

The longest film ever made



How long can you keep it up? The project must end at some point...

I've often said I'll continue until I die, but that's a joke. In fact, I don't know. Each film is an experience that will serve me for the next. My filmography is a kind of continuous ribbon. This approach, to ignore what I'll do in

the near future, allows me to be completely free in my head. Paradoxically, it is perhaps because of this freedom that I can continue to make *Cinématons*. If I was chained to the idea of an endless film, I think it would paralyse me – I'd have stopped this project long ago. This is my way of working. Maybe in my heart I know I'll continue to direct this film endlessly and I don't want to admit it to myself, to avoid the impression of being chained to this film.

You must encounter sceptics who see the project as pointless, pretentious or a stunt. How do you answer these criticisms?

The only answer I can give the sceptics is the film's success. If no one was interested in *Cinématon*, sceptics might have reason to be. But the film is appreciated; it has been much discussed by critics, analysts, philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists, and more and more people are asking to be filmed. It's encouraging that the number of people who appreciate my project is steadily increasing.

You visited the Gulf Film Festival last year. What were your impressions of the area and its filmmakers?

What pleased me most is the openness and curiosity of the people of the Gulf. In old Europe the public is jaded, and it's increasingly difficult to make them discover new things because they believe they know everything. This is obviously false. Conversely, in Dubai there's a thirst for discovery that existed in France when I started making films but has completely disappeared today.

A number of Courant's films will be screened throughout Gulf Film Festival, which takes place on April 10-16. See listings on page 84 for details, or go to www.gulffilmfest.com.

It sounds like a grand folly: thousands of documentaries filmed over more than 30 years to make up the longest movie ever. As director **Gérard Courant** flies into Dubai to film more of his 160-hour *Cinématon*, **Rob Garratt** asks the auteur what it's all about

Film directors have a reputation for being a navel-gazing bunch – especially European ones. But French director Gérard Courant appears to have taken the beret-wearing brigade to fresh heights of loftiness with *Cinématon*, a collection of more than 2,500 mini-films he's diligently filmed over 34 years. Screened back to back at a number of festivals across the world, it marks the longest film ever made, and a hefty 12-hour chunk will be screened as part of the Gulf Film Festival this week.

Started in February 1978, *Cinématon* is comprised of strict three-and-a-half minute intimate portraits of fellow filmmakers – subjects include Jean-Luc Godard, Wim Wenders and Terry Gilliam – which Courant compares to 'passport photos'. During two previous visits to Dubai Courant has filmed more than 20 hours of footage, including more than 130 *Cinématon* chapters in the city, the most he's captured anywhere outside of Paris and Cannes. Many of these will be screened as part of a focus on Courant's work at this

year's Gulf Film Festival. While the 60-year-old scurries around this year's festival in search of new subjects, we asked the wacky auteur why he's kept at it all these years.

Right, let's start at the beginning. Where, when, how and why did you get the idea for *Cinématon*?

The idea came back in the early '70s when I was a student in Dijon [in France], and a passionate film

revolutionary, an artistic object with original shapes, very close to the practices of contemporary art.

The project has attracted attention because of appearances by a number of high-profile filmmakers. How did you convince them to participate?

I explained to the celebrities that my project was an anthology film in which all the people I was filming were under the same rules, that this uniformity

'I've often said I'll continue until I die, but that's a joke. In fact, I don't know'

buff. I noticed that there were very few films about artists of the first half of the 20th century – contemporary cinema was born in 1895. The idea then came to me to retain a memento of film personalities from the art world [today]. I wanted to film it in an innovative cinematic form that is neither documentary nor television, but that is instead

was the specificity of the aesthetic project. Of course, these personalities are often surprised by the radicalness of this project that requires them to show themselves in an unusual on camera. As the project progresses and the number of *Cinématons* increases, more well-known people are filmed, and it's becoming easier to convince new people to take part.

► **NEXT WEEK:** We celebrate the 80th birthday of Egyptian film icon Omar Sharif