

When Strangers Meet: Visions of Asia and Europe in Film Arts & Culture Cross-Platform Series as part of ASEF15

18 May to 3 June

When Strangers Meet: Visions of Asia and Europe

When Strangers Meet: Visions of Asia and Europe is a film programme that explores the encounters and exchanges between Asia and Europe within transnational cinema. With a selection of iconic feature films and a selection of short films by emerging filmmakers, this programme presents the myriad ways in which each culture is represented and understood by the other. As a window into the discoveries, friendships, transformations and the spirit of mutual understanding between both continents, these films illustrate interactions of all shades that occur when strangers meet.

Fri 18 May

8.00 pm

The River by Jean Renoir (1951, France-India)

Sat 19 May

1.30 pm

Perfumed Nightmare by Kidlat Tahimik (1977, Philippines-France)

4.00 pm

The Year of Living Dangerously by Peter Weir (1982 Australia-Indonesia)

Sat 26 May

8.00 pm

Merry X'mas Mr Lawrence by Nagisa Oshima (1983, Japan-UK)

Sun 27 May

1.30 pm

Short Films Programme (Duration approx. 1 hour)

4.00 pm

Tropic of Emerald by Orlow Seunke (1997, Netherlands-Indonesia)

Fri 1 June

8.00 pm

The Last Emperor by Bernardo Bertolucci (1987, Italy-China)

Sun 3 June

4.00 pm

Moving by Park Ki-young (2011, Korea-New Zealand)

Friday 18 May, 8pm

The River

By Jean Renoir

1951 / USA-India / 99 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In English

Opening remarks by H. E. Olivier Caron, Ambassador of France and H. E. Dr. T. C. A. Raghavan, High Commissioner of India



Shot entirely on location in India, *The River* is Jean Renoir's and also India's first Technicolor film that beautifully unfolds like a series of impressionistic paintings. The film was adapted from Rumer Godden's novel, *The River*, which Jean Renoir was attracted to due to its absence of orientalism and exoticism that plagued much western representations of India.

The film follows Harriet the narrator as she recounts her childhood in an idyllic Bengal at the time of India's independence. Harriet's childhood is interrupted with the entrance of John, a captain who returns to visit his cousin, Harriet's neighbour, after the war. Harriet, her friend Valerie, as well as a Melanie, a young woman of mixed ethnicity, become infatuated by John. The film captures the coming of age of these three young women amidst the sensuous rhythms of life along the river, from the boatmen and factory workers at work, bazaars, and the religious practices of the locals. The tribulations that occur in their lives meander as gently as the Ganges River, which remains throughout the film as an omnipresent presence that mirrors the constant flow of life, its impermanence, and the universality of human emotions.

The River won the International Award at the 1951 Venice Film Festival. It remains one of the most seminal cinematic representations of India for Western audiences, and continues to garner critical praises. Martin Scorsese mentioned that it is one of his "most formative movie experiences," and positioned it as "one of the two most beautiful colour films ever made."

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Saturday 19 May, 1:30pm

Perfumed Nightmare

By Kidlat Tahimik

1977 / Philippines / 91 min / 16 mm / Rating TBC
In Tagalog and German with English subtitles

Much like a colourful scene of cruising Jeepneys, a popular form of commuter transport in the Philippines which are extravagantly refashioned from US Army jeeps, Kidlat Tahimik's debut feature *Perfumed Nightmare* creatively appropriates and navigates through the colonial remnants within the Philippines with a great abandon for cinematic conventions. It splices together found, stock and shot footage, in a concoction of autobiography and fiction.

The film features Kidlat himself as a Jeepney driver in the outskirts of Manila, and a faithful child to the Western developed world. He is the president of his local Werner von Braun fanclub, dreams of becoming an astronaut, and longs to take a pilgrimage to the West. His chance comes when an American hires him to run his chewing-gumball machine in Paris. Through a series of comical encounters during his stay in Paris and a trip to Germany, he soon realises that the developed world is not as gleaming as it seems.

Perfumed Nightmare is light, naive and dreamy on the surface, but hides a trickster at play whose pointed mispronunciations, misrecognitions and verbal wordplay with western cultural signifiers candidly shuffles the relations between East and West. *Perfumed Nightmare* won the International Film Critic's prize at the 1978 Berlin Film Festival and continues to be an unparalleled benchmark within the history of Phillipine Cinema.



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Saturday 19 May, 4pm
The Year of Living Dangerously

By Peter Weir

1982 / Australia / 117 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In English and Vietnamese with English subtitles

Opening remarks by H. E. Doug Chester, High Commissioner of Australia.



Based on the novel of the same name by Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously* tells the tale of Guy Hamilton, an Australian news journalist posted in Indonesia as a foreign correspondent during the last days of President Sukarno's governance. Guy enters a turbulent foreign cityscape of Jakarta where a community of European and American news journalists vie for information and interviews from the

Sukarno government and the Communist Party of Indonesia amidst escalating political unrest.

Without any contacts, Guy Hamilton befriends photographer Billy Kwan (staring Linda Hunt in her breakthrough cross-gender role that won her an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress), a male-dwarf who, in sensing an affinity with Guy, aids him in his journalistic endeavours. As a sensitive news tip is relayed by British attache Jill Bryant (played by Sigourney Weaver), Guy continues to perform his duties with idealistic abandon, while the westerners were hastily leaving the country amidst the attempted overthrow of Sukarno's government by the communists.

Without drawing any conclusions to the political events that unfold, Peter Weir limits his filmic world of Indonesia through the eyes of western journalists, an enclave marked equally with camarade and competition, and their interactions with the locals. Bookended by Guy's equally sudden arrival and departure from Indonesia, *The Year of Living Dangerously* is an experiential film that gives of a feeling the intensity of what it must be like to be swept away by the political currents of a foreign country.

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Saturday 26 May, 8pm

Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence

By Nagisa Oshima

1983 / UK-Japan / 124 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In English and Japanese with English subtitles



Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence is a haunting adaptation of Laurens Van der Post's novel, *The Seed and the Sower*. In his first English-Language film, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, Oshima addresses cultural perceptions through the vantage point of the British.

Set within a prison camp during WWII, it explores the clash between cultures and the power struggle between British POWs and Japanese soldiers. It revolves around the relationship between Major Jack Celliers, a rebellious prisoner played by David Bowie, and Captain Yonoi, the young Japanese commander played by Ryuchi Sakamoto who also composed the

film's enigmatic score. Their relationship is played out with an uncannily emotional level, with a looming sense of homoeroticism too much for Yonoi to bear, and a spectral possibility of friendship negated by historical circumstances.

Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence is a strange beast that floats through the war genre but never fully assumes its shape. It won a slate of awards including best director and best film at the 1984 Manichi Film Concours, and was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1983 Cannes Film Festival.

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Sunday 27 May

Visions of Today: Short Films from Europe and Asia (1:30pm)

2011 / various / 90 min / Digital / Rating TBC

In various languages with English subtitles

The short film section of the When Strangers Meet: Visions of Asia and Europe film programme is the result of a call for entries on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). As part of the celebration, ASEF hopes to offer opportunities for young and emerging filmmakers to explore the filmic possibilities on the theme of mutual perceptions between Asia and Europe. The theme can be interpreted creatively and involve relevant bi-regional themes such as immigration, culture-clashes, second generation migrants, returning to one's cultural roots, exchange of knowledge or expertise between the two regions or influence in terms of stylistic approach to filmmaking.

The selected short films come from a range of countries and represent a wide assortment of genre from fiction to documentaries and visual essays, giving voice to a medley of issues and ideas that bridges the gap between Europe and Asia.

Tropic of Emerald (4pm)

By Orlow Seunke

1997 / Belgium-Indonesia-Netherlands / 126 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In Japanese, Indonesian and Dutch with English subtitles

Opening remarks by Pauline Eizerna, Deputy Head of Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



In *Tropic of Emerald*, Dutch director Orlow Seunke crafts a captivating historical epic set in 1940s Indonesia. Weaving historical events into a tropical love story, the film spans the pre-war colonial era ruled by the Dutch plantation owners to the Japanese invasion and prison camps, ending with the violent independence struggle against the Dutch. Sympathetic to both sides, this epic goes surprisingly deep into the social and political climate.

The film centres on the beautiful nightclub singer Ems (Esmee de la Bretoniere), a native Indo-European married to elderly club owner Herman (Bram van der Vlugt). Strong-willed Ems is fiercely loyal to her land but is torn between her European and island roots. She falls in deeply in love with Theo (Pierre Bokma), a young Dutchman who has come to work on his uncle's rubber plantation. Their affair ends when the Japanese army invades in 1942. Throughout the film Seunke blends history, including occasional snatches of black and white archive footage, into a tense narrative. Through the character of Ems, the film offers a perspective on both Dutch and native Indonesian points of view, ultimately choosing, as she does, an independent country over her romantic but fragile Dutch love.

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Friday 1 June, 8pm

The Last Emperor

By Bernardo Bertolucci

1987 / Italy-China-UK / 163 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In Mandarin, English and Japanese with English subtitles

Opening remarks by H.E. Anacleto Felicani, Ambassador of Italy



The Last Emperor is an ambitious multi-layered biopic of Pu Yi, the last monarch of China. It begins from the time Pu Yi took over the throne at the young age of three. His childhood within the imperial palace is soon interrupted by the fall of the empire, as the narrative chronicles his collaboration with the Japanese in World War II, his rehabilitation by Chinese Communists during the Cultural Revolution, and his last days as an ordinary citizen in Mao's China.

Thrown into the turbulent waves of social and political transformations, Pu Yi resembles a puppet passively controlled and exploited by both local and

foreign political forces. Yet his detachment enables a vantage point in which we observe an individual's precarious identity shaped by the towering forces of the masses and the relentless movement of history.

Compared to Bertolucci's previous films, *The Last Emperor* is a great leap which saw him working in an unprecedented scale. With an international cast of thousands which include John Lone (as Pu Yi), Joan Chen and Peter O'Toole, Bertolucci shot his epic on location in China's Forbidden City. The film was an immense success, winning nine Oscars at the 1988 Academy Awards, including Best Film, Best Director and Best Screenplay.

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Sunday 3 June, 4pm

Moving

By Park Kiyoung

2011 / Korea-New Zealand / 91 min / Digibeta / Rating TBC

In Korean with English subtitles

Opening remarks by H.E. Mr Peter Hamilton, High Commissioner to New Zealand and H. E. Oh Joon, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea



Moving in both senses of the word, Park Ki-young's simple and straightforward documentary consists of a single interview with Jung Jin-sung and Lee Kyung-Mee, a South Korean couple who migrated to New Zealand in 2003. Held amidst the aftermath of the February 22 earthquake, the highly personal interview tells the story of their tribulations within a

new country in which they painstakingly set up their restaurant business, only to have it unexpectedly reclaimed by the forces of nature.

Minimalist and direct, *Moving* draws an affective aura from the honesty of the personal testimony which reinstates the potential of verbal storytelling within cinema. When conducting the interview Park Ki-young felt that their voice contained "their past life, their present and their future", and saw no need in adding any additional elements to illustrate their story. While it dwells with the experience of the earthquake, *Moving* does not offer any direct representations of it. Instead, the interview is intersected with static images of Christchurch that gently give way to the motions of the city's reconstruction after the earthquake.

As a pure and simple documentary, *Moving* conjures a sense of impermanence and a humanistic recognition of the failures and striving of ordinary people.

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