

TRANSFORMATION, TRANSLOCATION AND TRANSGRESSION: CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART CINEMA AFTER 2000

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Join CEAS for an overview of contemporary art cinema from the People's Republic of China (2003-2008). Transformation, Translocation and Transgression presents films that combine both realistic and surrealistic portrayals of contemporary Chinese life, drawing on recent films from both veteran filmmakers and new independent voices in the digital video scene. Winners of numerous awards at international film festivals, these works explore a broad spectrum of social issues confronting a Chinese society in transition, with a focus on everyday situations and ordinary people's dilemmas in the face of upheaval.

OCTOBER 3: BLIND SHAFT (盲井/MANG JING), DIRECTED BY LI YANG (李杨), 2003.

Blind Shaft depicts the story of two miners and murdering grifters (Tang and Song) who run an intricate scam they have perfected through repeated practice — find a poor, unsuspecting man, get him a job in an illegal coal mine as a relative, fake an accident, and blackmail the mine owner for compensation. For their latest “mark,” the two men choose a naive 16-year-old boy named Yuan. As they prepare to carry out their newest plan, things start to get complicated and the two men's scheme takes an unexpected turn. Writer-director Li Yang won 2003 Berlin International Film Festival Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Achievement. (92 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

OCTOBER 10: DRIFTERS (二弟/ ERDI), DIRECTED BY WANG XIAOSHUAI (王小帅), 2003.

Set in a coastal town from which illegal immigrants leave for the dangerous passage to America, Wang Xiaoshuai's film follows a young slacker Hong who once braved that very trip, but was forced to return home. While in the United States, he fathered a child with his employer's daughter, and was deported when her parents, who also came from the same town, found out. Hong leads a listless life, carrying on a secret affair with a traveling opera troupe performer, until he learns that his boss' family, along with his illegitimate son, are returning. Beautifully filmed in a succession of perfectly composed scenes, Wang Xiaoshuai's *Drifters* enriches its minimal plot with deep reserves of emotion. (120 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

OCTOBER 17: THE WORLD (世界/SHIJIE), DIRECTED BY JIA ZHANGKE (贾樟柯), 2004.

The dazzling film from acclaimed director Jia Zhangke focuses on a young dancer Tao, her security-guard boyfriend and others who come from China's inland provinces and work at World Park, a bizarre theme park where visitors can get a glimpse of famous international monuments without ever leaving the Beijing suburbs. Lavish daily shows are performed by Tao and her fellow performers amongst replicas of the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, the Pyramids and even the Twin Towers. However, the real-life problems and sufferings of this young generation are only put into relief by this facade of cosmopolitanism and Chinese “modernization.” It was the first film by Jia to gain official approval from the Chinese government. (139 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

OCTOBER 24: MOUNTAIN PATROL (可可西里/KEKEXILI), DIRECTED BY LU CHUAN (陆川), 2004.

Mountain Patrol is a remarkable adventure based on true events surrounding illegal Tibetan antelope poaching in Kekexili, a vast and remote region of China. Set against the exquisite backdrop of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, *Mountain Patrol* follows a band of brave vigilantes as they face enormous adversity and peril to save endangered Tibetan antelopes from ruthless outlaw hunters. The film is an understated, yet tightly constructed and compelling portrait of moral imperative, sacrifice, and everyday heroism, evoking a metaphoric image of alienation and spiritual desolation through panoramic shots of the rugged and majestic landscape. (89 min, in Chinese and Tibetan with English subtitles). (OVER)

OCTOBER 31: DAM STREET (红颜/ HONGYAN), DIRECTED BY LI YU (李玉), 2005.

In the early 1980s, teenage girl Xiaoyun and her boyfriend Wang are declared guilty of “moral decadence” and expelled from high school for her unwanted pregnancy. She is forced to put her child up for adoption. Ten years later, Xiaoyun’s life is at a standstill in the same riverside town in southwestern Sichuan province. She makes a meager living as a singer in a local song and dance troupe and settles in to perform everything from classical Chinese opera to sentimental pop hits. She is ostracized by residents of the town and her relationship with her family strained. Her only real companion is Xiaoyong, a fiercely affectionate boy who protects her from the critical eyes of the community until a marriage proposal uncovers the limits of their friendship, and the depth of her unresolved past. Winner of the 2005 Venice Film Festival C.I.C.A.E. Award. (93 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

NOVEMBER 7: THE SILENT HOLY STONES (静静的嘛呢石/JINGJINGDE MANISHI), DIRECTED BY WANMA CAIDAN (万玛才旦), 2005.

Winner of China’s national film award for best directorial debut, native Tibetan director Wanma Caidan’s serene and slightly comedic document of daily Tibetan life challenges the idealized perception of remote mysticism that the region has borne for generations. *The Silent Holy Stones* follows a young lama in an isolated mountain monastery who is restricted by his monastic duties but also becomes preoccupied with television. When he visits his native village for a New Year’s celebration and discovers a new TV and a TV series, “Journey to the West,” set in his family’s home, the lama’s fixation begins to distract him from his duties to the temple and his community. Despite the intensity of contrast between the religious and secular, the ancient and contemporary, the local traditions and the influence of the outside world, *The Silent Holy Stones* never escalates the tension to the level of contrived narrative conceit. (102 min, in Tibetan with English subtitles).

NOVEMBER 14: SUMMER PALACE (颐和园/YIHE YUAN), DIRECTED BY LOU YE (娄晔), 2006.

Summer Palace follows Yu Hong, a rebellious and sensitive young woman as she is transplanted from a small Chinese city to a politically charged Beijing University in the late 1980s. Yu Hong and her college boyfriend Zhou Wei embark upon a passionate but volatile love affair just as political forces are moving towards Tiananmen Square. The country’s social turmoil is witnessed through its disaffected youth, whose newfound sexuality and activism culminate in violent suppression. Spanning nearly 20 years of Chinese history, *Summer Palace* follows the eventual disillusionment of these young idealists and projects the country’s struggle for definition through the eyes of a young woman ill-equipped to handle it. *Summer Palace*’s explicit sex scenes and political undertones make the film a touchstone for controversy in China. (140 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

NOVEMBER 21: AND THE SPRING COMES (立春/LICHUN), DIRECTED BY GU CHANGWEI (顾长卫), 2007.

And the Spring Comes is Gu Changwei’s second feature film following his acclaimed feature debut *Peacock*. Set in a small town near Baotou, Inner Mongolia, Wang Cailing is a plain-Jane vocal teacher who has a magnificent voice and a big dream—to be an Italian opera singer at the National Opera House. She is not dreaming alone: she meets a young man who wants to be a China’s Vincent van Gogh, a gay ballet dancer who is past his prime, and other artist misfits. All of them struggle not only to realize their dreams in the harsh reality, but more pressingly, resist the quotidian with their idealism. (105 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

DECEMBER 5: GOOD CATS (好猫/ HAOMAO), DIRECTED BY YING LIANG (应亮), 2008.

Good Cats is independent filmmaker Ying Liang’s third feature film (after *Taking Father Home* and *The Other Half*), employing digital video and non-professional actors. The title of the film refers to reformist politician Deng Xiaoping’s principle that it doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white – as long as it catches mice. *Good Cats* is a sharp satire revealing the dark side of China’s economic miracle with striking originality. While following the irresponsible life of the main protagonist Luo, a chauffeur and debt collector for a dubious real estate developer, it shows the changes that rapid urbanisation has brought to Zigong, a fast-growing inland city in Southwest China’s Sichuan province. In the film, daily life is permeated with surreal events playing out on the border between reality, absurdity and hallucination. (103 min, in Chinese with English subtitles).

ALL FILMS ARE SCREENED STARTING AT 12:40PM ON FRIDAYS IN JUDD HALL, ROOM 302 (5835 S. KIMBARK).
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