



Artavazd Peleschian: Our Century

By Francois Niney, Constantin Wulff

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The cinematic oeuvre of Artavazd Peleschian--11 films--is considered one of the most influential of Russian documentary cinema. Shifting between documentary and experiment, between poetry and quotidian life, the work of this reclusive Armenian filmmaker brings image and sound together in an imposing overall composition. He calls his unique editing technique "contrapuntal editing," and through it achieves tension-filled sequences and sharp image changes, often set to the rhythmic power of music. In the tradition of Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, Peleschjan has revived the avant-garde film tradition. But though he was recognized and supported by Jean-Luc Godard in the 60s, his work has remained largely elusive. Nevertheless, it is screened regularly at film festivals and, since the 90s, Peleschian has gained some art world recognition: Paul Virilio included Peleschian's longest work, *Our Century* (1982), a key role in the exhibition *Ce qui arrive* at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. *Our Century* is a grandiose black-and-white film about the dreams and nightmares of the progress of civilization in the twentieth century. It shows what Hannah Arendt recognized in 1968, that progress and catastrophe are flip sides of the same coin. *Seasons* (1972-75) gives a striking picture of daily life in Armenia, of life caught between progress and tradition, still marked by its dependence on and vulnerability to the forces of nature. The short film *Inhabitants* (1970) shows, partly through archival footage, partly through images from the filmmaker's own camera, animals of the steppe fleeing from an unspecified but constant threat.

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