

# Mikkel Aaland



"It's All an Adventure"

## Chris Marker & Honoring Creativity

Last month I stopped in Paris to visit our daughter who is going to school at the American University of Paris. It was a chance for me to check on her progress and to make a pilgrimage to the resting place of one of my heroes, the French filmmaker and artist [Chris Marker](#), who died in 2012 on his 91st birthday.



This is the exact GPS location of Chris Marker's resting place.  
[48°50'11.592" N 2°19'35.238" E](#)

A few months earlier, on another Paris stopover, I dragged my 18-year-old daughter to the same site and she couldn't understand why we were going again.

"We were just here. Why again?" she asked as we wove our way through the Montparnasse Cemetery.

We walked by the tombstone of [Andre-Gustave Citroën](#) (born Feb. 5, 1878, Paris, France-died July 3, 1935, Paris). She groaned when I launched once again into my story about the man who created the company that produced the most advanced cars in the world, and the 1967 DS 21 Pallas, the car I drove a good part of my adult life. My daughter has little patience for the stories she has heard from me over and over again. And even less patience for stories of how things were better in the past.

The first time we visited the private mausoleum holding Chris's remains we struggled to find it. There is no clear map to its location like there is to the grave of the Doors's Jim Morrison at the Père-Lachaise cemetery, but this time we knew where we were going.

My daughter half-heartedly took a photo of me standing in front of the small structure, which looked like a phone booth. Inside was a *maneki-neko* ceramic figurine, a white Japanese cat, waving to visitors and welcoming them. Chris loved the *maneki-neko* so much he often included them in his films and correspondence. It wasn't a stretch to imagine him reincarnated as one.



Me & Chris Marker.



Chris and his *maneki-neko*.

Afterwards we walked to the restaurant of my daughter's choice. Yes, it took a bribe to get her to come along. I tried to explain why it was so important for me to come to this cemetery and ceremonially honor the man I was lucky to know personally since the mid-90s to his death.

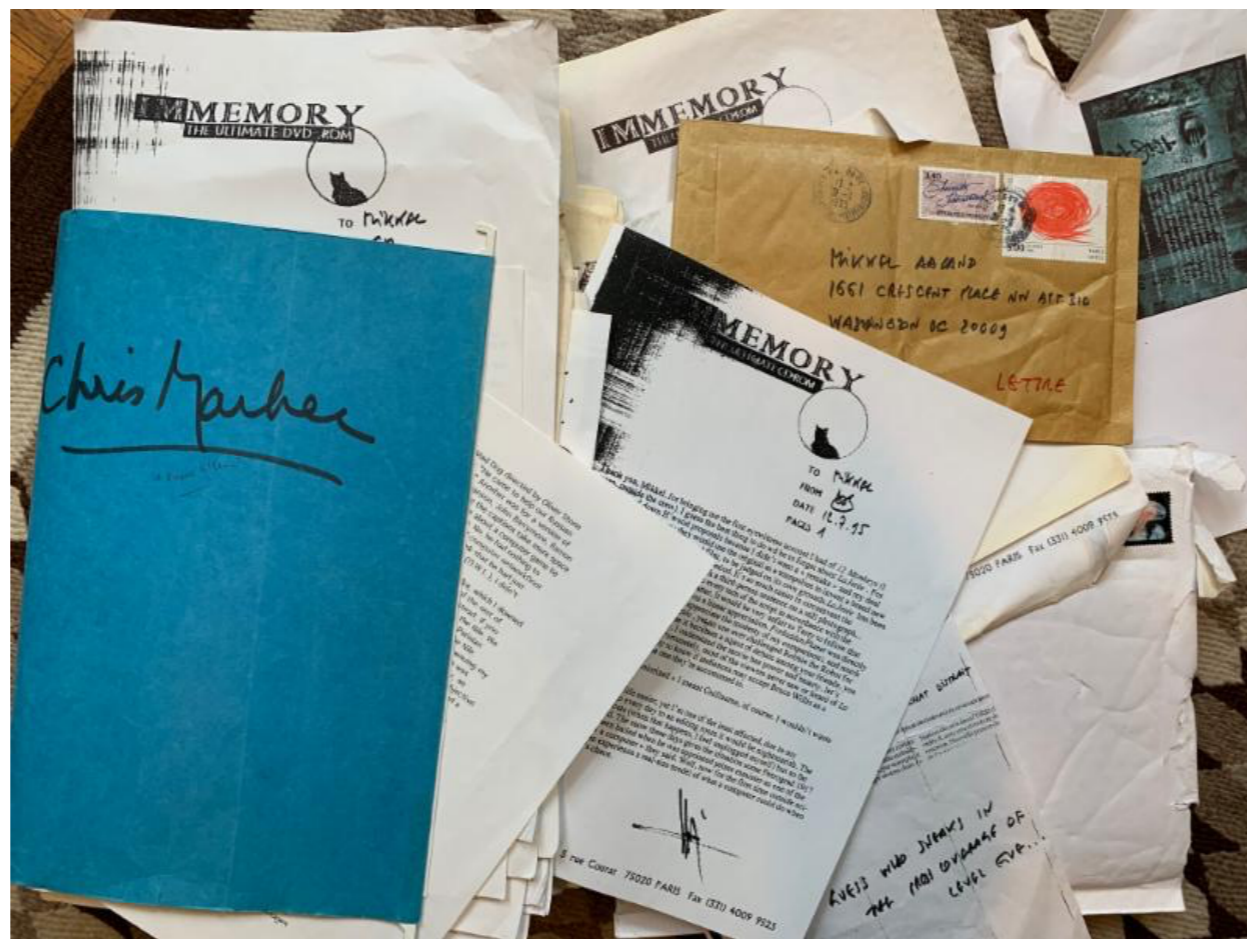
Marker, for those of you who don't know, is most famous for his films, [La Jetée](#), [Le Joli Mai](#), [A Grin Without a Cat](#) and [Sans Soleil](#). Always respected and acknowledged as a great artist in France, he had a brief moment in the American limelight in 1995 when [Le Jetée](#) inspired a Hollywood blockbuster, [Twelve Monkeys](#) starring Bruce Willis, Brad Pitt and Madeline Stowe.

I met Chris at his working-class apartment in Paris in 1994 when I was working on an assignment for [Wired](#) magazine. Sitting at a table in Marker's spacious apartment I took out my tape recorder and my camera. As soon as he saw me do this he held up his hand and said: Stop. No taping. No photography. No using direct quotes. He would only continue our meeting if I agreed to his conditions.

Turning off the recorder and setting my camera aside, I sat back, frustrated. What do I do now? Marker leaned forward and offered me a shot glass filled with vodka, making a point to say it was from Russia. It was only noon, but I eagerly took the glass and gulped the potent liquid down. After nodding and taking a swig from his own glass, Marker promptly refilled mine. I must have looked really disappointed because what he said next gave me hope. It's ok if you make this interview your own story, he said. Use your imagination. Put us on a boat on the Nile, or something.

In the end, when I wrote the story, I took his creative license seriously, but [Wired](#) wasn't so open to my fictionalized approach. They killed the story. Later, I managed to sell the story to [Digital Creativity](#), where it appeared as a cover story.

This was my first encounter with Chris's generous creative spirit, but not my last. Over the next several years I carried out an intense correspondence with Chris, mostly via fax and occasionally by post and later by email. I met him twice more in Paris, once at an outdoor café, and once more at this home when I delivered a batch of Russian videos I bought for him in Prague that he had requested. Mostly it was our ongoing fax correspondence that created a lasting impression on me. They would come in during the night when I was living in Washington, DC and in the early morning when I moved with my young family to San Francisco. I was happily married, but I read Marker's correspondence like they were love letters. I fixated on every word and every simple drawing that would often accompany them. Our correspondence was like oxygen for my own creative impulses and desires.



Years of correspondence with Chris.

Marker has a global fan club, and many others have encountered his generous spirit. Years after Chris died, I was at lunch with the Berkeley writers David and Janet Peoples. They told me about their experience working on the screen play for [Twelve Monkeys](#). Chris was adamant that they follow their own creative instincts and gave them carte blanche to do what they wanted with his masterpiece. I know he was thrilled with the results because when the movie came out to box office success and critical acclaim I got a fax from him boasting, "A Hollywood blockbuster!"

My daughter doesn't know Chris or his work, and I wasn't getting anywhere trying to explain why it was so important for me to go out of our way to honor him. I needed a way to connect.

She loves baseball.

"You know baseball players," I said, "They have rituals to give themselves confidence and help them play better. They grow a beard, or shave it, they wash or not wash, they eat something special, or abstain from something. They rub or kiss good luck charms. These rituals focus their minds and gives them a sense of control."

She laughed. "It's silly, but yes, I understand," she said.

In a way, by making this simple gesture of stopping at Chris's grave site I am honoring the man I call my muse, but I am also mentally and spiritually preparing myself for another kind of game. In this game, I am not sure what role I will play. I am not even sure of the rules. In 2022 Chris Marker turns 100. My intent is to find a way to honor his creative spirit in time for this significant milestone. To continue with a baseball metaphor, it's time to step up to the plate. I have no idea what the outcome will be. Stay tuned.

## Perfect Sweat Update

We just finished shooting [Perfect Sweat](#) episodes in Japan and Turkey and we begin shooting the Innovative Nordic Sweat episode in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in June. Mexico and two episodes in North American will shortly follow after that. We plan on making all nine episodes of [Perfect Sweat](#) available on one of the streaming outlets by early 2020.

To see the trailer for [Perfect Sweat](#) and learn more about the series go [here](#).

To see an online version of my original book [Sweat](#), go [here](#).

Follow [Perfect Sweat](#) on Facebook and Instagram.

## Why Are You Receiving This?

As humans, we share 99.9% of the same DNA but you and I are also connected in other ways. Maybe we met at a photography workshop or festival or perhaps we share a passion for saunas and open cold-water swimming. Maybe we sat together at a café somewhere and discussed the myth of Sisyphus or the purpose of life or perhaps we met on a wilderness trail or a river where I likely carried a fishing pole.

It could be we share the same commitment to family, community, and the pursuit of wellness or we are connected through my world-savvy wife, Rebecca or one of my purs-trotting daughters Miranda and Ana Mikaela. Some of you may have received this because you were recipients of one of my previous mailings called [World of Light](#).

If it is ok with you, I would like to use this medium from time to time to stay connected. My interests are wide ranging and so will be my posts. If that doesn't appeal to you, no worries. I totally understand. Just click on the Unsubscribe link below.

