

Les Films de l'Atalante  
present

an Iwaso Films & Les Films Hatari production



## American Journal

a film written and directed by  
Arnaud des Pallières

Documentary | France | Running time : 1h48 | DCP 1.85 | sound 5.1 | image 1.33  
Color and B/W | English Version

Photos and teasers downloadable [here](#)

INTERNATIONAL SALES / INTERNATIONAL PR  
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FESTIVALS  
Pascale Ramonda  
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## BERLINALE SCREENINGS

12.02.22	21:00	CINEMAXX 9 Press screening
13.02.22	09:00	CINEMAXX 4 Press screening
13.02.22	20:30	CINEMAXX 4 Press screening
14.02.22	12:30	CINEMAXX 7 Premiere
14.02.22	13:45	CUBIX 1 Market screening
15.02.22	17:30	CUBIX 7
16.02.22	20:30	CUBIX 7
18.02.22	12:00	AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE
19.02.22	18:00	CINEMAXX 6 & 7



## SYNOPSIS

Think of America, I told myself.

The cities, the homes, the people, the arrivals, the departures, the children coming and leaving, death, life, movement, speech.

Think of the deep sigh inside of all things alive in America. Bend down. And pick up what others let go to waste from life. So the wind won't blow it all away.

INTERVIEW WITH  
THE DIRECTOR

ARNAUD DES PALLIÈRES

The idea of America has been shaped by the seventh art. Indeed, what sets the short history of the United States apart is how it has been documented almost from its inception by film. In the shadow of the great American cinema, there is a vernacular heritage made up of countless private archives, home movies, institutional, advertising and educational films. In 2000, Arnaud des Pallières discovered the Prelinger Archives website, which brings together an immense collection of anonymous films from the beginnings of cinema to the advent of video in the 1970s. In response to a commission from Arte on the theme of the portraiture, he immersed himself in this ocean of films collected by Rick Prelinger, founder of the site, only to emerge ten years later with a short film *Diane Wellington* (2010) and a feature film *American Dust* (2011). Ten years for two hours of film. *Diane Wellington* laying the first stone of what will become a lifelong artistic achievement: assembling this ocean of American images to edit a film that matches his desires. *American Journal* (2022) was edited in three months. The form of the diary, says the filmmaker, was self-evident, underpinned by a few models such as Jonas Mekas' film *Walden*, in which he collected personal notes about events and people.

***Your editing is based on the principle of alternating shots and intertitles that give rhythm to the flow of time. An intimate and organic relationship develops between images and language. «If directing is a gaze, editing is a heartbeat,» said Jean-Luc Godard.***

Godard also said that when editing, «It is the hands that think.» After spending hundreds of hours watching these films, nurturing a long silent dialogue with them - like a collector enjoying the objects he has patiently accumulated. Having too much respect for these images, most of the time silent, to instrumentalize them or force them to speak, I decided at a very early stage not to resort to a voice-over that would have artificially ventriloquized them. I chose to use the archaic cinematographic technique of silent film intertitles instead, respecting thus the original silence of the shots. Short inserts in white letters on a black background, generating a rhythmical pattern like an interior scansion to the succession of shots, like a reading voice. It will resonate with each viewer as he hears it, even if it means believing he is actually hearing it. I remember Patrice Chéreau, after a screening of *Diane Wellington*, praising the voice-over, its discretion, its way of dealing with silences... until I made him realize that there was no «voice-over» in the film, that the intertitles he had read had resonated with him like a voice he thought he had heard.

***American Journal unfolds a constellation of fragments of the past like those dead astral bodies whose light still reaches us. The surviving images that you summon have an evocative power, in the strongest sense of the word: they make the soul of the dead appear.***

A face, a situation, a trick of the light, an incongruous scene, a defect of film... These images do not illustrate, they evoke. The flashes of narratives that I project by combining texts, sounds and music come from the shots themselves. It is very rare that I do not keep the entire duration of each shot that I use. I am convinced that I must respect the original material in order to preserve and transmit its raw power. The most thankless at first glance are the home movies. The same personal routines are shown over and over again: baby's birth, first steps, birthdays, thanksgiving, Christmas, weddings, sports activities, hunting parties, the construction of the house. But with a little effort, it is these very windows into the intimate that deliver the most emotions, dramatic sensibilities, promises of narratives, and sometimes frightening omens. In *American Journal*, I use the accidental superimposing of two scenes, thus duplicating the presence of a child, filmed in his daily family life at two different times of his life. This effect of ghostly twinship reminded me of the grimy joke that Mark Twain said to justify his pseudonym (Twain being an American pronunciation of twin). The fatal fantasy of the anecdote merges with the superimposition of images in a literally fantastic coincidence. The whole film becomes thus a kind of poetics of coincidence. Such image of a little boy from the 1960s looks like it could have been an image of me, but it is not me. This gap is the source of the emotion that I seek to share with the viewer.

***«It's my childhood and it's not my childhood / Like this movie which is mine and not mine,» reveal a self-reflexive manner of reading the intertitles of American Journal.***

The film was written one shot after the other, holding the memory of a story or a text, broken down in successive boxes. This cinematographic style of writing reconciles in me the cinephile (the cinema lover of « the others » ) and the fictional filmmaker. In 1952, Guy Debord ironically said: «The whole world has already been filmed, let's move on to the debate.» Yes, the world has already been filmed. Especially the United States, which has largely flooded the planet with their images. So let's move on to their editing! For me everything in this ocean of images is an opportunity for intuition, approximation, imagination. Mine, but above all that of the film viewer , to whom I wish what happened to me when looking at these images: a lot of emotion and mystery. The fundamentally active role given to the film viewer has always been at the heart of my process. I have total confidence in the viewer's ability to create the film he is watching. For that, images and stories must maintain a free, floating, almost undecidable relationship, following a poetics of intuition and sensation. Like me, the viewer must be able to project himself into other times, into other presents than his own. In a multiple, concrete, repeated way, he must be able to reach other lives than his own.

Interview by Stéphane Malfettes



## BIOGRAPHY

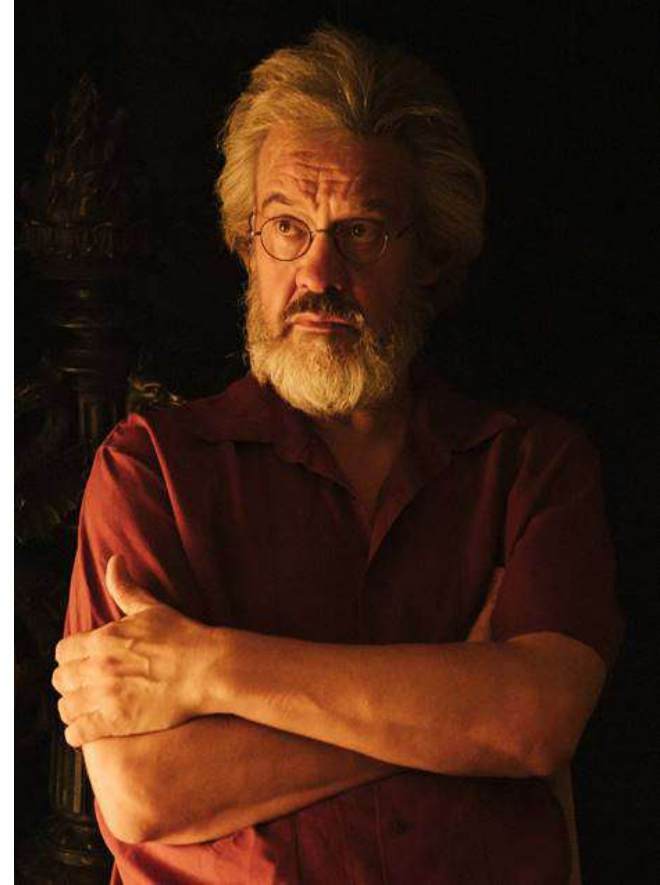
### ARNAUD DES PALLIÈRES

Arnaud des Pallières was born in 1961 in Paris.

As a teenager, he was introduced to theater and studied literature. After studying cinema, he shot a dozen of short films, including *La Mémoire d'un ange* et *Les Choses rouges*. In 1987, organized and filmed a conference by the philosophe Gilles Deleuze: *What Is the Creative Act ?*

He shot several documentary-fiction essays for television including a portrait of Gertrude Stein et *Disneyland, monviuex pays natal*. He shot five features films: *Drancy Avenir, Adieu, Parc, Orphan* and *Age of Uprising: The Legend of Michael Kohlhaas*, in competition in Cannes Film Festival 2013, starring Mads Mikkelsen in title character.

Since 2004, Arnaud des Pallières has been working on a visual and sound fresco - a constellation of films, plural - exploring American stories from the 20th century, compiled entirely from archive footage from the American Prelinger collection. Through this series of films, the filmmaker explores America as one would explore Atlantis, a lost continent. *Diane Wellington, American Dust* and now *American Journal* are the result of this original creative process.



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## FILMOGRAPHY

### ARNAUD DES PALLIÈRES

- 2022 [AMERICAN JOURNAL](#) - Feature | 108 min.  
Berlinale 2022 - Encounters
- 2019 [DEGAS ET MOI](#) - Short | 16 min.
- 2016 [ORPHAN](#) - Feature | 111 min.  
Toronto International Film Festival 2016  
San Sebastián International Film Festival 2016 - In Competition
- 2013 [AGE OF UPRISING : THE LEGEND OF MICHAEL KOHLHAAS](#) - Feature | 122 min.  
Cannes Film Festival 2013 - In Competition
- 2011 [AMERICAN DUST](#) - Feature | 100 min.  
FID Marseille 2011 - Opening film
- 2010 [DIANE WELLINGTON](#) - Short | 16 min.  
Venice Film Festival 2010 - Orizzonti
- 2008 [PARC](#) - Feature | 109 min.  
Venice Film Festival 2008 - Orizzonti  
Toronto International Film Festival 2016

## FILMOGRAPHY

### ARNAUD DES PALLIÈRES

- 2005 [LE NARRATEUR](#) - Short | 10 min.
- 2003 [ADIEU](#) - Feature | 124 min.  
Locarno Film Festival 2003
- 2001 [DISNEYLAND, MON VIEUX PAYS NATAL](#) - Short | 46 min.
- 1999 [IS DEAD \(PORTRAIT INCOMPLET DE GERTRUDE STEIN\)](#) - Short | 45 min.
- 1996 [DRANCY AVENIR](#) - Feature | 84 min.
- 1994 [LES CHOSES ROUGES](#) - Short | 20 min.
- 1993 [AVANT APRÈS](#) - Short | 15 min.
- 1989 [GILLES DELEUZE : « WHAT IS THE CREATIVE ACT? »](#) - Short | 49 min.
- 1989 [LA MÉMOIRE D'UN ANGE](#) - Short | 22 min.

## PRELINGER ARCHIVES

Prelinger Archives was founded in 1983 by Rick Prelinger in New York City. Over the next twenty years, it grew into a collection of over 60,000 «ephemeral» (advertising, educational, industrial, and amateur) films. In 2002, the film collection was acquired by the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. Prelinger Archives remains in existence, holding approximately 11,000 digitized and videotape titles (all originally derived from film) and a large collection of home movies, amateur and industrial films acquired since 2002. Its primary collection emphasis has turned toward home movies and amateur films, with approximately 18,000 items held as of Spring 2021. Its goal remains to collect, preserve, and facilitate access to films of historic significance that haven't been collected elsewhere. Included are films produced by and for many hundreds of important US corporations, nonprofit organizations, trade associations, community and interest groups, and educational institutions.





## TECHNICAL CREW

**DIRECTION** : Arnaud des Pallières

**EDITING** : Arnaud des Pallières

**MUSIC SCORE** : Martin Wheeler

**ARCHIVE CONSULTANT** : Rick Prelinger

**PRODUCTION** : Michel Klein, Jérôme Dopffer

**POST-PRODUCTION MANAGER** :

Gautier Raguenes

**AUDIO MIXING** : Mélissa Petitjean

**COLOR GRADING** : Serge Antony

**ARCHIVE DIGITALIZATION** : Rick Prelinger,  
Skip Prelinger

**EDITING ASSISTANTS** : Hugo Orts,  
Quentin Sombsthay

**EDITING TRAINEE** : Louise Carlier

**RECORDER** : Brice Afonso

**CREDITS** : Pierre-Emmanuel Meunier

**ADDITIONNAL SOUNDS** : Jean Mallet,  
Olivier Mauvezin, Martin Wheeler

**IMAGE WORKFLOW** : Gaétan Marras,  
Julien Petri

**CLEARANCE** : Matthieu Payet

**PRODUCTION COMPANIES** :

Iwaso Films

Les Films Hatari

**FRENCH DISTRIBUTION** :

Les Films de l'Atalante

**SUPPORTS** :

Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine

SACEM

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