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BLACKBOOK

Exploring the Achingly Beautiful World of Wim Wenders

As today begins MoMA's expansive retrospective of legendary German filmmaker Wim Wenders' work, take a closer look at the incredible films playing in their series.



JAMES COHAN GALLERY

When making myself emotionally vulnerable to a film, there's a very particular feeling I always long for. It's a sensation I've never been able to fully articulate yet understand as truth and search for it in everything I consume. It's not the only feeling that gives me pleasure or ignites my synapses when watching a movie, but it's the one I love best and the one that makes me feel alive. It echoes a sentiment I've long felt, a transient emotion with no name or origin, and one that brings me back to myself and never fails to puncture my heart. I didn't always know it existed, I couldn't always taste its sweet presence, and it took seeing the films of Wim Wenders to enliven it within me.

Always possessing an atmosphere both melancholy and tender, filled with a gentle existential ache that wraps you in its beauty, Wenders' films quiet the noise inside. The first time I watched a Wenders film it felt like falling in love—my heart beat with frantic rhythm, my mind expanded and twitched in new and frightening ways, and I was overwhelmed by the simple wonder of having those ineffable feelings articulated before me with such stunning clarity. First, there was *Paris, Texas*, Wim's breathtaking masterpiece of silent, endless longing and the pain lost love. Then there was *Wings of Desire*, his sweeping emotional epic poem about morality and the search for connection. After that came *Alice in the Cities*, *The American Friend*, *Pina*, and the rest of his incredible oeuvre that burned an indelible mark into my brain. His work has become a part of me, a part of my heart, and friend that I return to when I need solace.

And this week, **MoMA** begins their impressive Wim Wenders retrospective, covering everything from his early short films to his most recent endeavors into 3-D cinema. I could not be more excited to revisit his enduring classics and to have the chance to see those early works I've never witnessed before. So to get you ready for the series, here's a closer look at the films showing. Take a breath and enjoy.

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Wenders' 1984 road movie meets existential dramatic masterpiece about the saudade that rests within us all. Written with brilliant minds **Sam Shepard** and **L.M. Kit Carson**, and starring **Harry Dean Stanton**, **Hunter Carson**, and **Nastassja Kinski**, the picture comes alive through **Robby Müller**'s beguiling cinematography of the American Southwest to tell the story of a man who reunites with his family after wandering into the desert four years prior. As emotionally stirring as it is visually arresting, *Paris, Texas* explores the silent bond between parent and child, the fractured emotions between the sexes, and the lost soul's commitment to finding the screams that shake the walls inside. Winning the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1984, *Paris, Texas* remains one of the most incredible films ever made.

Wenders' 1986 black-and-white epic poem of a film about morality and the search for connection and pleasure. Co-written with Peter Handke, the film stars **Bruno Ganz** as an angel who oversees human life and longs to feel the daily sensations of mortals. Upon falling in love with a heartbreakingly lonely trapeze artist, he attempts to transcend his immortality to become a member of the living. The film also features a brilliant performance by **Peter Falk** as himself.

Wenders' 1975 philosophical and wandering movie starring **Rüdiger Vogler**, **Hanna Schygulla**, and **Nastassja Kinski** in her screen debut. The second in his "Road Movie Trilogy" tells the story of an aspiring writer who begins traveling around West Germany, gathering a strange cast of characters along the way. Again, the film's incredible composition and landscape was lensed by long-time Wenders collaborator and friend, **Robby Müller**.

Wenders' 1977 film, loosely adapted from Patricia Highsmith's *Ripley's Game*. Shot in absolutely wondrous color and precision by **Robby Müller**, the film stars **Bruno Ganz** and **Dennis Hopper** to tell the neo-noir tale of career criminal who deals in forged art and a terminally ill picture framer who he turns into a hit man. As one of Wenders' most remarkable films, it also features performances by iconic filmmakers **Nicolas Ray** and **Samuel Fuller**.

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Wenders' 1974 film, the first in his "Road Movie Trilogy." Starring **Rüdiger Vogler** and shot by the incomparable eyes of **Robby Müller**, the faded black-and-white polaroid of a film tells the story of a German writer who is unexpectedly left to care for a young girl named Alice. Stuck with her, the two travel through various German cities looking for her grandmother without any clue where to find her, save a photograph of her front door, sans house number. Metaphor looms large in the delicately-crafted and subtly moving film, whose relationships closely foreshadowed those to come in *Paris, Texas*.

Wenders' 1980 documentary co-directed with iconic filmmaker **Nicolas Ray**. Screen out of competition at Cannes in 1980, the inventive and inviting documentary collaboration portrays the last days of Ray's life before he died of terminal cancer in 1979. As an examination of life and death, the film pays tribute to Ray's work and its tremendous influence on Wenders' films.

Wenders' self-referential film made during the production of his Coppola-backed 1981 feature *Hammett*. Telling the story of a film crew stuck in Portugal after running out of money and film stock, the film follows the director as he travels to Los Angeles in search of his producer. Featuring music by The Del-Byzanteens, which director **Jim Jarmusch** was then a part of, left over film stock from Wenders' film was later used for the first third of Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise*. *The State of Things* took home the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1982.

Wenders' 1976 black-and-white film, and the second in his "Road Movie Trilogy." Winning the FIPRESCI Prize at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival, the movie stars **Rüdiger Vogler** and **Hans Zischler** as a projection-equipment mechanic and a depressed hitchhiker as they travel along the East-German border visiting old movie theaters. Impressively shot by **Robby Müller**, whose work was so integral to Wim's early movies, the near-perfect film is as poetic and alive as it is composed and indebted in its cinematic predecessors.

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Wenders' 1991 epic sci-fi drama that began as his attempt to make the "Ultimate Road Movie." Taking place in 1999, the film stars **Solveig Dommartin, William Hurt, Sam Neill, Max von Sydow, Jeanne Moreau, and Rüdiger Vogler** to tell the story of a woman who is enlisted by bank robbers to make a money drop in Paris. In the process, she meets an American on the run from the CIA who is trying to protect a device that allows anyone to record their dreams and visions so the blind can see. The two begin spanning the globe together while a subplot about a damaged nuclear satellite that destroys civilization also becomes present.

Wenders' latest film, the Oscar-nominated documentary about photographer **Sebastião Salgado**. Co-directed with Salgado's son **Juliano Ribeiro Salgado**, the powerful and enlightening documentary examines Salgado's work over the last 40 years, as he traveled from continent to continent photographing some of the most important events in modern history around the world. We see his evolution from deeply immersed photographer to his current work restoring and rebuilding the land in which he grew up on.

Wender's wonderful 1989 documentary about legendary Japanese fashion designer **Yohji Yamamoto**. Delving into aesthetic identity, creative process, and cinema's digital age, the **Robby Müller**-lensed film also explores the relationship between cities and identity and provides a deeply poetic and intimate look into the world of both Yamamoto and Wenders.

Wender's immersive 1985 documentary homage to the great Japanese director **Yasujirō Ozu**. As a diary on film, we follow his exploration into the life and work of Ozu's life, conducting interviews with Yuharu Atsuta (Ozu's cinematographer) and visiting his shooting locations. We're also given Wenders' exposition on the culture of contemporary Tokyo in comparison to the Japanese culture so heavily imbued in Ozu's work. The resulting film is an homage to him and a journey to capture the essence of what it is Wenders has forever been so fascinated by in his work.

Wenders' 1999 documentary about the music of Cuba. Working with longtime collaborator and friend **Ry Cooder**, the movie documents how Cooder brought an ensemble of legendary Cuban musicians out of retirement. Traveling to Havana to bring them back together, their careers are brought back to life through stunning performances and an album titled *Buena Vista Social Club*.

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Wenders' 1993 sequel to 1986's masterpiece *Wings of Desire*. Again starring **Bruno Ganz** and **Otto Sander** as angels visiting earth, this time we watch their lives inhabiting the world of mortals. The film also features wonderful performances from **Nastassja Kinski**, **Rüdiger Vogler**, **Willem Dafoe**, and a cameo by **Lou Reed**.

Wenders' absolutely breathtaking 2012 Oscar-nominated documentary about the life and work of German choreograph **Pina Bausch**. As an artist who shared a deep simpatico with Wenders, here we see him impart his beautifully melancholic voice into re-staging her life's work. Presented in 3-D, the film, which began its production before her untimely death, features members of her **Tanztheater Wuppertal** company performing her choreography in unlikely and evocative places. As one of his most incredible films, *Pina* reverberates with the memory of Bausch and the painful and impassioned nature of her work.