

Contextual Practices

Ways of Perceiving

ADAD4019

Ways of curating;

Imagined display Space Exhibition

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This virtual exhibition named 'The Films of Life' is a visual retrospect to the films made by the American director, screenwriter and producer Terrence Malick.

The venue chosen to exhibit and curate this film-makers work will be held at 'the Design Museum' in Kensington London, as shown in 'Fig One'.

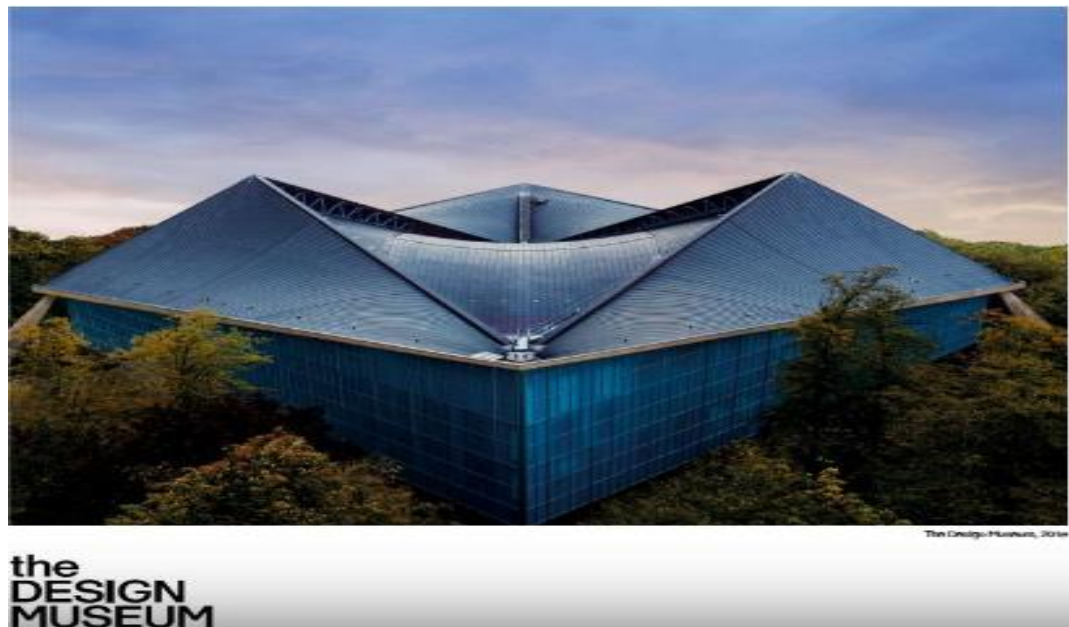


Fig One

Being the very same venue where Stanley Kubrick: The exhibition was a prominent presence in 2019. Back when this task was initially presented to curate an art exhibition, it was Terrence Malick's visual subjectivity to each of his films, when this idea began. The initial task was to explore each visual image to Malick's work, for which the film maker has committed his craft into each of his feature films released to date. Then the mission of this exhibition; is to identify a connective thread within the film makers' visual aesthetics to each of his feature films.

Malick's films have gathered polarized opinions throughout his career amongst critics and audiences. The general consensus within the themes present throughout his films are philosophical and spiritual overtones, whilst gathering much praise for the beautiful cinematography within his work. These opinions were interesting to explore Malick's body of work and subsequently became the basis for making this exhibition, further posing the question; what is the channel that drives the philosophical and spiritual grounding, inspiring Malick's work. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has been referenced throughout Malick's work (**Rossouw, 2017**). Which will be addressed again later into the exhibition.

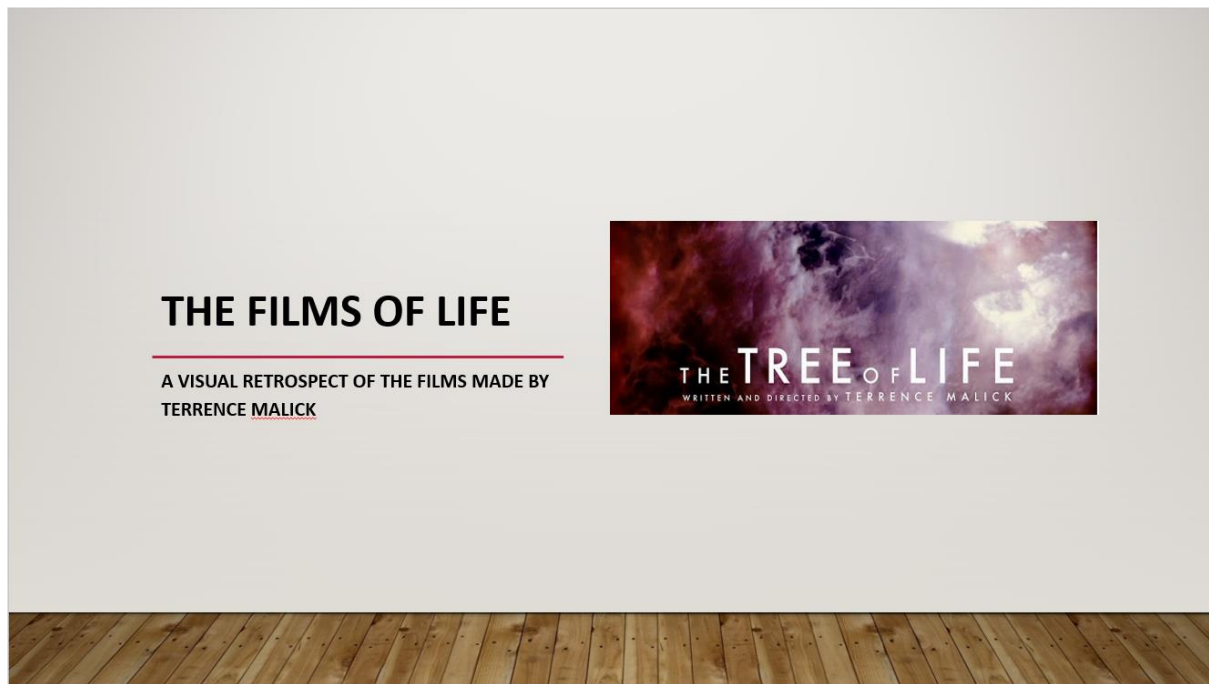


Fig Two



Fig Three

Focusing mainly on the beautiful cinematography, whilst combining the aesthetics featured throughout his films, each picture will be displayed on a white wall background occupied within a spacious area as depicted in Fig Three. The objective is to give sufficient space between each picture, with one in particular occupying the majority of one wall. This approach was intended to present each film project and accompanying stills as the

centre of interest, free from any redundant distractions for the audience to fully engage with each frame. Similarly, Hans Ulrich Obrist observes this approach akin to the paintings of Claude Monet, O'Doherty stating 'The spectator was to be encouraged to observe the work free from the distraction produced by the proximity of other ones' (Obrist, 2014, p.28).

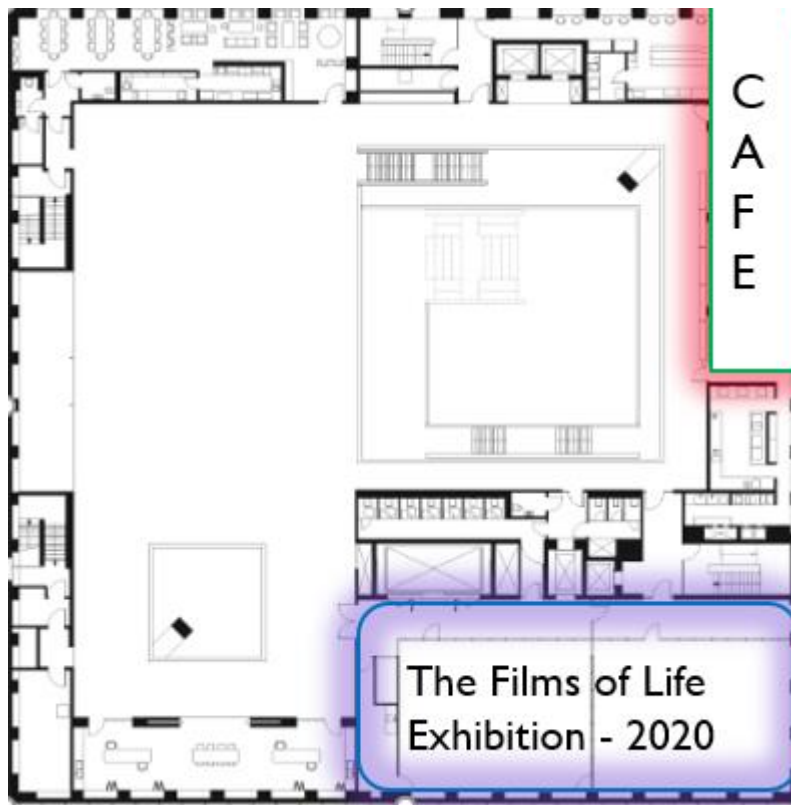


Fig Four

This floor plan in Fig Four is located on level +2 within the Design Museum. Access into the 'Films of Life' exhibition can be easily located and accessed to the left from the main access flight of stairs and elevator, these directions would be from the viewpoint of the public's arrival to this level. Once inside the exhibition space, the spectators can navigate around the self-contained area. There is a communal seating with café that can be accessed when exiting from the double doors leading out of the exhibition room.

BADLANDS - 1973

An American neo noir period crime drama film. The story is set in 1959 South Dakota, where a 15 year old teenage girl living in a remote town meets a 25 year old 'troubled' Korean war veteran. They go on the run after he murders the teenage girl's father.

Highly cited by film critics as one of the greatest and most influential films of all time. This was writer, producer and director Malick's directorial debut

'Transcendent themes of love and death are fused with a pop-culture sensibility and played out against a midwestern background, which is breathtaking both in its sweep and in its banality' - Dave Kehr - The Chicago Reader



Fig Five

The first exhibition piece - Fig Five, is the film makers debut feature film 'Badlands' released in 1973. The decision to include a tradition frame around 3.5 length x 2.5 width in metres for the scale of the image, is to suggest a classic visual reference to the era of the film. The large scale and singular choice of image is the one Terrence Malick film within this collection to feature one large framed image only, as this was one of those striking looking stills which could in essence singularly capture a story within one single frame. It's a beautifully composed shot, that could be interpreted as the hostility of the man carrying a firearm against a barren landscape within a mystical reality, taking into consideration the symbolism of the way in which he carries the rifle on his back. The author Peter Wollen gives his insight into the use of semiotics within twentieth century cinema; 'Yet our experience of cinema suggests that great complexity of meaning can be expressed through images' (Wollen, 1974, p.120).



A romantic period drama film set in 1916 that tells the story of two lovers travelling to the Texas panhandle to harvest crops for a wealthy dying farmer. They plot to inherit the farmer's fortune by means of a false marriage to the female lover.

DAYS OF HEAVEN - 1978

This was Malick's second feature film after *Badlands*. Since release the cinematography has been widely praised, that earned the film an Academy Award for Best Cinematography.



Fig Six

With the 'Days of Heaven' exhibition space - Fig Six, was an opportunity to showcase the dynamic range of cinematography on display. The aim here is to consider each picturesque still, as making a connective thread or relationship between them. Many cinephiles and fans of Malick's work will associate the place of story within these settings for each of these scenes, recreating their own nostalgic experience. Being hailed as 'one of the most beautiful films ever made', according to Charlotte Crofts in her journal. Furthermore, indicating Malick's experimentation with sound; 'ridding the film of dialogue creating a different emphasis on sound **(Crofts, 2014)**. Most of the scenes were shot during 'magic hour' the period just before sun rise or just after sun set, as displayed in the top right image, which affirms Malick's graceful use of framing similar to his previous feature *Badlands*.

THERE WAS TO BE A HIATUS OF ZERO FEATURE FILMS
RELEASED BY TERENCE MALICK FOR THE NEXT **20 YEARS.....**
THEN IN 1998

Fig Seven



The film marked Malick's return to filmmaking after a 20-year absence.
The story is about a United States army private that goes AWOL from his unit and lives amongst the indigenous inhabitants in the South Pacific.
The film was shot on various locations in Queensland, Australia.

THE
THIN
RED
LINE -
1998



Martin Scorsese ranked it as his second-favourite film of the 1990s



Fig Eight

As a novel way to express a little playfulness for the spectator, having a blank space with no pictures as shown in 'fig seven' to serve as passage from the previous exhibition wall space to the next. The headline message with the appearance of a thin red line underlining, is setting up an obvious hint to direct the audience in sequence of Malick's release window that sets up the film makers next major release after a twenty-year gap. With Malick's comeback feature - Fig Eight, the task in mind is to exhibit the horrific reality of war conflicting humanity with nature. Prolonged throughout the lengthy running time, as William Thomas quotes within his review of the film; 'It is long, very,

very serious and neck-deep in tropical symbolism - war as a crime against nature **(Thomas, 2003)**. The image on the left perfectly captures the tranquillity and stillness of beauty encompassing nature versus the despair and violation of war being played out against mother nature. Back to the Heidegger connection, there is a film philosophy paper written by Robert Sinnerbrink, whereby he poses this observation; The question I shall explore is whether we should describe *The Thin Red Line* as 'Heideggerian Cinema' **(Sinnerbrink, 2006)**. Apart from giving a brief synopsis and a quote relating to the film, the images are given the freedom to speak for themselves to the spectator.



Fig Nine

This inspired story based on the now famous tale of Pocahontas, was an opportunity to present some historical closure to the film makers catalogue of work - Fig Nine. The intention with this particular exhibit is to keep the synopsis very brief whilst certainly to not treat the prospective audience condescendingly, due to the universal popularity of the character and story. This historical fact is specified by Gregory D. Smithers; 'Pocahontas remains one of the most recognizable Native icons in American culture today' **(Smithers, 2017)**. Again, with this exhibit, the focus is firmly on the stunning imagery within Lubezki's cinematography. As with most of Malick's visual storytelling, they are a concurrent theme with the nature versus humanities intervention into proceedings. The curators' intervention through keen observation when deciding on the layout of these stills, is to place the lush green with humans occupying the landscapes left and right posing looming conflicts. This is in stark contrast to the image positioned at the centre displaying mother nature existing in an undisturbed tranquillity.

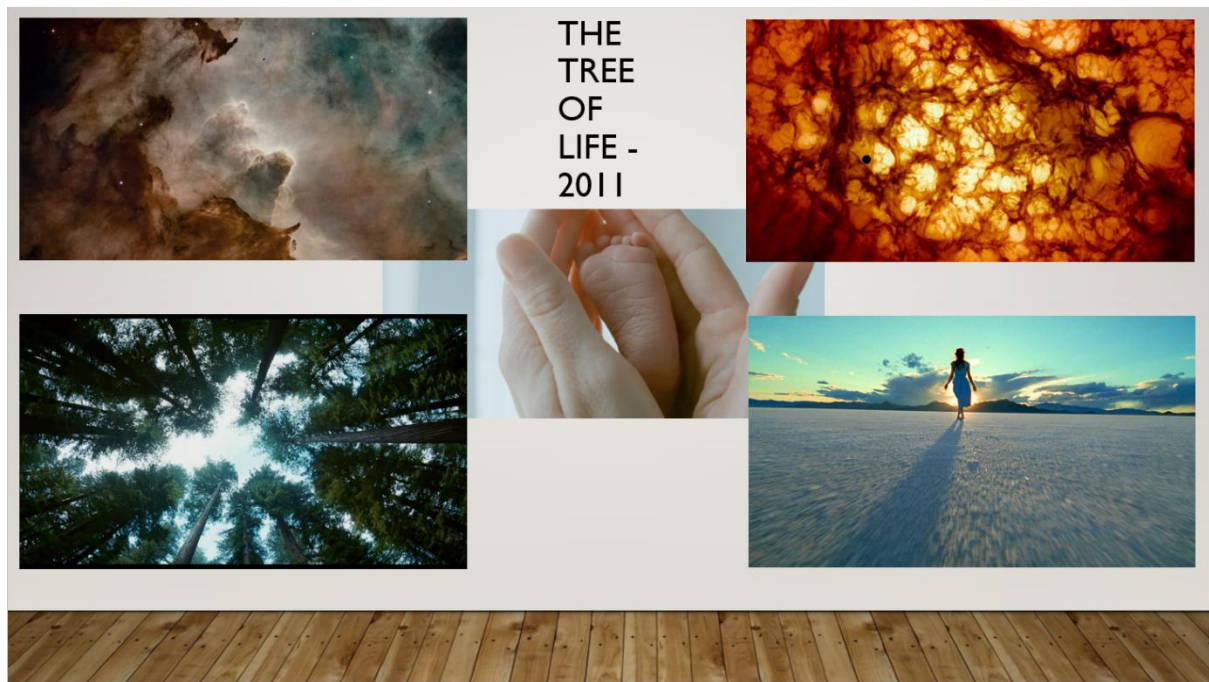


Fig Ten

These arguably mesmerising images - Fig Ten, were chosen and arranged as seen for two reasons; Intended to immediately capture the spectators gaze, with the other to illustrate the great magnitude of Terrence Malick's vision and imagination within this hugely ambitious and often beguiling film. This project is an experimental drama with an existential journey through the creation and loss of life, that's one of a multitude of synopses the audience can deduce to encapsulate the story and elusive narrative structure for 'The Tree of Life'. Therefore, from the perspective of this film including Malick's prior catalogue of film projects, encapsulate many moments which establish the film makers cinematography as a form of visual art. As Laura Mulvey expresses this point clearly; 'The play with enigma and riddle is an invitation to search for an entry point, through association and personal reverie, that may vary for each individual spectator' (Mulvey, 2009, p.144-145).

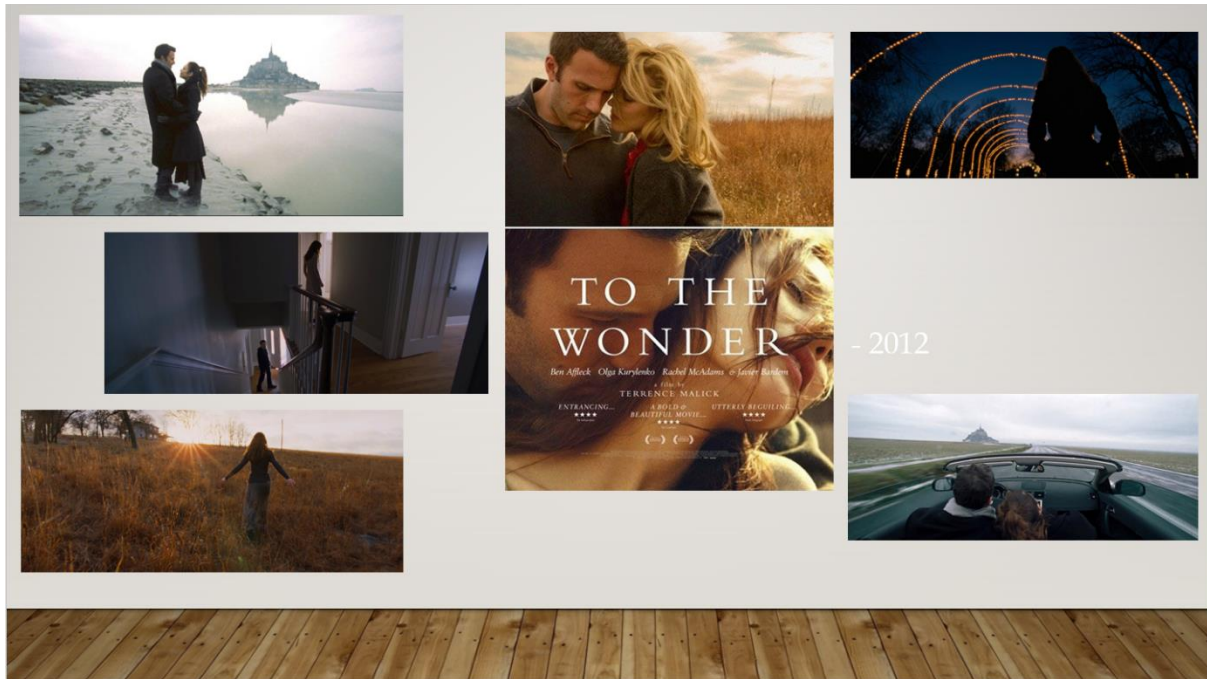


Fig Eleven

As a fitting conclusion to this exhibition even though to date, there have been numerous more mainstream releases made by the maverick film maker. However, from this feature moving forward including all of his recent films, there has been a perceived shift of opinion towards Malick's directorial choices of late by audiences and critics. As Charles Graham-Dixon observes; 'Where the director's meditative, philosophical voiceovers once felt vital and wondrous, for many viewers they now began to feel stale and gratuitous. Images of nature, once unique and reflective, risk appearing flouncy and overused' **(Dixon, 2017)**. This feature is another experimental project, whilst similar to 'The Tree of Life' this romantic drama has reportedly further implications, as claimed to be Malick's most personal project to date. There has been speculation about this from acclaimed film critic Roger Ebert, with this feature being the very last film he reviewed before his death in 2013; 'We don't need to be told Malick's in an autobiographical vein here; these memories surely belong to the storyteller' **(Ebert, 2013)**. Could this personal film by this film maker, be perceived as his very own love letter? One which encompasses Malick's philosophical grounding, then add to the film makers signature formula; the birth of life, splendour of nature, spiritual occurrences with characters involved in poignant moments, that are all encapsulated within the known universe. The final product being the exhibition; 'The Films of Life'.

Figures

Fig One: the Design Museum (2016) *Time Out* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+design+museum+london+exhibition+space+layout&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&sxsrf=ALeKk01had14KDj_VNW1bvB2QPa32cgW9A:1586433940429&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjpher7ptvoAhWGfMAKHQJTCMQQ_AUoAXoECA4QAw&biw=1920&bih=969#imgsrc=VeMEAKzBogpeKM (Accessed 9th April 2020).

Fig Two: The Tree of Life (2011) *Where Pen Meets Paper* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+tree+of+life&tbn=isch&chips=q:the+tree+of+life,g_1:movie:UUvYM9ZL6Yk%3D&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwjgmcmUk5rpAhUF8hoKHarjDE0Q4lYoAHoECAEQFA&biw=1903&bih=969#imgsrc=tsbRJTWI2piJ8M (Accessed 4th May 2020)

Fig Three: The Best Photography Galleries in London (2019) *Culture Trip* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+design+museum+london+exhibition+space+layout&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&sxsrf=ALeKk01had14KDj_VNW1bvB2QPa32cgW9A:1586433940429&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjpher7ptvoAhWGfMAKHQJTCMQQ_AUoAXoECA4QAw&biw=1920&bih=969#imgsrc=FFzUnXZGevTNcM&imgdii=r6iV8u7Kv9NqQM (Accessed 4th May 2020)

Fig Four: Inside London's design museum: a first look at john pawson's interiors (2016) *designboom* (Diagram)

Available at:

<https://www.designboom.com/architecture/design-museum-london-opens-john-pawson-interiors-11-16-2016/gallery/image/design-museum-london-opens-john-pawson-designboom-6> (Accessed 4th May 2020)

Fig Five: Badlands (1973) *Psycho Drive-In* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=badlands+film&tbn=isch&chips=q:badlands+film,g_1:cinematography:785R0QvyQBA%3D&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwi277jFm5rpAhXY4YUKHW-NDJcQ4lYoA3oECAEQGg&biw=1903&bih=920#imgsrc=UyhHXsVN8Y0htM&imgdii=sWRmVfYuxoTmmM (Accessed 4th May 2020)

Fig Six: Days of Heaven (1973) *Pintererst* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=days+of+heaven+film&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjgmcmUk5rpAhUF8hoKHarjDE0Q2-cCegQIABAA&oq=days+of+heaven+film&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzICCAyAggAMgIIADIECAAQGDIECAAQGDIECAAQGDIECAAQGDofCAAQgwE6BAgAEEM6BggAEAgQHjoGCAAQBRAeOgQIABAEUL0KWOBMYLFdaAFwAHgAgAFKiAGYcZIBAJlwMAEAoAEBqgELZ3dzLXdpei1pbWc&sclient=img&ei=hwKwXqC6B4Xka6rHs-gE&bih=969&biw=1920&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813#imgsrc=ZedA7QMnjuapyM
(Accessed 4th May 2020)

Fig Seven: The Thin Red Line (1998) *No source required* (Exhibition piece).

Fig Eight: The Thin Red Line (1998) *FilmGrab* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+Thin+Red+line+film&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjfgIHSwqzpAhXjuXEKHQ2fcIQ_QAUoAnoECCIQBA&biw=1920&bih=920#imgsrc=o4nxDQZ_HSBI2M (Accessed 11th May 2020)

Fig Nine: The New World (2005) *WorldPress.com* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+new+world+cinematography&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjWq5qDxKzpAhXEwoUKHQoLBkIQ2-cCegQIABAA&oq=the+new+world+cinem&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQARgAMgIADoGCAAQBxAeUIPTCliZ9gpguIELaABwAHgAgAFHiAGOA5IBATeYAQCgAQGqAQtnD3Mtd2l6LWltZw&sclient=img&ei=r6W5XpaYFMSFlwSKlpiQBA&bih=920&biw=1920&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813#imgsrc=KeWa87j_vaa3TM (Accessed 11th May 2020)

Fig Ten: The Tree of Life (2011) *SlantMagazine* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+tree+of+life+film&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjRyfHU9K3pAhX1pHEKHYGtBrsQ_AUoAXoECCsQAw&biw=1920&bih=969#imgsrc=9-IDMM_D9mvMeM
(Accessed 12th May 2020)

Fig Eleven: To the Wonder (2012) *IMP Awards* (Image).

Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=to+the+wonder&rlz=1C1CHBF_en-GBGB813GB813&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjQ0ebF9a3pAhVsQRUIHaMTCaQQ_AUoAXoECCoQAw&biw=1920&bih=969#imgsrc=L1-BWsphec9oWvM
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Mulvey, L. (2009) *Visual and other pleasures*. 2nd edn. United States, United Kingdom, Europe and other countries: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ebert, R. (2013) 'A few characters in search of transcendence'. *Review of To the Wonder*, directed by Terrence Malick. Available at: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/to-the-wonder-2013> (Accessed: 15th April 2020).