

Double Takes

A series of short video essays

By Sarah Atkinson

Double Take 002

Katharine Hepburn

Summertime 1955

A woman in a white dress walks backwards along the side of a canal in a city location.

She holds a film camera to her face as she steps backwards towards the water

The clip is in slow motion.

The following text is displayed in captions at the bottom of the screen:

“Despite Kate’s insistence that she not chance further damage to her skin or a rare disease, David Lean was not willing to compromise with realism. Finally, Kate agreed to go ahead when Lean arranged to barricade an area of the canal with plastic sheets lowered from barges and then to flood the enclosed area with disinfectant. On the long-awaited day, the company all stood by. Kate was poised for action when suddenly the water began to foam like a bubble bath, the result of the density of the chemicals. “If you think I’m going into that, you’re crazy,” Vincent Korda, the art director, suggested “wind machines” - producing a gale-force wind sending the foam down the canal like a tidal wave.”

As the woman nears the edge of the river, she falls backward.

The following text is displayed in captions at the bottom of the screen:

“Kate, her face and all exposed sections of her body covered in Vaseline as further protection from the water, fell in backward the moment the water cleared.”

A young boy who has been standing by the canal side looking on, grabs the film camera from her hands as she plunges into the water.

A large splash as the woman is submerged, the boy looks on and gasps.

The following text is displayed in captions at the bottom of the screen:

“Lean was not happy with the take and Kate, after being pulled out of the water by a gondolier, had her hair dried and replaced her wet dress with an identical dry one before trying again.”

The woman’s head appears from the water, she starts to call out.

The following text is displayed in captions at the bottom of the screen:

“It tastes lousy ... like a swimming pool in California with all that chlorine,” she complained as she stood ready for the next take. Three more takes were to follow before Lean was satisfied. That night Kate’s eyes began to itch and tear. She had infected them with a form of conjunctivitis that would always stay with her.”

DOUBLE TAKE

#002

KATHARINE HEPBURN (1907-2003)

SUMMERTIME (1955, DAVID LEAN)

Source: Katharine Hepburn: A remarkable woman,
by Anne Edwards.

FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PURPOSES

SARAH ATKINSON, 2022