESY OF EVERETT COLLECTION

### **Martin Scorsese, Director**

*Mr. Scorsese produced the 2003 PBS series "The Blues." He talked about Mr. Wenders's contribution, "The Soul of a Man."*

MS: I've known Wim for many years now. For both of us, cinema and music are inseparable, so we've always had a special kinship, I think. From the start of his career, Wim's films, both fictional and nonfictional, have been not just inspired by, but *immersed* in, music. The very first picture he ever made was named after the Lovin' Spoonful song "Summer in the City," and it's actually filled with music by the Kinks.

I remember talking to Wim about his contribution to the "Blues" series. He proposed a semi-fictional movie about three of his blues heroes—Skip James, Blind Willie Johnson and J.B. Lenoir—that would be shot on film with a vintage hand-cranked silent-movie camera. Of course I was excited—*that* was a movie I wanted to see. The opening image of the satellite in orbit, over which we hear Blind Willie Johnson's "Soul of a Man," is unforgettable.

### **Laurie Anderson , Composer and performer**

*Ms. Anderson contributed music for "Faraway, So Close!"—in which her late husband, rocker Lou Reed, made cameo appearances—and "Wings of Desire" (1987), for which she said she received a sudden request.*

LA: I'm mixing my own movie right now and I know how last-minute crazy it can get. Wim called me up and said, "I'm mixing the film and I need some angel fragments." That's all he said.

# JAMES COHAN GALLERY

OK, not sure what that means, but I put some things that I thought might be called “angel fragments” on a cassette, and sent it to him, and he used the cassette version!

I didn’t think in my wildest dreams that he would use the cassette. It was so genius what he did. That little piece you hear on headphones. Someone on a train is listening to a song—which makes it perfectly reasonable. That is so smart to use music that way, sort of disintegrated. So it changed my mind about the way a lot of things could be done.

## **Nastassja Kinski, Actress**

*Ms. Kinski made one of her most memorable performances in “Paris, Texas” (1984). Playing a woman who has abandoned her family, she has an unexpected conversation with her lost husband, played by Harry Dean Stanton, from behind a one-way window at a Texas strip club.*

NK: I first met Wim on the very first film he cast me in when I was 12 (“Wrong Move”), so “Paris” was our second film, 10 years later. Years had passed since I met him, and he was so quiet and calm. I was still a kid and that feeling of the first work, the crew and Wim continued throughout our films: a sense of family.

Harry Dean I had also worked with before. So there was a feeling of family, doing a film about a family, and a love story and loss and reuniting, reliving moments from the past to be able to live the present and reunite. The scene with Harry Dean we rehearsed a lot, but then we just lived it inside of ourselves.

## **Siri Hustvedt, Novelist**

*Ms. Hustvedt, known for her novel “The Blazing World,” has been friends with Mr. Wenders since 1990. She discusses “Kings of the Road” (1976), a kind of minimalist buddy movie about a film-projector repairman and a hitchhiker, riding along the border between West and East Germany.*

SH: I saw “Kings of the Road” in New York long before I met Wim. I remember that I did not really understand what I was watching, but I was deeply impressed nevertheless. For days afterward I was haunted by images of the sky in the film. They still appear to me from time to time as if I had dreamed them.

What the movie did was to make me think about sky and our small human movements beneath it. At their best, Wim’s films...make you feel your own sensual consciousness.