

Wadsworth Atheneum  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

*Philip Haas/MATRIX 108*  
*November 18, 1989*



From *The World of Gilbert & George, 1981*  
Photo: Martin Schäfer

MATRIX is supported by funds from  
Aetna Life & Casualty, the Lannan Foundation,  
and by a grant from the National Endowment  
for the Arts, a federal agency.

## Program

*11:30 a.m.*

*Remarks by Philip Haas*

*Noon.*

**The World of Gilbert & George  
(1981)**

69 minutes 16mm Color 25fps

© Arts Council of Great Britain 1981

Producer: Philip Haas

Directors: Gilbert and George

Camera: Martin Schäfer

Sound: Martin Müller

Editor: Heather Holden

*1:15 p.m.*

*Intermission: Box lunches available for purchase  
in the theater lobby*

*1:45 p.m.*

**Scenes and Songs from Boyd Webb  
(1984)**

20 minutes 16mm Color 25fps

© Arts Council of Great Britain 1984

Producer: Philip Haas

Directors: Philip Haas and Boyd Webb

Camera: Wolfgang Suschitzky

Sound: Martin Müller

Editor: Julian Sabath

Music: Marc Wilkinson

*2:10 p.m.*

**A Day on the Grand Canal with the  
Emperor of China or Surface Is Illusion but so  
Is Depth (1988)**

46 minutes 16mm Color 24fps

© Philip Haas 1988 made in association with the Program for  
Art and Film, a joint venture of the Metropolitan Museum of  
Art and the J. Paul Getty Trust

Producer/Director: Philip Haas  
Writer/Narrator: David Hockney  
Camera: Curtis Clark  
Sound: Susumu Tokunow  
Editor: Curtiss Clayton  
Advisor: Maxwell Hearn  
Music: Marc Wilkinson

*3:05 p.m.*

**Stones and Flies: Richard Long in  
the Sahara (1988)**

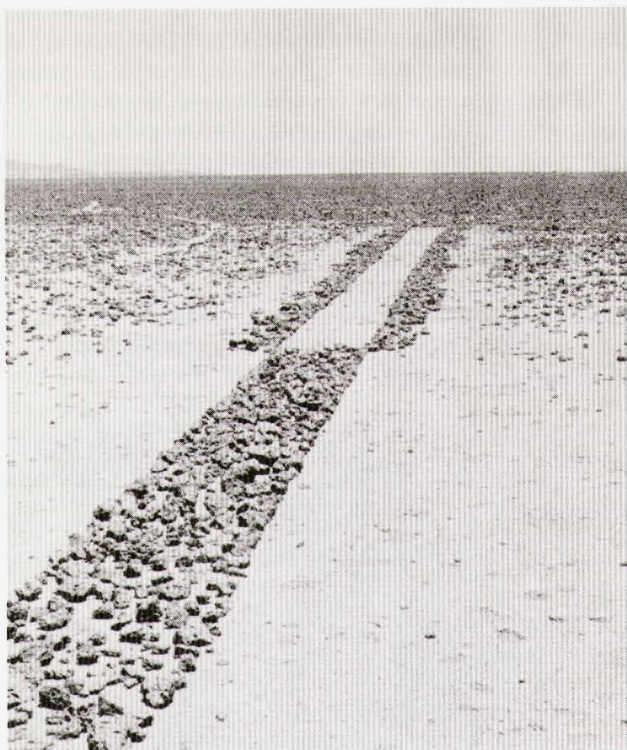
38 minutes 16mm Color 25fps

© A Methodact Ltd. Production for The Arts Council of Great  
Britain made in association with Channel 4 Television, HPS  
Films Berlin, and Centre Georges Pompidou, La SEPT, CNAP  
and WDR

Producer/Director: Philip Haas  
Executive Producer: Rodney Wilson  
Associate Producer: Heinz-Peter Schwerfel  
Camera: Bernard Zitzerman  
Camera Assistant: Sophie Charriere  
Sound: Eric Devulder  
Editor: Julian Sabath  
Assistant Editor: Belinda Cowdy  
Music: Marc Wilkinson

*3:45 p.m.*

*Discussion with Philip Haas*



From *Stones and Files: Richard Long In the Sahara*, 1988  
Photo: Sophie Charriere

*4:30 p.m.*

**The Giant Woman and the Lightning Man  
(1989)**

55 minutes 16mm Color 25fps

© Fernando Trueba P.C., made in association with the  
Centre Georges Pompidou

Producer: Fernando Trueba  
Director: Philip Haas  
Production Manager: Juan Botella  
Camera: Tony Wilson  
Sound: Graham Wyse  
Editor: Belinda Cowdy  
Assistant Editor: Terri Dewhirst  
Music: David Byrne



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*Philip Haas/MATRIX 108*

Each of Philip Haas's five films, completed between 1981 and 1989, is the result of an intense collaboration between artist/subject and filmmaker. Concerned with issues that are germane to each artist, Haas accompanies his subject on an intellectual and sometimes physical quest toward a shared cinematic statement. Haas sees his role in this endeavor as translator of select, essential characteristics of each artist's personal vision into the medium of film. His success, which sets him apart from many other filmmakers, is the result of his ability to identify closely with each artist's view of the world. Though generally adhering to a nonfiction format, Haas's films never slip into the didactic detachment of a documentary. The final product is a symbiosis between artist and filmmaker. In each case, the result bears a strong resemblance to the artist's work, while always framed in Haas's distinctive signature style: a careful attention to formal considerations coupled with a lean, precise vocabulary.

Haas arrived at filmmaking from the theater, where he had been an assistant to the eminent British stage director Clifford Williams in London from 1977 to 1979. From the theater Haas brought to his filmmaking a keen sense of discipline and a highly developed sensitivity to staging and framing. Haas says that he is interested in "the performance side of things, in making artistic statements that are both theatrical and filmic." Each of Haas's five films accomplishes these intentions.

Haas began his collaborative film work in the contemporary visual arts with **The World of Gilbert & George** (1981). In this first endeavor, Gilbert & George, two artists originally known best for their deadpan gallery performances, wanted to make a work of art on film. They designed the film, did the story boards, and are credited as the directors. Haas's role on this film was primarily technical.

The result is a film that is an encyclopedic catalogue of Gilbert & George's artistic imagery, including adolescent boys, hot-house flowers, and English hymnals, and a rare look at the artists in their carefully staged home setting. The startling and daunting contrasts between propriety and impropriety (key attributes of these two artists who are always well attired in identical conservative suits) surface in this film time and again. For Gilbert & George, who see almost every aspect of their life as part of their art, this film

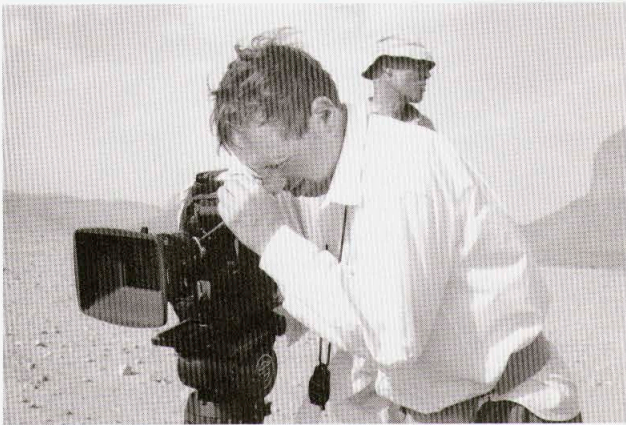
offered a rare opportunity to merge life and art on a grand scale. This was possible thanks to the sure-footed, unstinting, and sympathetic support of the filmmaker. For Haas, it was an auspicious debut as a young filmmaker.

In **Scenes and Songs from Boyd Webb** (1984), Haas moved into the position of codirector and the film is perhaps the most truly collaborative, in terms of joined artistic visions, of his five films to date. With a filmmaker's insight, Haas conceived of Boyd Webb's photographs, usually preposterous, ominous, and amusing scenes carefully staged in Webb's London studio, as stills from an unrealized film. Haas wanted to "reverse the process" and turn Webb's "film still sensibility" into actual film vignettes. Webb designed a series of eight tableaux explicitly for the film, and the actions were spun off of these sets. In this collaboration, Haas's theatre experiences came to the fore. From good-natured children lost at sea to a woman launching vegetables into space, the film's highly theatrical scenes are also preposterous, ominous, and amusing. For Haas they have "a strange surreal quality, bleak and post-nuclear, a world-weary wistfulness." Most audiences will agree. Together artist and filmmaker achieve a cinematic transposition that offers a penetrating look inside Webb's world. **Scenes and Songs** is a disquieting and often humorous meditation on fertility, death, and regeneration. Given the fictive nature of these vignettes, this is the least documentary of Haas's films.

**A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China or Surface Is Illusion but so Is Depth** (1988), features David Hockney commenting with irrepressible delight on a scroll by Wang Hui (1632-1717) that details the Kangxi Emperor's journey through the waterways of China. In a "performance-lecture" Hockney guides us along the length of the seventy-three-foot, seventeenth century scroll, making many intriguing observations about the differences between Eastern and Western conventions of perspective. For contrast, the large panoramic painting **Capriccio, Piazza San Marco Looking South and West** by Canaletto (Antonio Canal, 1677-1768) hangs in the background, and a second, later scroll about the Emperor's grandson, which by contrast exhibits early Western influence, is introduced. The rapport between the artist, the director, and the intervening medium of film is a fruitful one. As Hockney walks us through the narrative of the scroll, **A Day on the Grand Canal** almost magically evolves into a meditation on the nature of narrative and perspective as well as a meditation on the

nature of cinema. Hockney himself cheerfully and pointedly acknowledges the presence of the camera and the rectangular edges of the viewing screen.

At one point Hockney even speculates on how Western perspective may have contributed to the invention of canon fire. This spirit of candor and philosophical reflection and the leisurely pace may remind some viewers of *My Dinner with André*. Just as Louis Malle's camera brought us into an unexpectedly intimate situation with Wallace Shawn and André Gregory, Haas brings a large audience to a little-known work of art, one which has probably been seen in its entirety by only a few dozen people over the past three centuries.



Phillip Haas on location, *Stones and Flies: Richard Long in the Sahara*, 1988  
Photo: Sophile Charriere

Richard Long is the subject of Haas's fourth film, *Stones and Flies: Richard Long in the Sahara* (1988). The film tracks Long on a walk in The Hoggar, a volcanic area in the Sahara desert in southern Algeria. Using his expertise, Haas knows how to create an emblematic representation of Long's elusive aesthetic sensibility. Long departs from an unnamed Bedouin village. The camera focuses on Long's process of art making, along with the rhythm of his life on such a trek: walking, making art, brewing tea, resting. It is in this film that Haas as director takes the lead. Haas's sensitivity extends to filming many scenes from a vantage point similar to the camera angle Long himself uses in his own photographic



documentation. **Stones and Flies** deftly translates the essential elements of Long's work into a poetic, uniquely cinematic statement. To do so, Haas had to create a relationship of trust in which Long was willing to participate as a performer for Haas's camera. Long explains directly to the camera that all the elements of the walk are part of his art, and that, to him, sculptures are "stopping places along a walk."

Long's intense personal connection with the land, his ritualistic, innovative, and highly idiosyncratic approach to making art in the landscape and the access he gave Haas to his art making process all contributed to Haas's selection of subject matter for his most recent film. **The Giant Woman and the Lightning Man** (1989) shows the making of ground paintings that tell stories known as dreamings by Australian Aborigines in Yuendumu in the center of the country. The film also explores dreamings portrayed on bark paintings by two Aborigine brothers in Maningrida in the north. In this film, as in the one on Richard Long, the emphasis is on actual art making. As in all of his films, Haas here is intrigued with revealing aspects of the artist's creative process, and, as in earlier films, the director's approach is notably circumspect. The camera is usually on a tripod, there is little hand-held footage and little zooming. Part of Haas's distinctive style is the calm and restraint with which he enters an artist's world. This transcultural assignment, commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou and Spanish television, required particular sensitivity on Haas's part. Not only did it represent an intrusion by an outsider into another's milieu, but the art itself is intensely invested with spiritual significance. Aborigine songlines and dreamings are both stories and maps. There are many layers of meaning in the ground paintings. It is through these rituals that the Aborigines call their land into existence. It is also an initiation ritual for the young boys by older men who teach these dreamings which have been passed forward since prehistory. Here Haas found subjects whose art making process was inherently theatrical.

A greater sense of independence and detachment can be observed in Haas's recent work. But all five films have much in common. Each is a film made in the spirit of the artist's work, and each is preoccupied with activities that are normally inaccessible to the average filmgoer. Haas has established himself as a gifted young filmmaker, able to use his medium to expand our understandings of the contemporary creative process.



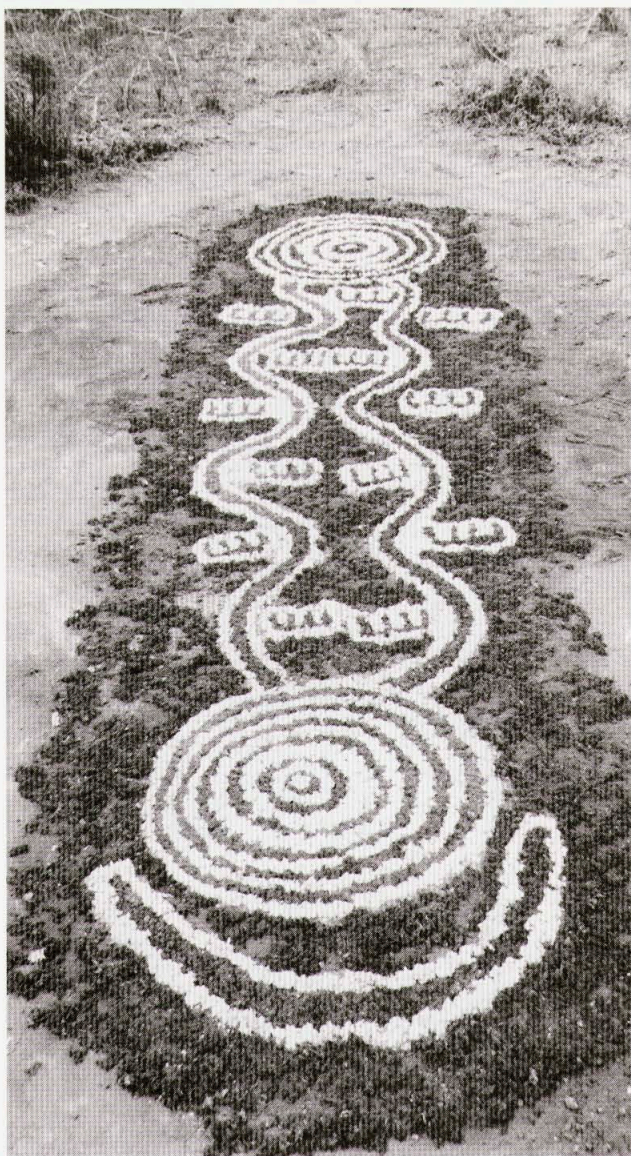


From *Scenes and Songs from Boyd Webb*, 1984  
Photo: Boyd Webb

Philip Haas was born in 1954 in San Francisco, California. He received a B.A. from Harvard University in 1976. In 1976 he moved to England, working in the theatre, initially as an assistant director to Clifford Williams of the Royal Shakespeare Company and then as a director in his own right. Haas began working in film in 1980 as an assistant to James Ivory on *Jane Austen in Manhattan*. The following year he made his first film, *The World of Gilbert & George*. His films have been screened at the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Film Festival's New Directors series, as well as film festivals throughout the world. A retrospective of Haas's films was featured earlier this year at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Haas currently lives in New York, and his films are released theatrically in the United States by New Yorker Films.

Paolo Columbo, Guest Curator  
Director, Centre d'art contemporain  
Geneva, Switzerland

Andrea Miller-Keller  
Curator of Contemporary Art  
Wadsworth Atheneum



Ground painting from *The Giant Woman and the Lightning Man*, 1989  
Photo: Juan Botella