

**Cinémathèque
Quarterly**

**Jan-Mar
2012**



N S M

**National Museum
of Singapore**

Cinémathèque

**“Nostalgia is an estranged
and diseased utopia that
retreats into the past.”**

– Ho Tzu Nyen

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Enamorada / A Woman in Love (1946) by Emilio Fernández
Image from British Film Institute

Editor's Note

Cinema can't seem to keep its hands off history, even if cinematic representations of socio-political events or iconic figures generate controversy (maybe that's why). What will audiences make of yet another film on the Rwandan genocide (Alrick Brown's 2011 film *Kinyarwanda*)? Some filmgoers balked at Terence Malick's portrayal of Pocahontas in *The New World* (2005) because he took a politically astute child-diplomat and turned her relationship with Captain John Smith into a dreamy, sensual, brooding tale of star-crossed lovers. Closer to home, ambivalence greeted Filipino filmmaker Raya Martin's *Independencia* (2009), the second film in a trilogy that self-consciously deconstructs American colonial history in the Philippines, as well as the very genre of the 'historical' film. The list goes on.

In this issue, we consider the uneasy yet inevitable relationship between cinema and history, echoing the discussions of the *ASEAN Museum Directors' Symposium* (January 13–14) on representations of the past and the visual medium. Tan Sihan compares the short documentaries produced by the Documentation Center of Cambodia with French-Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh's narratively nuanced portraits of genocide victims and wonders whether genocide – that ultimate crime – can be visually represented at all and whether documentaries can be used as tools for reconciliation and remembrance.

The road to mass atrocity often begins with mundane policy decisions regarding identity, nation building and the representation of history. We feature an essay on Malaysian cinema from the 1950s–1960s which asks why the cultural heterogeneity that marked the co-productions of that era are viewed in some quarters as a phenomenon to be denied and excised from Malaysian cinematic history and the people's collective memory.

Two films in our *World Cinema Series* this quarter tie in aptly in this regard. Sergei Parajanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1968), a lush rendition of the life of Armenian poet Sayat-Nova and Mani Kaul's folkloric *Duvidha* (1973)

were both viewed as anachronistic films that failed to conform to the socio-political exigencies of the time.

We top off the Series by offering audiences the chance to (re)-visit a piece of that wildly bizarre series of the early 1990s: *Twin Peaks*. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992) is beyond history and time and that is precisely why we like it.

This issue also has a new section dedicated to interviews with Singapore filmmakers. We inaugurate this in the hopes that it will compel filmgoers who aren't familiar with the terrain to find out more, while giving fans, film students, academics and critics yet another perspective on the creative processes of local filmmakers. We start with that consummate experimenter Ho Tzu Nyen and his list of obsessions that run the gamut from 16th century paintings and Singapore history, to death metal and the eternal return.

Glimpsing back, this quarter also features two special programmes: *The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema* (January 26–29) and *Merdeka! The Films of Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho* (March 28–31). The latter will feature the world premiere of a film restored by the National Museum of Singapore: Ismail's *Lewat Djam Malam / After the Curfew* (1954).

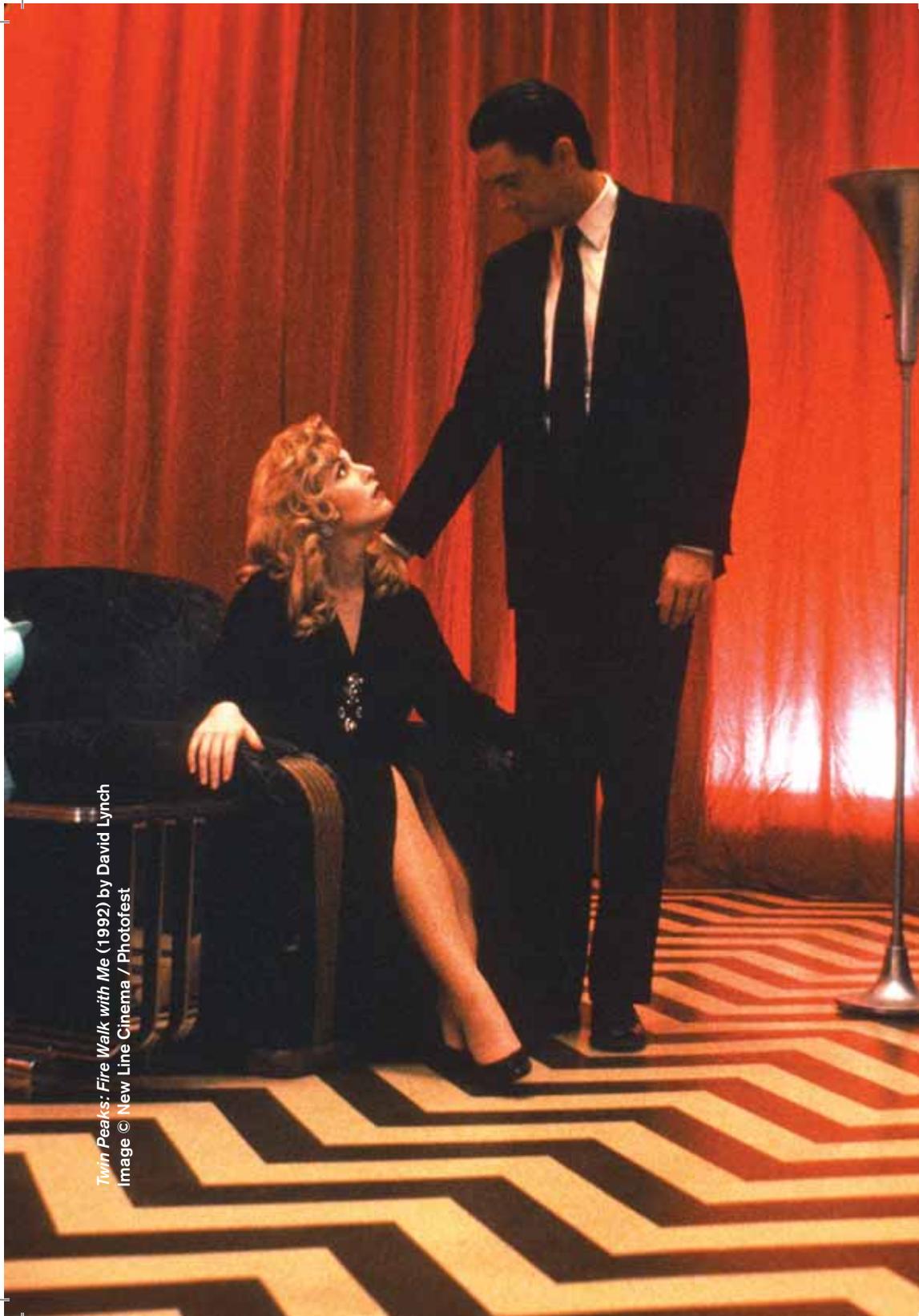
We end this issue's *Word on the Ground* section with a loving paean by Filipino filmmaker and musician Khavn De La Cruz to the late Alexis Tioseco (1981–2009) and Nika Bohinc (1979–2009) – cinephiles, film critics and ardent supporters of independent cinema. Khavn remembers the role his friend Tioseco played in organising, celebrating and supporting the annual *.MOV International Film, Music & Literature Festival* (founded by Khavn) and why the proverbial show must go on.

Vinita Ramani Mohan

Editor

Cinémathèque Quarterly

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me (1992) by David Lynch
Image © New Line Cinema / Photofest



World Cinema Series

10 January, 7 February, 6 March / 7.30 pm

Gallery Theatre, Basement

\$9 / \$7.40 Concession

Prices inclusive of SISTIC fee

A programme of the National Museum Cinémathèque

World Cinema Series is a monthly screening of works by the boldest and most inventive auteurs across the world, from renowned classics to neglected masterpieces. Witness the wonders, possibilities, textures as well as the revelatory moments that have contributed to the rich history of cinema. Take a leap of faith and discover the art of cinema that continues to affect and inspire us on the big screen – as it was meant to be seen – with the *World Cinema Series*, shown every second Tuesday of the month at the National Museum of Singapore.

Tuesday 10 January, 7.30 pm

The Colour of Pomegranates

Director **Sergei Parajanov**

1968 / Russia / 73 min / 35 mm / NC16

In Armenian with English subtitles



Image courtesy of Arkeion Films

Much like a series of Persian miniatures whose cryptic visuals are fantastically brought to life by mechanical clockwork operated by a human hand, *The Colour of Pomegranates* gazes back at an ancient culture with the motive to resurrect its symbolism with a grand cinematic gesture.

Reconnecting with the rich history of Armenia, Parajanov chronicles the life of the Armenian poet and troubadour Sayat-Nova, a revered figure recognised for his contribution to the cultural legacy and national identity of the country. Chapters of his life are expressed through a series of meticulously constructed tableaux that reflect the stanzas and lines of his poems and songs. The film moves through his early years as a wool-dyer, his rise as a court poet and musician for the 18th century king of Georgia, his tragic relationship with the king's daughter which led to his expulsion, his monkhood, and his eventual martyrdom upon execution by the Persian army of Agha Mohammed Khan.

With a vigorously consistent yet playfully light theatrical formalism, the religious rituals, ethnographic artefacts and the landscape of Parajanov's ancestral home are extracted from its distant past and placed within an uncluttered mise-en-scène that invites contemplation. This is combined with a soundtrack which strings together traditional Armenian instrumental music through the dissonant technological manipulations of musique concrète which allow single notes, the material sounds of rituals and even silence to reverberate. Through sight and sound, *The Colour of Pomegranates* projects a crystalline vision of the past that cuts through its esoteric barriers, allowing its meanings to breathe in a meditative present that could only signal its passage into the future.

Cultural production was heavily policed in 1960s Soviet Russia and the overflowing aestheticism of *The Colour of Pomegranates*, which seems indifferent to 'present' social concerns, was deemed as subversive by the authorities. Parajanov was persecuted for creating a work that departed from the officially sanctioned mode of social-realist cinematic expression. In his persistence to complete the film despite its repercussions, Parajanov shares a similar destiny with Sayat-Nova – that of the artist who takes on the burdened yet joyful task of laying testament to the religious and cultural sentiments of a heritage that has been displaced.



Image courtesy of RUSCICO

Sergei Parajanov

Upon graduating from the prestigious Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography in Moscow, Parajanov made a series of state-sanctioned social-realist films. His friendship with Tarkovsky inspired his subsequent phase of filmmaking. With his masterpieces *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) and *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1968), Parajanov found his calling to revive his Armenian ancestral history through a colourful compositional style that prioritises visual and musical effect over narrative. While these films established him as an auteur praised by his European counterparts such as Godard and Fellini, his rejection of the rigid cultural ideology of Soviet Russia resulted in a series of state-initiated trumped up charges which led to him being imprisoned for four years. Parajanov made two other feature films *The Legend of Suram Fortress* (1984) and *Ashik Kerib* (1988), and explored other forms of expression such as painting and collages before passing away in Armenia in 1990.

Tuesday 7 February, 7.30 pm

Duvidha / In Two Minds

Director **Mani Kaul**

1973 / India / 84 min / Digital Beta / Rating TBC

In Hindi with English subtitles



Image © National Film Development Corporation Ltd

Mani Kaul's third film (his first in colour), *Duvidha*, is based on a Rajasthani folk tale by Vijaydan Detha. The film essays the story of a merchant's son (Ravi Menon) who returns home with a new bride (Raisa Padamsee) only to leave her soon after for businesses afield. His pursuit of greater wealth takes him to remote places and he returns only after long lapses of time. A ghost living in a tree impersonates the travelling husband and starts to live with his wife; they subsequently have a child. The husband hears of this on his return and is horrified to find the ghost impersonating him. With the help of an enigmatic shepherd, the ghost is finally lured into a leather bag and sent away.

A bewitching amalgamation of the classical styles of the Kangra and Basohli miniature paintings and the art cinema of Robert Bresson and Sergei Parajanov inform the colour schemes, the framing and editing as well as the melancholic atmosphere of the film. This is in contrast to the full-blooded folk music score. Perhaps the most visceral aspect of *Duvidha* is Kaul's experiments with the imagery. He employs a number of photographs, freeze frames, jump-cuts and repetitions to illustrate the film's central notion of temporal and geographical dislocation. Free from the burden of traditional narrative storytelling, Kaul explores an alternative in which the past, present and future are always in conversation. The duality apparent in the title imbues itself throughout the film. It involves a choice between the spiritual and the material, the new bride's past and future, her childhood and adulthood, her freedom and honour and her love and security.

The film positioned itself so far from any other in Indian cinema's history that even directors outside the sphere of commercial cinema could not grasp its achievement. Satyajit Ray, considered the spiritual father of the Indian New Wave, wrote a scathing article (*Four and a Quarter*, now collected in *Our Films, Their Films*, a collection of essays and critiques by Ray) expressing his disapproval and bewilderment. Ray attacked the film for its self-indulgence, its exotica and sparseness, while proclaiming that, "Kaul's wayward, fragile aestheticism has led him to the sick-bed". Unsurprisingly, such condemnation by the establishment has been the best feature of avant-garde art. While Kaul retained his experimental streak throughout the rest of his film career, *Duvidha* remains his most acclaimed film.



Image © National Film Development Corporation Ltd



Image © National Film Development Corporation Ltd

Mani Kaul

Mani Kaul was born Rabindranath Kaul in Jodhpur, Rajasthan in 1944. Kaul joined the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune initially as an acting student but decided to switch over to the direction course instead, where he came under the tutelage of Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak. He graduated from FTII in 1966. Kaul's first film, *Uski Roti* (1969), was one of the key films that signalled the rise of the Indian New Wave. The early cinema of Mani Kaul posed questions about the cinematic form, while pushing the envelope with great rigor, especially in such films as *Asad ka Ek Din* (1971), *Duvidha* (1973), and *Satah se Uthata Aadmi* (1980). In 1976, Kaul and other like-minded artists set up the Yukt Film Co-operative (Union of Kinematograph Technicians). This led to a remarkable avant-garde experiment in collective filmmaking. Kaul explored fiction and documentary with films like *Dhrupad* (1982), *Mati Manas* (1984) and *Siddheshwari* (1989) where the two different genres are fused successfully together with a rare cultural intensity. Mani Kaul continued making films until his untimely death last year, aged 66.

Tuesday 6 March, 7.30 pm

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

Director **David Lynch**

1992 / USA / 135 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC

In English



Image © New Line Cinema / Photofest

Somewhere within the wilderness close to the Western fringes lies Twin Peaks, a town that figuratively encapsulates a lost trajectory of the American Dream. Much like a postcard that freezes the idealistic pursuit for happiness at a certain juncture of history, it features a picturesque landscape complete with hunting lodges, suburban homes, late night diners and cherry pies. Similarly, its inhabitants seem like stock characters from American soap operas. There is, however, something amiss in the community of Twin Peaks. While it gives off a sense of tranquillity and pastoral charm missing in modernised cities, it is also in close proximity to a repressed heritage lurking beneath the American dream, an unsettling nocturnal stain so terrible that it can only be understood in riddles.

At the heart of the immensely popular 1990s television series *Twin Peaks* was the corpse of Laura Palmer, a teenage homecoming queen who was found washed up on the banks of a river. Both her life and her subsequent death are shrouded in mystery, as seemingly innocent bystanders are gradually implicated in one way or another, unravelling the town's veneer of propriety and wholesomeness. David Lynch's feature-length prequel, *Fire Walk with Me*, departs from the meandering narrative of the television series and instead dives head-on into the tragic last days of Laura Palmer, revealing the enigmatic event that constituted the recurring themes of the series.

Yet an event is never concrete in the Lynchian universe. While laying bare the circumstances of Laura Palmer's death, *Fire Walk with Me* takes an unrestrained hallucinatory trip into the realm of her subconscious with its labyrinth of liminal spaces, doorways and a bestiary of creatures that soak up the horrors of reality only to flow back to the surface with a frightening intensity.

When the buzzing of hypnotic televisual feedback in the opening sequence is suddenly interrupted when a baseball bat smashes the television, Lynch's mission is clear. Rather than pinning terror on a malevolent metaphysical force, as the series eventually did, *Fire Walk with Me* which must be considered as one of Lynch's most brutal excursions, seeks to dispel illusion and reveal the real forces behind it: transgression and violence within the dark well of humanity, and within that, precious traces of love and goodwill, but more so, a desperate hope for transcendence.

World Cinema Series



Image © New Line Cinema / Photofest

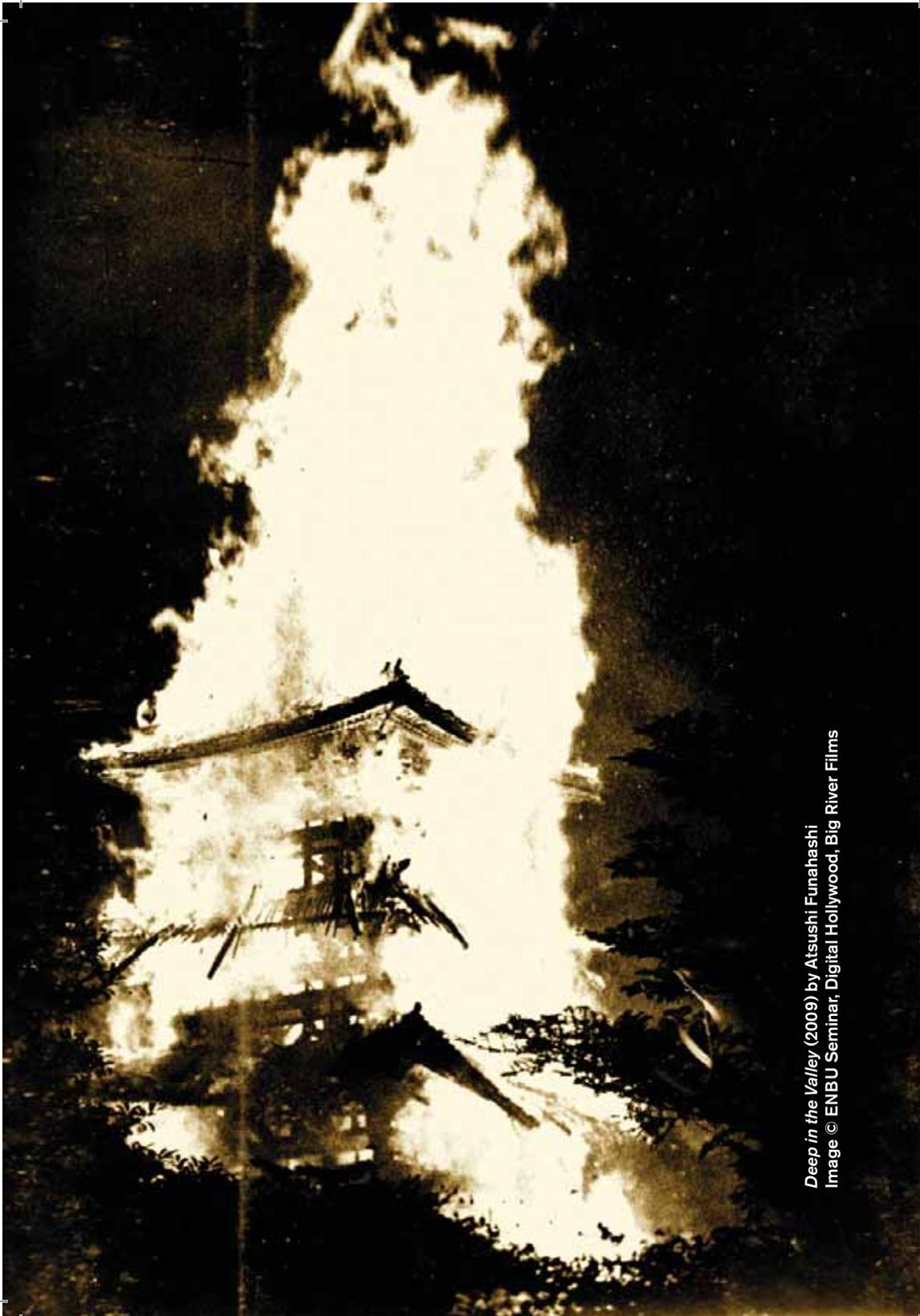


Image © New Line Cinema / Photofest

World Cinema Series

David Lynch

David Lynch made his first short films while studying painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. With the success of *The Alphabet* (1968) and *The Grandmother* (1970), Lynch moved to LA to create *Eraserhead* (1976) his first feature which went on to become an international cult classic. His distinctive body of work such as *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Wild at Heart* (1990), *Lost Highway* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and also the TV series *Twin Peaks* (1990–91) came to define a surrealistic topography of America rife with mystery and the potential for discovery, yet dangerously close to an underbelly of corruption. Lynch is also an ardent propagator of transcendental meditation through the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, a coffee aficionado with his own signature blend, and a musician who has recently released his first solo album, *Crazy Clown Time*.



Deep in the Valley (2009) by Atsushi Funahashi
Image © ENBU Seminar, Digital Hollywood, Big River Films

ASEAN Museum Directors' Symposium: Film as a Language of History

13–14 January / 9.30 am to 6.30 pm

Gallery Theatre, Basement

Free Admission with Registration

A programme of the National Museum of Singapore

To explore timely questions about the role that film plays in the way we make sense of our collective and personal histories, the National Museum of Singapore presents a two-day symposium that brings together esteemed filmmakers, historians and academics for a series of presentations and film screenings that examine the intersections between film and history. Open to all members of the public, the symposium will be a platform to discuss how history is represented and experienced through the filmic medium and the implications of this process on our understanding of the past. A special highlight of the symposium is a forum that reflects on the history of the National Museum of Singapore's utilisation and engagement with film in its galleries and Cinémathèque.

To register, please email to nhb_nm_cinematheque@nhb.gov.sg with your name and contact details. Seats are limited, and will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

AMDS: Film as a Language of History

Schedule

Friday 13 January

- 9.30 am** **Welcome Address**
Michael Koh (CEO/National Heritage Board)
- 9.45 am** **Keynote Address**
Cinema as a Language of History: Explorations into Two Related Worlds
Associate Professor Kenneth Paul Tan
- FORUM 1: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND FILMIC REPRESENTATION**
- 11.20 am** ***Dealing with the Ghosts of the Past in Malaysian and Indonesian Cinema***
Dr. Farish Ahmad-Noor
- 11.50 am** ***Memories and History in Filipino Cinema***
Nick Deocampo
- 1.50 pm** Film Screening: ***Deep in the Valley***
Atsushi Funahashi (2009 / 129 min / PG13)
With an introduction and a post-screening discussion with Atsushi Funahashi
- 4.50 pm** Film Screening: ***Invisible City***
Tan Pin Pin (2007 / 60 min / PG)
With an introduction and a post-screening discussion with Tan Pin Pin

AMDS: Film as a Language of History

Schedule

Saturday 14 January

FORUM 2: HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES, RUPTURES, AND FILMIC PERSPECTIVES

- 9.30 am** *From National Narratives to Unwanted History in Thai Cinema*
Chalida Uabumrungjit
- 10.45 am** *Filming with History in Mind: Exploring Gie and Contemporary Indonesian Cinema*
Riri Riza
- 12.50 pm** Film Screening: *Independencia*
Directed by Raya Martin (2009 / 77 min / M18)
With an introduction and a post-screening discussion
with Dr. Portia Reyes
- 3.00 pm** *Historical Perspectives in Cinema*
A discussion with filmmakers Atsushi Funahashi,
Riri Riza and Tan Pin Pin
- 4.45 pm** **REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF FILM
AS A LANGUAGE OF HISTORY
IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SINGAPORE**
A discussion with Lee Chor Lin (Director, National Museum
of Singapore) and Zhang Wenjie (Head of the National
Museum Cinémathèque)
With participation by Victric Thng and Tan Pin Pin
- 6.15 pm** **Closing Remarks**
Professor Chua Beng Huat

Enamorada / A Woman in Love (1946) by Emilio Fernández
Image from Film Reference Library



The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema

26–29 January / Various Timings

Gallery Theatre, Basement

\$9 / \$7.40 Concession

Prices inclusive of SISTIC fee

A programme of the National Museum Cinémathèque

Co-presented with the Mexican Embassy of Singapore

The period from the 1930s to the 1960s is canonised as the historical peak of Mexican cinema that encapsulated the heartbeat of a nation on the brink of modernity. Reflecting localised realities and fantasies, films during this golden epoch are popular forms of entertainment assimilated into the everyday life of Mexicans. They are also emblems of the idealistic search for a Mexican aesthetic that established a unified national identity. Exploring the rich legacy of this lively period, this programme features masterpieces by Mexican auteurs synonymous with the Golden Age.

The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema is part of a cultural exchange between Mexico and Singapore that explores the most vibrant episode of each country's cinematic history. The Golden Age of Singapore Cinema will be presented in Mexico in late 2012.

The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema

Schedule

Thursday 26 January

7.30 pm *Enamorada / A Woman in Love*
Emilio Fernández (1946 / 90 min / Rating TBC)

Friday 27 January

8.00 pm *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa! / Let's Go With Pancho Villa!*
Fernando de Fuentes (1936 / 92 min / PG)

Saturday 28 January

1.30 pm *La Perla / The Pearl*
Emilio Fernández (1947 / 85 min / PG)

4.00 pm *Distinto amanecer / A Different Dawn*
Julio Bracho (1943 / 108 min / PG)

8.00 pm *El Vampiro / The Vampire*
Fernando Méndez (1957 / 96 min / PG)

Sunday 29 January

1.30 pm *Nosotros los pobres / We the Poor*
Ismael Rodríguez (1947 / 128 min / Rating TBC)

4.30 pm *Una familia de tantas / One Family Among Many*
Alejandro Galindo (1948 / 130 min / Rating TBC)

8.00 pm *Macario*
Roberto Gavaldón (1960 / 91 min / Rating TBC)

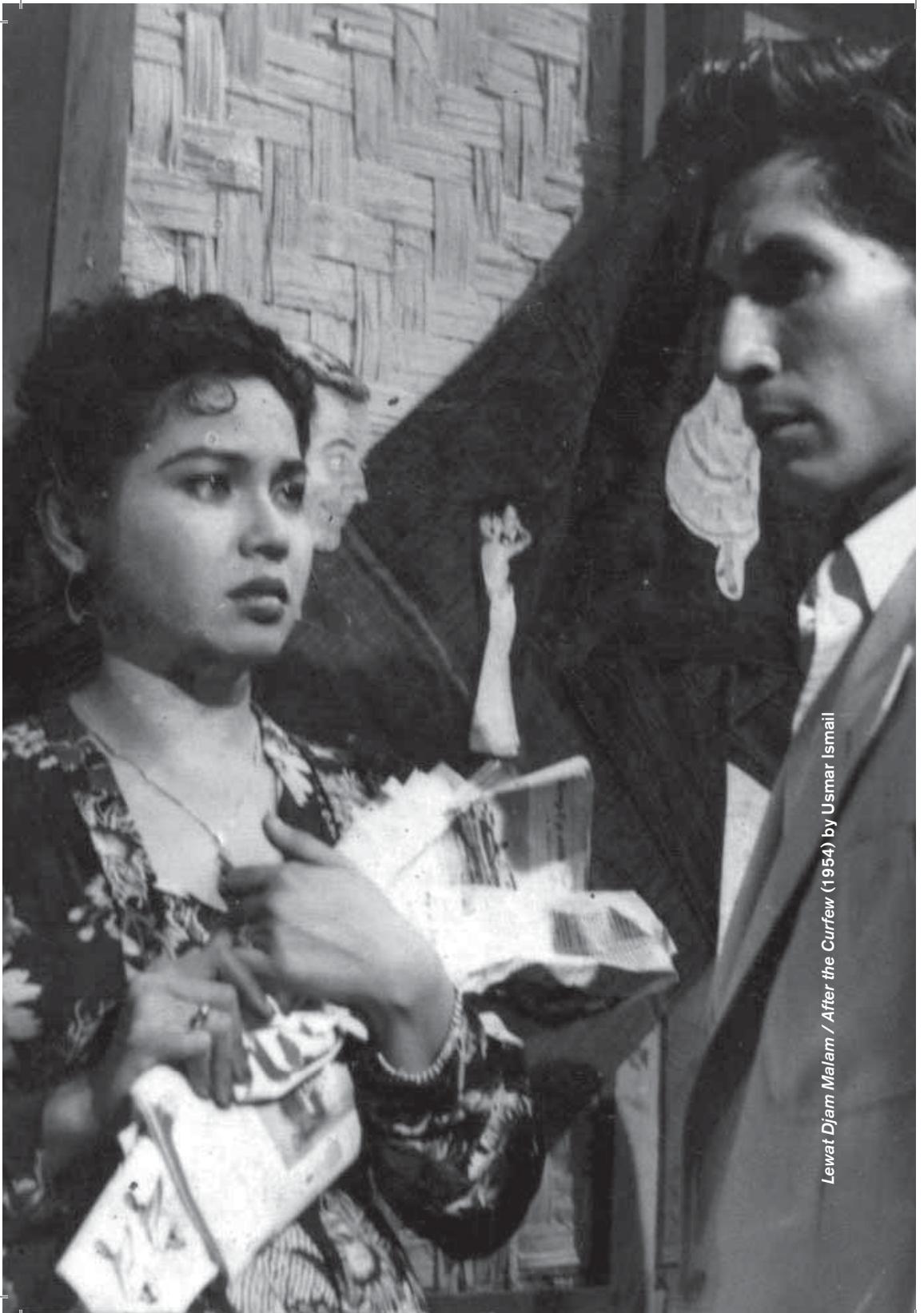
The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema



Macario (1960) by Roberto Gavaldón
Image from Film Reference Library



El Vampiro / The Vampire (1957) by Fernando Méndez
Image © Alameda Films / Photofest



Lewat Djam Malam / After the Curfew (1954) by Usmar Ismail

Merdeka! The Films of Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho

28–31 March / Various Timings

\$9 / \$7.40 Concession

Prices inclusive of SISTIC fee

A programme of the National Museum Cinémathèque

Merdeka! is a special focus of six major works by Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho, two master filmmakers who have shaped and defined modern Indonesia cinema. Regarded as The Father of Indonesian Cinema, Usmar Ismail started the first wholly-owned Indonesian film company in 1950, a year after Indonesia won its independence (“Merdeka”), and made the first films that showed the real lives of Indonesians and their struggle for independence. While Ismail fought to tell the story of Indonesia’s independence, Garin Nugroho fought to establish an Indonesian independent cinema. Beginning with his debut feature *Love in a Slice of Bread* (1990), Garin led the development of independent Indonesian films and actively fostered a community of filmmakers towards the arrival of the Indonesian New Wave in the late 90s.

A special highlight of *Merdeka!* is the world premiere of the National Museum of Singapore’s restoration of Ismail’s critically acclaimed classic *Lewat Djam Malam / After the Curfew* (1954).

Merdeka! The Films of Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho

Schedule

Wednesday 28 March

8.00 pm ***Lewat Djam Malam / After the Curfew***
Usmar Ismail (1954 / 102 min / Rating TBC)

Thursday 29 March

8.00 pm ***Surat untuk Bidadari / Letter to an Angel***
Garin Nugroho (1993 / 118 min / Rating TBC)

Friday 30 March

8.00 pm ***Darah dan Doa / The Long March***
Usmar Ismail (1950 / 127 min / Rating TBC)

Saturday 31 March

1.30 pm ***Puisi Tak terkuburkan / A Poet***
Garin Nugroho (1999 / 83 min / Rating TBC)

4.00 pm ***Tamu Agung / The Exalted Guest***
Usmar Ismail (1955 / 107 min / Rating TBC)

8.00 pm ***Mata Tertutup / Blindfold***
Garin Nugroho (2011 / 90 min / Rating TBC)

Merdeka! The Films of Usmar Ismail and Garin Nugroho



Puisi Tak Terkuburkan / A Poet (1999) by Garin Nugroho



Darah dan Doa / The Long March (1950) by Usmar Ismail

One of the main buildings at S-21, or Tuol Sleng prison
Image © *Whita Ramani Mohan*





Confronting the Unrepresentable: Documentary Films and the Cambodian Genocide

Tan Sihan

If genocide is the ultimate, unrepresentable crime, what can cinema do for the cause of genocide prevention? This essay looks at how survivors of the Cambodian genocide use film as a tool to promote reconciliation and education.

“A peaceful landscape... An ordinary field with flights of crows, harvests, grass fires. An ordinary road where cars and peasants and lovers pass. An ordinary village for vacationers - with a marketplace and a steeple - can lead all too easily to a concentration camp”.¹ In lilting French, with verdant visuals of sunlit meadows and a wistful score, Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955) seductively lulls viewers into the horrors of World War II. Made just ten years after WWII’s end as part of a French memorial effort, Resnais’s documentary features sobering

Confronting the Unrepresentable

recounts of Nazism against a backdrop of concentration camps (Auschwitz and Madjanek). Historical significance instigated its production, specific memories of survivors shaped its form, and an inquisition against the conspirators of war sealed its assembly. Seventy years on, more than sixty documentaries have been made on the holocaust, ranging from grayscale Anne Frank re-enactments to Discovery Channel's double-billed miniseries, *WWII in Colour*.²

What Resnais and others documented unforgettably for post-war Europe, Cambodians Rithy Panh and Youk Chhang have endeavoured to achieve for Cambodia over the last two decades - an ubiquitous record of its civil war past. The Khmer Rouge reign of 1975–1979 claimed a fifth of Cambodia's population under the cloak of deranged communism. Nearly two million lost lives in history's fourth deadliest genocide were largely forgotten in the aftermath of the tragedy, as survivors sought to avoid speaking about the past. Panh, a French-Cambodian filmmaker, established the Bophana Audio



Behind the Walls of S-21 (2007) by Doug Kass
Image courtesy of Documentation Center of Cambodia

Visual Center (BAVC) while Chhang became the Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and acts as an advisor on the organisation's various filmic, radio and publication projects. Together, they have been headlining efforts to resuscitate Cambodia from a lingering amnesia of the genocidal years. The initiatives have spanned museums, institutes and extensive databases on the regime to increase awareness, as well as documentary films. The statement, "A society cannot know itself without having an accurate memory of its history"³ characterises DC-Cam's *raison d'être* and their documentaries aspire to facilitate healing, and reconciliation.

Writing History, Documenting Memory

History began as an oral tradition, a word-of-mouth discipline before the invention of a writing system. The written word cemented history's objective to account and record significant events – migrations, wars, trade, conquest and empire. Purposes have varied to suit specific functions, with conquistadors espousing Mayan conquests with exotic flourish and perverse dictators drawing up statistical data on death tolls. Methods to transcribe history have similarly shapeshifted from hieroglyphic monuments to the modern documentary. With the vast knowledge of our world attributed to the rigours of historians since their existence in the Aristotelian epoch, historians are often perceived as paragons of truth with public faith placed on their cohesive annals and verifiable facts. But complexities arise when evidence is unearthed decades after an event that may shed new light on what some believe are immutable facts.

As such, memory is the feeling of the past while history is an impassive note of the past. By establishing an active

relationship with the past, memory does not recognise any break between past and present, fulfilling what Maurice Halbwachs called “a current of continuous thought”.⁴ The past lives on ad infinitum in one’s head; our mundane, daily thoughts may occupy the temporal mindspace but once reminded, memories re-surface, as fresh and as visceral as ever. It is effectively, a bondage to the past. A problematic memory encourages continued estrangement with the present, barring successful integration with the present and reconciliation with the past. Like a bodily organ, the traumatic memory becomes a permanent inhabitant in one’s mind; repressing it is no guarantee of liberation from associated emotions of the event.

As such, by documenting memories, we are effectively documenting portions of the human condition, capturing the living, lucid complications of our lives. Just as our present is contingently infused with memories, a film narrative is adept at incorporating intermittent flashbacks. Traumatic memories are prone to strike abruptly and the very nature of film as a medium mirrors that break in an arguably seamless narrative.

‘Bringing Back Together’ – DC-Cam’s Films as Tools for Reconciliation

DC-Cam explores this disorder explicitly in its documentaries by plotting differing testimonials of victims and perpetrators on singular situations, challenging the viewer to reconcile with both versions. In place of traditional and often secondary history, DC-Cam introduces memory in the first degree.

Their work is crucial because the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, a belated prosecution that only began its second trial indicting senior Khmer Rouge leaders last year, has been riddled with problems from its inception. The reluctance

of Hun Sen, the Cambodian Prime Minister, to back the UN-led Khmer Rouge Tribunal beyond two trials by citing the possibility of political unrest, drew international derision. The ambivalence at the government level to value the justice process presents a bleak prospect for reconciliation going forward.

In contrast to this, it's evident watching DC-Cam's short documentaries that considerable groundwork has gone into gaining the trust of survivors, convincing them to verbalise and indeed, document their memories for posterity's sake. More fly-on-the-wall than cinema verite, their films abide by a suitably journalistic code in documenting – always conscientious yet discerning and never manipulative. Whether fifteen or forty five minutes long, there lies a respectful interviewer-interviewee relationship in each documentary. Former perpetrators are dispassionately asked to remember and revisit deplorable acts from their collective past.

The naturalistic progression of the storytelling seems void of any interpretative control or self-serving agenda, with truth-seeking as the only driving principle. Talking heads are intercut with rustic village life; photo stills and black and white archival footage are used sparingly and a narrator duly contextualises these images, setting out the history of the period. It is a formula that is repeated across the series. There are no shocking images to accompany the graphic nature of the recollections. Instead, the safe and minimalistic format ensures its universality and viability as a teaching tool in schools. In addition, there are no shoddy re-enactments or dubious expert voices juxtaposed with the intimate, confessional tone of the interview-driven films. The emphatically sterile presentation does away with all manner of cinematic flash or rousing scores, leaving a direct depiction of survivors

Confronting the Unrepresentable

recounting their experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime. DC-Cam does not aspire for the groundbreaking or award-winning. There are none of the brashly divisive ways of Michael Moore or Morgan Spurlock, no Herzogian spirituality or the shadowing dedication of Maysles, just a professionally linear product that duly serves its purpose – what you see is what you get.

A tense moment ripe for any emotional picking is duly underplayed in *Behind the Walls of S-21* (2007). A series of questions build towards revealing the roles each party played: Him Huy, a S-21 guard, repeatedly denies ever torturing the detainees of Tuol Sleng only to have Bou Meng, an artist, specifically single him out as the guard who prodded and hurt him with a bamboo pole. The structure of backstory-recount-resolution, which is repeated through each film, veils exceptional moments of poignancy that astound cumulatively, long after the viewer has moved on to another film, another image. In a startlingly memorable scene in *The Khmer Rouge Rice Fields* (2005), a rape victim, Tang Kim demands, “I want



Behind the Walls of S-21 (2007) by Doug Kass
Image courtesy of Documentation Center of Cambodia

to ask, the Khmer Rouge killed my husband. What can they pay? Take them all to be killed so I can have some peace.”⁵ The film trails her to a huge temple at Da District, away from the rice fields. She and other devotees pray and meditate as the voiceover ventures into the topic of forgiveness. Yet this desire for peace is shortlived, taking a dramatic turn yet again as she returns to the storied rice fields, fervidly demanding that “blood will be paid by blood”⁶ for “I will not get closure on the past if I am not vindictive”.⁷ There is no escape from her raw desire for vengeance. It seems to ebb away, only to return renewed as another traumatic memory is unearthed. She confronts the camera and we in turn, as the audience, suddenly become uncomfortable witnesses. At boiling point, director Rachana Phat relieves the tension superbly, cutting to a scene of a nun shaving Tang Kim’s head. The bare, shaven Tang Kim smiles peaceably while the voiceovers of monks preaching peace and reproving revenge tides her into a hopeful calm. In this minute long sequence, Youk Chhang finds his metaphor, his representation of memory stirred and appeased.

When asked what makes a good documentary, the veteran documentary auteur Errol Morris stated that, “There is no rule about how a documentary film has to be made. The only rule is that one should try to pursue the truth, and try to tell a story about the real world.”⁸ DC-Cam’s documentaries, regardless of length, ensures that the common objective and the subsequent audience interpretation are identical takeaways - the horrors of genocide are lasting and every effort must be made to see justice served and prevent such atrocities from happening again.

The urgency with which these documentaries confront its audience, particularly Cambodian viewers, is crucial to

Cambodia's future. Most survivors of the war are illiterate, unable to reach out beyond the communities they live in. The life expectancy of Cambodians stands at sixty years of age, so there is also a sense in these films that time might be running out. For the generation born after 1979, many are unable to believe the stories their parents and grandparents tell them. In addition to the films they produce, DC-Cam also has a series of youth-focused programs that include trips to the S-21 Tuol Sleng prison and the Cheung Ek Killing Fields memorial site. Students are also brought to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to attend hearings. Film then becomes part of a larger integrated effort, locally initiated, to promote healing through storytelling, witnessing and listening.

These efforts have not gone to waste. In 2009, Cambodia's Education Ministry approved the first-ever Khmer Rouge history textbook. Produced by DC-Cam and Ton Sa Im, the Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education, Youk Chhang enlisted the aid of psychiatrists and genocide experts in compiling its content, acutely aware of its sensitive nature. Survivors such as Tang Kim subsequently volunteered to educate teachers to better inform their students in history classes.

Paying Homage – Rithy Panh & the story of Hout Bophana

Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy (1996) was the first Khmer film made about the mass crimes of the Khmer Rouge era. Rithy Panh, who survived but lost his entire family to the regime, settled in France and later established an audio-visual centre, naming it after the titular Bophana. Additionally, he directed four other acclaimed films on the Khmer Rouge. Individually, *Rice People* (1994) competed for the Oscars in the foreign film category and *S21: The Khmer Rouge*

Killing Machine (2003) showed at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. The latter is perhaps the most high profile Khmer documentary in placing victims and aggressors side by side. With *Bophana*, Rithy Panh pays homage to the fighting dead.

A moving, soulful docudrama based on dozens of unearthed love letters, as well as an enigmatic portrait of a striking young woman, Hout Bophana became a national icon of the futile struggle against genocide and mass atrocity. The unofficial Anne Frank of Cambodia was, like Tang Kim, a victim of rape. She subsequently bore a child from the assault, before escaping to Phnom Penh where she met Sitha, her would-be lover. They were separated, each sent to toil in the fields, only to be reunited again at Tuol Sleng, in death. Her story, recalled heartrendingly by her surviving mother and relatives, is buffered by nuanced voiceovers reciting the couple's love letters to each other. The affection, longing, hope and ultimate despair reverberate in each sentence and word of the banned letters.



The Khmer Rouge Rice Fields (2005) by Rachana Phat
Image courtesy of Documentation Center of Cambodia

Excerpts are read in voice-over, juxtaposed against a gritty montage of detained peasants working the fields. “I know only too well that one day I will be a victim of our enemies here;”⁹ Bophana grimly predicts to her lover Ly Sitha, a former Buddhist monk turned Khmer Rouge cadre. “I cannot fight against destiny to meet you;”¹⁰ she continues in another letter, as a group of young peasants ferry a huge boulder across a knoll, “because life has an ending and when you reach the end, you must know how to end this life;”¹¹ as the boulder is finally lowered into a ditch. In lieu of the forbidden nature of love letters, Bophana would sometimes sign off as “Flower of Dangerous Love”.¹² Their exchanges would eventually lead to their premature deaths, as S-21 guards intercepted their letters and the regime began vicious purges against soldiers in its own ranks. Panh sidetracks from the main narrative to feature a S-21 survivor, Heng Nath, showing Mr Houy, a former S21 guard around a gallery of paintings in one of Tuol Sleng’s rooms. Heng Nath, who painted most of the pictures depicting prison conditions and torture, banter amicably with Houy about his incarcerated years in an atypically surreal moment.

Panh shares with DC-Cam a similarly modest approach towards documenting the Khmer Rouge years, basing his films upon haunting, quietly devastating testimonials. His documentaries are lengthier, reflexive pieces and in them, an articulate elegance rivets through slowly revealing layers of loss, hurt, confrontations and reconciliation. Panh is particularly gifted in crafting an immersive environment where his subject’s words are the action, the drama and the nuances. Heng Nath, who fronts *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, eases his much younger perpetrators into casual exchanges before leading to a chilling confrontation. Panh’s films are not necessarily something you will want to watch again, but

they stay with you long after, possessing a mesmeric power to put everything into perspective.

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Attempting to represent genocide through film presents a difficult terrain riddled with controversy. Back-to-back Hollywood depictions of the Rwandan genocide have drawn both confusion and criticism from Rwandans. In Raoul Peck's *Sometimes in April* (2005), Jean Pierre Rucogoza, a 47-year-old university lecturer and genocide survivor finds an alien version of events "characterized by very serious inaccuracies and omissions which made most survivors say 'it is not our story'",¹³ The one-man-show heroics of *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), the *Schindler's List* of the 2000s, has been downplayed by Rwandan President Paul Kagame who regards the representation a "falsehood" and "even those that are true do not merit the level of highlight."¹⁴ Foreign, especially western, adaptations of crucial international affairs often sacrifice the entire truth for the sake of fitting an appropriate and marketable genre. Dr. Peter Hammond gapes at the forfeit of vibrant African Christianity in *Hotel Rwanda* since religion is at the root of the Rwandan genocide, threatening the importance of its otherwise accurate narrative.¹⁵ *Schindler's List* (1993) itself featured harrowing scenes of genocide in the Polish concentration camps but the culling served as a secondary story to the Schindler narrative. A concerted attempt to portray the actions of the Japanese military during World War II in Mou Tun Fei's *Men Behind the Sun* (1988) is, for example, negated in a scene in which a character throws a cat into a cage full of ravenous rats. By turning to metaphors such as these, all nuance is lost. Instead, we're left with the image of prey against predator, victim against oppressor.

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The Khmer Rouge period dominated international headlines in the early 1980s, and the regime's collapse was most memorably captured in Roland Joffe's *The Killing Fields* (1984), which bagged three Oscars with Khmer Rouge survivor Haing S. Ngor receiving the best supporting actor award for his performance. Based on a New York Times article, it is perhaps the most well-known film made about the Khmer Rouge, inspired by *Night and Fog* in the similar need to represent an atrocity with gripping urgency and authenticity. Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982) featured Franz, a doctor who joins a protest group consisting of European medical professionals who march into Phnom Penh, demanding treatment for the injured and dying. The film version in 1988 however, forfeited the Cambodian episode entirely.

But these films differ from the documentaries of Rithy Panh and DC-Cam in one crucial respect: most obviously, the latter are locally made. But more importantly, they refuse to graphically depict the torture and massacres. The contemporary landscapes "mark a refusal to fill an absence, a refusal to take us back to a history that in its magnitude exceeds any examples that would partially serve to represent it".¹⁶ The Khmer Rouge cannot be represented by fetishising violence, or through graphic metaphors or explicit symbolism. The audience needs to understand, think and even reflect; not succumb to emotions that overt violence might instigate. While the films seek not to represent genocide, they exist and have to exist to deter entire populations from denying the Khmer Rouge ever happened.

Belated as it is, the pioneering endeavors of Rithy Panh and Youk Chhang's team of documentarians and writers

represent a self-reliant Cambodian approach and a breakaway from foreign dependence – to own, tame and integrate their estranged history as part of the Khmer identity. Films by Cambodians, either living in the country or in the diaspora, may repeatedly return to the idea of memory, trauma and history, but that repetition is a necessary process – one that is liable to continue until Cambodians feel justice has been served in some way. Modern Cambodia will no longer tolerate any feigned ignorance and disrespectful amnesia. Thirty years after the Khmer Rouge period, the work of DC-Cam and BAVC ensure that the testimonies of survivors which had been suppressed, overlooked or simply forgotten are given their rightful place in the official narrative and in the larger, international attempt to understand and prevent mass crimes, atrocity and genocide.

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Tan Sihan is a 23-year old Mass Communications undergraduate at the Nanyang Technological University. From Giallo to Gallo, he became a roving, cinephile after watching Kim Ki-Duk's *3-Iron* by mistake some years ago. In his spare time, he likes to travel, observe and write in no particular order.

- 1 *Night and Fog*, DVD, directed by Alain Resnais (France, UK: 1955)
- 2 *World War II in Colour*, Discovery Channel.
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- 3 "Publications", Documentation Center of Cambodia.
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- 4 Maurice Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory" in *The Collective Memory* (New York: 1980)
- 5 *The Khmer Rice Fields*, VCD, directed by Rachana Phat (Cambodia, DC-Cam: 2004)
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Scott Tobias, "Errol Morris-Interview" AVClub. July 24 2011
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- 9 *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy*, VCD, Directed by Rithy Panh (Cambodia: 1994)
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- 11 Ibid.
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- 13 Arthur Asimwe, "Rwanda Survivors say Hollywood got it Wrong", Reuters (South Africa: 2006)
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- 15 Peter Hammond, "Hotel Rwanda" Frontline Fellowship.
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- 16 "Representation and the Holocaust" in *Criticism and Ideology*. See: <http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Criticism-Ideology/Holocaust-REPRESENTATION-AND-THE-HOLOCAUST.html>

Plural Identities, Reinventions and Revisions in Malaysian Cinema

Vinita Ramani Mohan

Should cinema serve a nationalistic agenda? Examining the freewheeling spirit of Malaysian cinema of the 1950s–1960s, this essay concludes that nothing could be worse for fostering creativity and openness in filmmaking.

Ask P. Ramlee: Pluralism and Malaysian Identities

When he was asked about his films, *Tokyo Magic Hour* (2005) and *The Year of Living Vicariously* (2005), filmmaker Amir Muhammad summed them up as “Malaysian” films first, however else they may be categorised and understood upon further analysis.

Made in the same year, one is ostensibly a eulogy and a visual poem tracing the beginnings and demise of a relationship (*Tokyo Magic Hour*). The other film is a documentary shot variously around the production locations of Indonesian filmmaker Riri Riza’s film *Gie* (2005). The documentary captures the thoughts of students and the crew on the state of their country.

The question is, how or why are they 'Malaysian' films? Some pieces clicked into place during the 2005 Screen Singapore Festival's screening of P. Ramlee's *Labu Dan Labi* (1962).¹ The film is a riotous comedy in which two servants, Labu (M. Zain) and Labi (P. Ramlee), lead lives of miserable subservience to Haji Bakhil (Udo Omar). Bakhil (which means "stingy poker") is a caricatured tyrant who hoards his wealth, refusing to part with it even when his daughter needs a little extra cash to keep her sewing business going. Labu (the cook) and Labi (the driver played by P. Ramlee) drift off into a world of fantasy one night, lying out on the porch and conjure up scenarios in which the master-servant relationship is reversed.

The film then segues into the various possibilities their fantastical imaginations create. Suddenly, Labu is a souped-up magistrate and Labi is a doctor. The two meet in a snazzy jazz bar where a cool-looking band play sexy numbers (and the acquiescent guy serving the drinks is Haji Bakhil).

Songs include Consuelo Velázquez's *Besame Mucho*, now made famous by Cape Verde chanteuse Césaria Évora. Models representing every ethnic group (Anglo, Chinese, Malay and Indian) strut down a catwalk and the dramatic emcee keeps the mood up. Labu and Labi break into hilarious, satirical versions of rich, established aristocrats – complete with English-accented Malay and plenty of English words thrown in for good measure.

As if this sequence weren't absurd enough, Ramlee's comedic but wry narrative takes us through every cliché imaginable. The two men play out Tarzan in the jungle (an almost *Animal Farm*-like parody of our animalistic, primordial need for power); the classic western; noir and melodrama complete with marriages, murder attempts

and jealousy. The audience can either dismiss it as the mad desires of two servants or an excuse for Ramlee to engage in some freewheeling warm-ups in various cinematic genres.

What stood out most dramatically at the film's closing is P. Ramlee's message that this is a Malaysian film. In it, Malay characters can be anywhere and anything – both in an economic and cultural sense. They can become what they desire and also parody the outcome. Gin and tonic, sexy baju kurong, status and prejudice – it is all there ripe for the Freudian picking.

In an article called *P. Ramlee Bridges the Ethnic Divide*,² Muhammad says just as much in response to the growing tendency in some circles to reify Malaysian (and Malay) cinema - a dubious act of "reclaiming identity" if there ever was any. Quoting Ayu Haswida Abu Bakar's take on Malay cinema, Muhammad writes, "Malay cinema is described as "kuat dibelenggu oleh budaya India" (tightly shackled by Indian culture) and our audiences "dibuai momokan imaginasi pengarah India" (lulled by the spectre of Indian directors' imagination) before our hero P. Ramlee came along and "berjaya melenyapkan pengaruh budaya India" (successfully wiped out the influence of Indian culture) from local cinema.

At a film conference in 2005, Ms Bakar raised these issues once again.³ In her paper, she writes that, "films must portray Malaysia's dictum being 'Our film, our image'".⁴ There are two implications to be drawn from this somewhat ambiguous statement. Firstly, there is an assumption that "our image" is cohesive and homogenous. What little mention of plurality there is in the paper is only given a cursory glance at best. Indeed, Indian directors like P.L. Kapur, B.N. Rao, B.S. Rajhans or

L. Krishnan are hardly mentioned, with the exception of Rajhans. Instead, Ms Bakar states, "Ironically, it was the Malays that took hold of the dying industry and began its restructuring".⁵ Unsubstantiated, this supposed economic fact is turned into a piece of historical revisionism, effectively denying the pluralism and cultural syncretism that was evident in the cinemas of Malaysia and Singapore at the time.⁶

The second assumption is that film must conform to a homogenous cultural reality. Ms Bakar only substantiates this by quoting herself: "The influence of popular culture must not be treated lightly as its powerful impact is piercing into our society amidst modernization and urbanization and ultimately into our cultural heritage".⁷ This statement seems to suggest that Malaysians must prepare for an impending threat. There's also the recommendation that the government should play a paternalistic and interventionist role in determining the content of cinema as it ties into issues of "national integration".

In his essay tracing the historical development of cinema in Malaysia, M. Shariff Ahmad summarises that the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) was set up to regulate film activities, "to monitor and guide the growth of the industry so that its economic profile could be clearly seen within the context of the overall economic growth of the country".⁸ It seems that this is how Ms Bakar interprets the role of such an institution.

In a considerably better and more astute paper, Malaysian academic Norman Yusoff examines hybrid identities and pluralism, delving into the works of cultural theorists such as bell hooks and Stuart Hall.⁹ Yusoff recognises how new Malaysian cinema problematises attempts to define

a monolithic idea of “national cinema” and how some portrayals of inter-cultural relationships or ethnicity may be in line with the nation’s ideas of multiculturalism, or a challenge to it.

Yusoff states in the paper that, “In the context of Malaysian cinema, the question of representation has been at stake lately, with the heterogeneity and hybridisation of the nation portrayed in films”.¹⁰ Why is representation at stake the moment heterogeneity and cultural boundaries are simply shown as dynamic rather than static? Via his analysis of three contemporary Malaysian films – *Spinning Gasing* (Teck Tan, 2000) *Sepet* (Yasmin Ahmad, 2004) and *Sembilu* (Yusof Haslam, 1994) – Yusoff concludes that the “multi-culturalism steeped in these films, through the manifestation of multi-ethnic representation, do contribute to a particular construction of (Malaysian) national identity that insists upon heterogeneity and hybridity”.¹¹

Navigate This: Culture on the Move in Hussain Haniff’s *Jiran Sekampong*

Hussain Haniff’s film *Jiran Sekampong / Village Neighbours* (1965) is a brilliant social drama that slowly unwinds in a kampong where issues of materialism, social status, class, even “caste” and sexuality emerge. The atmosphere always borders on the explosive, though Haniff keeps the tension subtle and even includes elements of parody to show how social mores and struggles for power brings out the worst in people.

Rohani and her mother live in a more rural part of town and they earn their keep with the elder woman’s domestic work at the home of a doctor. The doctor and his wife see themselves as relatively progressive, though there are

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lines that cannot be crossed – dancing to 50s rock'n'roll and young couples openly making out is of course, out of the question. Rohani's suitor (approved by her mother) is Salim, a dedicated mechanic at a workshop.

Other families include Hassan and his father, who wishes his philandering son would settle down with a proper, nice and traditional Malay woman. Instead, Hassan is dating sexy, self-assuredly cosmopolitan and status-seeking Suriani. Schooled by her mother Cik Bedah, who buys the make-up and clothes to send out the message to the community that her daughter is no backward village girl, Suriani's entire demeanour goes against what Hassan's father wants in a potential daughter-in-law.

The cast of characters are complex and Haniff manages to deftly weave their stories together. In a critical scene, Hassan asks Suriani to dress in the traditional baju kurung and pay a visit to his home, convinced that his father will realise Suriani is not a mini-skirt wearing, spoilt, sexy brat. Suriani shows up and follows the appropriate code of behaviour, predictably impressing Hassan's father. When his father asks, "Who is that?" and is told it is indeed Suriani, he exclaims how wonderful she is, concluding his joyous approval with, "Stay with this Suriani and drop that other one you were seeing!"

It's a bizarre bit of irony but Haniff's inclusion of such a scene is telling and oddly anachronistic. Here is a moment in a Malay film where an incisive comment is made about cultural navigation, about youth and identity as fluid, not fixed. The pluralism Haniff hints at isn't just between cultures in a multi-ethnic context; it is the plurality inherent to identity itself; a plurality that undoes how we define what or who a "Malay" person is.

Osman, a simple but impassioned fellow develops a relationship with Salmah, the doctor's daughter. Osman's mother is just as mortified as Salmah's parents when they all find out about the young couple. Osman's mother insists: "We're a bohmo (shaman) family and Salmah is from a doctor's family. The two cannot mix!" Once again, Haniff doesn't push the point too dramatically. The class differences are evident, but he makes it clear that socially, such differences are not always seen as hierarchical; that notions of superiority, inferiority and difference are complex and cannot be reified.

The stereotypes in the film – the macho man, the gossiping women and the status-seeking parents – enable Haniff to show that when passions run high, we become a caricature of ourselves. The portrayal of gender dynamics, sexuality and power in itself are insightful and do not appear dated even forty years after the film was made. Cik Bedah is the epitome of contradictions in a social context where she understands the worth of sexual currency, but deplors such behaviour when it's someone else's daughter.

In a particularly daring scene, Rohani is raped by neighbour Encik Salleh, a lecherous landowner who spies on her when she is with her boyfriend Salim. At the same time, we see Salim praying at the mosque. After Encik Salleh has left, Rohani remains mute, in a state of shock. The filmmaker juxtaposes this image with Salim at the workshop, intently working a lead metal rod through a hole.

Though the film ends on a positive note, this particular scene is the darkest and most powerful in the film. In how it overtly questions the role men play in women's lives and the issue of sanctity or purity as religion would define it,

Haniff manages a form of social commentary that is both subtle and remarkable.

Construction still not complete

Several films of this era are cosmopolitan, witty and incisive in their portrayal of issues such as tradition, modernity and culture. However awkwardly done, or however wooden the acting may seem in parts, films such as *Satay* (1958) by K.M. Basker or *Korban Fitnah* (1959) by P.L. Kapur, successfully touch on gender, sexuality and cultural mores. Even *Sumpah Pontianak* (1958) by B.N. Rao, starring the famous Maria Menado, takes the pontianak myth about the cursed spirit of a dead woman coming back to wreak havoc on the community, and reverses it. Here, Menado plays all three characters – the pontianak, the beautiful spirit of the deceased mother, and the ugly hunchback who has been subdued by the villagers. But in every incarnation, she is powerful and her only intention is to protect her daughter and destroy anyone who harms her. Though some theorists generally read the pontianak myths through a psychoanalytic framework to expose the ways in which femininity is constructed, films like Rao's also show how the traditional reading of the myth can be subverted.¹²

And that is precisely what Malaysian cinema from the 1950s–1960s period seems to demonstrate: that subversion, play and open interpretations of cultures, myths and social roles are the very stuff of great films.

A longer version of this essay appeared in the online Southeast Asian cinemas web-journal Criticine in October 2005. See: http://www.criticine.com/feature_article.php?id=21

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- 1 Unfortunately, the website pertaining to the Festival has not been archived for reference. More information on the Festival, see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Screen_Singapore>
- 2 Muhammad, Amir: *P. Ramlee Bridges the Ethnic Divide*. January 21, 2005, *New Straits Times*.
- 3 Ayu Haswida Abu Bakar: *Malaysian National Identity in Malaysian Cinema*. Presented at the Southeast Asian Cinemas at the Borders conference, August 15–16 2005. Organised by the Thammasat University/Thai Film Foundation: See the following link for more: <http://www.thaifilm.com/newsDetail_en.asp?id=143>
- 4 *Ibid*, p.2.
- 5 *Ibid*, p.6.
- 6 In an interview I did with Maria Menado in August 2005 for an article, the actress told me that she had worked with the likes of Shammi Kapoor – the great Indian actor – and that there was a great deal of interaction, exchange of ideas and creative energy between the Indians and Malays. When I queried her on why this isn't mentioned more in writings about Malaysian cinema, she simply shook her head, rolled her eyes and said, "what to do?"
- 7 Ayu Haswida Abu Bakar: *Malaysian National Identity in Malaysian Cinema*. Presented at the Southeast Asian Cinemas at the Borders conference, August 15–16 2005. Organised by Thammasat University/Thai Film Foundation: See the following link for more: <http://www.thaifilm.com/newsDetail_en.asp?id=143> p.8
- 8 Ahmad, M.S.: *Malaysia in The Films of Asean*, Edited by Jose F. Lacaba. ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information: 2000, p. 55.
- 9 Yusoff, Norman: *Representation of Multi-Ethnic Characters in Contemporary Malaysian Cinema*. Also presented during the Southeast Asian Cinemas at the Borders Conference, 15–16 August 2005, Thammasat University/Thai Film Foundation.

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- 10 Ibid, p.3.
- 11 Ibid, p.17.
- 12 Adeline Kueh's paper and research in this area makes for excellent reading. See Kueh, A.: *Pontianak and her Sisters: Representations of Monstrosity in Southeast Asian Popular Culture*. The full paper was previously available at: <http://www.ahcca.unimelb.edu.au/events/conferences/WLB/kueh.html> (accessed 2005).





The Cloud of Unknowing (2011) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

Interview

Ho Tzu Nyen

From innovative approaches to using television and music, to madness and civilization, artist and filmmaker Ho Tzu Nyen sat down with Vinita Ramani Mohan and Shan Bertelli to talk about what drives him to make films, how it all began and why he strives for a healthy ambiguity that opens up his films and cinema itself to multiple interpretations and endless projections from the audience.

Starting at the beginning, what led you to film?

The love of seeing films led me to making it. When I become very interested in something, I usually try to find a way of getting involved with it. But I wasn't trained as a filmmaker; I didn't go to a film school. I went to arts school and majored in sculpture, but all along I knew that I'd eventually be working with moving images and sound.

Was there a filmmaker in particular who was an influence that led to the turning point in what you wanted to do?

At different stages in my life there were different filmmakers that were really important. When I was about seventeen or eighteen, I had important encounters with films by Fellini, Antonioni and Godard. These films were much less accessible when I was growing up in the pre-internet world. That was the era of VHS tape, and chancing upon these films was like striking gold. Each masterpiece reveals a world of possibilities. One film that was really important for me was Pasolini's *Teorema*. It was a film of profound passion, expressed through a structure that is crystalline in clarity. Another filmmaker of continuing importance for me is Andrei Tarkovsky. In his work, the dimension of time is rendered into a tangible form. I feel breathless with awe before the unfolding of his films. I grew up on a steady diet of genre films from Hong Kong. Today, I hold some of the films that Johnnie To and Dante

Lam made in high esteem, and I rank King Hu as one of the greatest filmmakers of all time. But if I think further back, I would also say that my childhood experience of *E.T.* was important. I was only 8 years old then and I found myself crying when E.T. died. I was shocked to find myself in tears in a cinema. I didn't know what was happening to me so I looked at my parents and they were oblivious. Of course E.T. was resurrected and I felt cheated. I wanted E.T. to stay in the grave! Don't come back! Just die! But I guess being duped is also a big part of the cinematic experience.

In terms of what we've seen of your works, were there any tentative short outtakes prior to *Utama: Every Name in History is I* (2003) or was *Utama* really the first?

I fiddled around with cameras but never properly made anything that I would consider a finished work. I guess that in those days, I simply could not think of anything compelling enough for me to devote time to. Making a film involves not only my time, but also the time of the other collaborators. And seeing a film takes up time. It is an immense expenditure of resources, and sacrifice of time. And time is life. This is why I find uninteresting films a travesty.



Utama: Every Name in History is I (2003) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

Utama was the first film I made. It took me almost two years to complete – even if the shooting took just 3 continuous days, without sleep. The entire crew had never been part of a film before. The cinematographer was a good friend, a photographer. So we shot the entire film in his living room. We hung green paper in his living room as a makeshift chroma-key screen and shot the film there. It was crazy. It took six months to edit the film, because the lousy computers we could afford back then were so slow. But it was anarchic fun.

It's very interesting that your first foray into filmmaking also had to do with this idea of origins. *Utama* is about, ostensibly, the moment that Singapore was declared as Singapore (or Singapura). Why did you choose something that was so weighed with meaning?

Utama came about when I got to do my first one-person exhibition, at the Substation. I got to know the former Artistic Co-Director of the Substation, Lee Weng Choy, after he had read some of the art criticism I wrote. Somehow that led to an exhibition. And since it was the first time I was having an exhibition in Singapore, I thought I should start at the beginning of Singapore. *Utama* was also an excuse for me to engage with a field of literature that I was very curious about - Southeast Asian historiography. Up until then, I was solely immersed in philosophical writings as well as art and film theory. I think I felt that I needed to find a way to engage theoretically with this region, to figure out what it means, for me. So I spent almost a year researching and writing the script. It was marvelous to encounter the writings of great Southeast scholars such as O.W. Wolters. Ultimately for me, I believe that we don't really choose the work that we do. Rather, the work chooses us. We are servants of the work.

In your article for FOCAS (Forum on Contemporary Art & Society) called *Every Cat in History is I* you were able to deconstruct this idea of origins, linking it to pandemic, paranoia and state control. As a writer, you're able to delve into the complexity of these issues. So was it a challenge to distill that kind of complexity and reflect it in a short film?

I think of complexity as the result of looking at the world without safety nets, without resorting to any sleights of hand. Writing an essay and making a film is like choosing between prose and verse. For me, a strong poem is an intense condensation of a world. It requires a process of compression that makes it much more economical than prose writing, though this same process also opens the work up to a kind of ambiguity. But this ambiguity is also the space that allows the spectator to come in, to occupy the work, and make it his or her own. The works of art that appeal most strongly to me have the quality of being simultaneously dense, and empty at the same time. It is like the Taoist image of the void – where fullness is paradoxically emptiness.

For *Utama*, the challenge was to find a way to condense the information and knowledge gleaned from the work of scholars into images and sounds. *Utama* was first shown at the Substation with a group of paintings in 2003. So it functioned like an art installation. At the same time, the film was circulated in the film festival circuit, giving it a chance to be seen by a different audience. Subsequently *Utama* became a performance lecture at schools, and performing arts festivals – hence reaching out to yet another kind of audience.

There are both recurrent themes and recurrent collaborators in your works throughout the years. How important has that spirit of reciprocity, community and collaboration been for you in your development as a filmmaker?

Actually, it's a really crucial part of my practice and it's something I grow to appreciate with each new work that I make. As far as possible, I try to work with the same people so we can grow together. For me filmmaking is like a community art project – an opportunity to spend time with friends, and to make new ones.

In *Utama* a few interesting statements are uttered. A character says that exclusion is a function of nostalgia and if one were to dig deeper into the past, one would only find a mirage. This recurs in your next episodic series *4x4*. You seem to be critical of explorations of the past, of how they are undertaken.

Official histories are always written with the backing of an army. Today in Singapore, we can observe a growing fascination for alternative histories. On the one hand, the plurality of accounts is productive, but I think it is equally important to critically assess the claims of those who produce these alternative accounts. Some interesting work has grown out of this, but most of it is not artistically interesting, politically productive nor historically informative. Very often, these projects end up as exercises in nostalgia, where history is invoked as nothing more than a marketing tagline. These attempts often end up emptying out the political charge of these moments.

Despite how it has often been perceived, *Utama* is not an attempt to produce an alternative founding myth of Singapore, different to the official, Anglo-centric version of history that we have been fed with. It is not an attempt to replace Sir Stamford Raffles, with Sang Nila Utama, the pre-colonial founder. Rather it is an attempt to question the very mechanism that underlines all myths of origin.

In *Utama* the words “consort, murderer, usurper, pirate, traitor” are all used to refer to the ostensible ‘founder’ of Singapura. You also delve into Raffles and how he has been represented in Singapore history through your writings. How would you tell the story of that other iconic ‘father’ figure Lee Kuan Yew?

There was a time when Raffles was sick in his residence in Singapore. In a feverish state, he dreamt of death, and of the royal grave at Fort Canning, and of Utama who came before him. Each founding father dreams up another, they repeat one another, like a row of portraits of kings and conquerors in the hallway of an imaginary, and intoxicating museum of power.

Tell us how *4x4: Episodes of Singapore Art (2005)* was conceptualised and received.

4x4 was a way for me to work through Singaporean art historiography, and to find an audio-visual means of disseminating this information and knowledge, to the widest possible audience. A big inspiration was Roberto Rossellini’s didactic series of historical works for television, such as *The Age of the Medici* and *Pascal*.

Ho Tzu Nyen

4x4 was part of the Singapore Art Show, organised then by the National Arts Council. It was a biennial exhibition for which they commissioned Singapore artists to create works for different spaces. They didn't specify what they wanted, so I proposed a television series. I wasn't interested in creating something for a gallery or a museum because I wanted to reach a broader audience.

This is how we got involved with Arts Central. We managed to persuade them to commission this series. As for the reception to *4x4*, it is difficult to say. Making a television show, you don't get reviews or meet people who have just engaged with it, so the feedback is not immediate. I've heard of people making pirated copies of the work and distributing it amongst themselves, which is great. There were many enquiries from libraries about acquiring it, but the price that Arts Central was asking for was just too prohibitive. One thing for sure – the commissioners from Arts Central weren't fans of the series! The first episode of the series featured a painting by Cheong Soo Pieng, which has Malay women in an idyllic kampong setting. I reconstructed the entire painting with real props and live models. Upon seeing a preview of that episode, one television executive told me that it was not sexy enough, and that I should zoom in to the women, and maybe to flash out ratings of how sexy and virginal each of these women were. I just pretended to take down



4x4: Episodes of Singapore Art (2005) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

his comments in my notebook. Arts Central, now known as Okto recently aired the series again, which is great. Maybe they like it now!

What led you to work with prominent television and theatre actors like Lim Kay Tong and Beatrice Chia-Richmond?

Since this was being made for television, I felt it was appropriate to have faces that an audience finds familiar. Presenters in a television programme essentially function as an interface between the programme and the audience, and familiarity smoothens this process.

There's a didactic quality to all the episodes of *4x4*, but the structure is also very Socratic. Opposing forces exist in a state of heightened tension and disagree about interpretations of works of art. Why that structure and that tension?

Television series about art are usually mild tempered affairs. There's always a single voice, dishing out statements about artworks that the audience receives. Different interpretations of the work may be discussed, but eventually everything is resolved, and articulated in one voice. This single channel of address is an authoritarian form of communication, which is completely antithetical to the freedom of interpretation promised to us by art.



4x4: Episodes of Singapore Art (2005) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

Despite having talking heads and interviewees, there's always that synthesis.

Yes, *4x4* was made precisely to function as a kind of dialectical didacticism without synthesis. *4x4* can be described as art criticism delivered through two points of view embodied by two presenters who never agree. The conflict is never resolved. The synthesis is left to the audience. In many television programmes the presenter addresses the audience on the other side of the screen directly, commanding attention in a mode that is essentially authoritarian in structure. *4x4* was borne out of an attempt to undo this system of authority.

Why did you set it up as a debate between a man and a woman in every episode, with the woman always representing the contrarian, controversial view?

If it's a man and a woman, the viewers immediately project certain forms of relationships on them. Again it draws upon the conventions of television in order to ease viewers into the episode, so that other forms of experimentation can take place. As for why the woman is always given the contrarian view – well, we first need to define “contrarian”, and according to who, and what criteria.



4x4: Episodes of Singapore Art (2005) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

In the second episode, this struggle between two forces sees a violent resolution. Tell us about that.

The last word is always achieved through violence, a shutting out of the other. There is an inherent violence in all arguments. So the violent end of the second episode takes that to its logical conclusion. It ended the debate without settling it.

Viewing it now in the current climate, in the aftermath of two quite interesting elections that took place in 2006 and 2011, it seems like an apt metaphor for the PAP and opposition voices. There are voices on the outside constantly presenting contrarian views and you've got the status quo not being able to hear that and finding various ways to resolve that, suppress it.

I think of a lot of my films as blank screens. I'm obsessed by the idea that if you compress a sufficient amount of information and association into a single work, these intentions cancel each other out, hence leaving the film in a paradoxical state of blankness. It's a way of making a film simulate the condition of a blank screen, a way of moving forward that is also simultaneously a return. This blankness is what allows the audience to project, to hallucinate, to envision. In Singapore, my works often lend themselves particularly well to audience projections and hallucinations of a political nature. I wonder what it says about me, or the audience....

In your film *HERE* (2009), patients with psychological problems at Island Hospital are offered treatments using 'videocure', where their problems are documented on film. There is a character, Robert, who refuses to be cured. He refuses to be denied his past, denied who he is. He is also the only white character at the hospital, which is interesting.

I thought of the character as a manifestation of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the asylum. The lines he speaks are mostly quotations from Nietzsche. When I cast the actor who played Robert, it was coincidental that he was white. He could deliver the lines without sounding awkward, so I cast him. In any case, he is not the only white character. We have a couple of white doctors as well. I'm sure this can lead to more speculations of a political-paranoiac type.

Though the setting is an asylum, *HERE* has a broad cast of characters from different backgrounds that's quite representative of Singapore.

In some way, all of my films are expressions of Singapore. They might not deal with Singaporean issues ostensibly, but they are manifestations of my dreams and nightmares about this place. I've always been fascinated by a primitive function of film – which is its use for recording presences. I am moved by seeing and hearing people that I know, and have a fondness for, in my films. When I'm casting for my films, acting ability is not always a prime concern. I am more attracted to people with singular presences and interesting physiognomies. Making a film is to find some way of channeling those energies.

Would you ever experiment with documentary filmmaking, given your fascination for documenting space, cultures, languages and bodies?

I find that sometimes, fiction films are the best documentaries, and documentary films sometimes produce the best fiction. For me the lines between these categories don't exist when I work. I just create images and sounds, as faithfully and accurately to my own nervous system.

Speaking of bodies, *Earth (((radio)))* (2009) feels like a tableau vivant. Critics saw Gericault, Delacroix and Caravaggio in your film – the set piece, the lighting, the mood, the feeling that it is the aftermath of some horrendous event. In that sense, there was the smallest trace too, of Picasso's *Guernica*. What prompted this exploration of a traumatic event?

I have a great love for classical European paintings from the 16th–18th centuries. I feel a greater affinity for these paintings than I do for a lot of contemporary art. The most important genre of painting then was the history painting, and history painting is built upon a ready-made event, which the prospective spectator already knows. These events are historical, biblical, or mythical - it is assumed that the viewer of the painting already knows the story. With *Earth (((radio)))*, there is no more specific event, no narrative, just a catastrophe, the aftermath of an unknown disaster. A world of spectres, somnambulists and dreamers. In *Earth*, or should we say, on earth - history is catastrophe.

So that's very different from the nostalgic rendition of the past where in fact things are more perfect. This is an antithesis to that where the past is not just flawed; you're saying the past is detritus and decay.

Nostalgia is borne of dissatisfaction with the present. As such, nostalgia is a kind of longing for a different world. More precisely, nostalgia is an estranged and diseased utopia that retreats into the past.

But then you overlay this with a soundtrack composed of Metallica, Queen, Pearl Jam and Guns and Roses etc. It's a jarring juxtaposition. It certainly sounded to me like the soundtrack for my generation.

There are a few soundtracks to *Earth (((radio)))*. When it was first made, the Singaporean band The Observatory performed to it in a show called *Invisible Room*. After that, the film has been screened with live music performed by many other great musicians, such as Black to Comm, from Hamburg, Wolfram, from Warsaw and Oren Ambarchi, from Melbourne. *Earth (((radio)))* is a version I did using samples from the Billboard Top 100 guitar riffs of all time - and all these samples are slowed down so that a process of delayed recognition takes place. This is parallel to what happens visually in the films - compositional schemas from Caravaggio or Gericault float up through the cloak of contemporary dress, after some time. *Earth (((radio)))* is an kind of mnemonic exercise for people of my, and your generation.

We've talked about the cyclical quality that exists through so many of your films. You ask yourself if that was actually the beginning or was it in the middle at the beginning of looping something. How are you seeing that representation of time? And how does film lend itself to that idea?

This circular structure is something that recurs in a lot of the work I do. It is not something I consciously plan for - it just happens. One way of understanding a circular structure is that one doesn't really go anywhere with it.

The other way of understanding a circular structure - the more precise way, in fact, would be to see that the circle is never perfectly

Ho Tzu Nyen



Earth ((radio)) (2009) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen



The Cloud of Unknowing (2011) by Ho Tzu Nyen
Image courtesy of Ho Tzu Nyen

formed. Rather what we have is a spiral. In *HERE*, the end seems to lead to the beginning, but it is nevertheless a new beginning. For me, interesting films are propositions about the experience of time.

***The Cloud of Unknowing* (2011) works with some of these themes, these repetitions.**

The Cloud of Unknowing is a film that brings together a number of paintings in which clouds appear as symbols of the divine. The sudden and irrational eruptions of clouds in these paintings also signify a suspension of the laws of reality, and as such, come close to madness. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a reconfiguration of the ambiguities inherent within these iconic religious paintings, but acted out in an old, decaying and abandoned housing estate in Taman Jurong in Singapore, channeled through Singaporean bodies.

With your film though, you get the sense that there might be something ambiguous and insidious. There's a sense of foreboding. You're not sensing something necessarily transcendental when you see the cloud.

It's the doom metal version of those paintings! (Laughs)

That's great! That should be your synopsis for *The Cloud of Unknowing*: a film that is a doom metal rendition of transcendental Catholic visitations.

There's a fine line between transcendence and hallucination. Divine manifestation in many classical paintings is often accompanied by a liberation from logic, from reality, and from the earth. This is why in these paintings figures rise into the air, light intensifies, and rapture occurs. Clouds appear as portals to another dimension, or become vehicles upon which saints travel through the firmament. Those were early psychedelic experiences – outbreaks of cosmic joy and delirium.

What's next in the cards for you?

The Cloud of Unknowing was commissioned to represent Singapore at the Venice Biennale in 2011. That has just ended, and the installation –

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which includes the film, a specially designed 13 channel sound system, smoke machines and floodlights, is traveling to the New Frontiers section of the Sundance Film Festival. Right after that, a new, four-screen version of the work is going to be shown at a solo exhibition I'm having at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. In April, I'm working with a new, and really amazing new band called 3 Tigers, in a kind of drone metal opera about the extinction of Malayan tigers and the myth of the shamanic were-tiger at the Esplanade Theatre Studio. At the same time, I'm finishing my second feature film, called *Endless Day*.

Will it be an aesthetic departure from what you've done so far?

Every work is a new departure, though old obsessions often return to haunt them.

Ho Tzu Nyen (b. 1976) is a filmmaker, artist and is the Singapore desk editor for Art Asia Pacific (USA). His short film *Utama: Every Name in History is I* (2003) was presented at the Sao Paulo Biennale (2004) and Fukuoka Triennale (2005). He also produced a made-for-TV series *4 x 4: Episodes of Singapore Art* (2005) for the Singapore Art Show. His first feature film, *HERE* (2009) was shown at the Director's Fortnight section at the 62nd Cannes International Film Festival in 2009. His subsequent medium length film *Earth ((radio))* (2009) premiered at the Venice Film Festival in the same year. In 2011, he presented an installation, *The Cloud of Unknowing* at the Venice Biennale. He is currently completing his second feature film, *Endless Day*.



Word on the Ground

Is There a Ghost in My House? On Alexis, Nika, and Holding the 4th .MOV Fest in Their Memory

Khavn De La Cruz

Alexis Tioseco (1981–2009) was a film critic, founder of online film journal Criticine and a film professor at the University of Asia and the Pacific. His partner, Nika Bohinc (1979–2009), also a critic and writer with Ekran magazine in Ljubljana, Slovenia, had moved to Manila to be with Alexis. A prodigious talent, a champion of Filipino, and indeed, Southeast Asian cinema, Alexis was a force to be reckoned with. Critic Gabe Klinger named Alexis' article "The Letter I Would Like to Read to You in Person" (written as a letter to Nika) for Rogue magazine as a piece that would become definitive and canonical in what it demanded and desired for Filipino cinema. Their combined powers and passion would have been a formidable thing to behold. The couple were murdered in their Quezon City home on September 1, 2009. Ostensibly a robbery, the case was mired in problems and to date, the murderers remain at large. Cinema lost two brilliant, committed souls and their deaths sent shockwaves across the global film community. Friend, comrade, filmmaker and artist Khavn De La Cruz remembers Alexis and Nika, in the context of a Festival he founded and has been running since 2002.

I must have felt there hasn't been enough suffering in my life. Otherwise, I would never have held a .MOV Fest this year. Organizing a festival on a shoestring budget is madness, but this year it was also tinged with a

sense of nostalgia. We held the festival in loving memory of the dead - Alexis and Nika - and as it would later on turn out, my father.

I'll let you in on a secret: there was never going to be a fourth .MOV Fest. A trilogy was as far as I wanted to go with it. Trilogies have a nice symmetry to them. There were a lot of other things to do anyway: on my plate was a pile of work two buildings tall and an ocean wide. Besides, it's a whole lot easier to make a film than to organize a festival. The very first .MOV Fest was, in fact, an accident. All I wanted was to hold a short film competition called Silvershots. The next thing I knew we had to fill up an entire week with films. .MOV Fest was born right that very minute, with the help of Chits Jimenez and JD Domingo.

All .MOV Fest wanted to do was crank up the volume on unsung cinematic voices: the wildly experimental, the off-center upstarts, the rebels in the fringes, the ones that fell between the cracks, the ones that got lost in the shuffle, and the ones that we may have missed but shouldn't have.

Alexis Tioseco was still around at the time of the second edition. His love for cinema ran deep: South East Asian cinema in particular. We all have the boundless, unflagging work he put into Criticine and S-Express as evidence of that love. Even when the 2nd .MOV Fest was just a plan hatched in between slurps of bottomless iced tea and bites of pizza (Napoli's is so good you'll rethink your life goals after every box), I knew Alexis was going to do the programming. Not only did the guy have impeccable taste, he was every bit as sworn to the festival's mission.

Now, it's custom to say only nice things of the dead, but I'll go against the grain here and tell you a few truths about Alexis. Some friends called him Eggy. Eggy is not Klingon for "highly intelligent or very good-looking." It's a synonym for Egg. There's no sugarcoating this: Alexis was as egg-headed as they come. It wasn't cute or adorable and it explained why he was such an earnest, intelligent young man: he had a lot to compensate for. One of Alexis's other quirks was that, if he gave you a

Is There a Ghost in My House?

present and later on realized what a nice present it was, he'd ask you to give it back. Alexis was also a huge fan of Filipina bombshell Angel Locsin. I have reason to suspect he wallpapered his desktop with her photos.

I tell you these things about Alexis not to slander the dead but to make you understand that Alexis wasn't just a great film critic, which he was; he was my friend. This is why the fourth .MOV Fest was particularly bittersweet. We dedicated it to the memory of Alexis Tioseco and Nika Bohinc. In many ways, this year's .MOV Fest is a valentine, a celebration: of their life, of their work and, more than that, of their love. Their love for the Philippines, for Slovenia, for cinema, for art, for each other.

I remember how the aura of their funeral mass felt closer to that of a wedding mass - and how it made sense that way. Alexis and Nika were fated and inseparable. Love was always the spirit in which Alexis and Nika did their work and lived their lives. It is the spirit in which we remember them. And it's only right that this is the spirit .MOV Fest embodies and continues to thrive on. In going before their time and in the tragic way they did, Alexis and Nika have given .MOV nothing short of a new lease of life. Alexis may not have been around to program this year's festival but, in many ways, it's as if he still is. This year yielded a very promising crop of new blood. Alexis would have been thrilled; he was always eager to recognize and encourage new talent. The Silvershorts winners - Jon Lazam, Mark Mirabuenos, and Alvin Yapan - are particularly good. Finalists Jet Leyco, Gym Lumbera, and Lito Tabay are also talents to keep an eye out for. Jet Leyco's first feature *Ex Press* which premiered in the 4th .MOV Fest will have its international premiere in Rotterdam this coming January.

Death is overrated. There's nothing special about dying. Everyone dies. Films rot. Myths are forgotten. Cinemas crumble. Acceptance is key. Yes, we mourn the dead but the goal is not to shed tears for them forever. The goal is to love despite death, despite the inevitability of loss. To capture death and life in digital and celluloid, to present it as

Word on the Ground

real love: that is the challenge. That is what we're here for, that is what Alexis' death made me see. Thank you, Alexis & Nika. Lots of love, pizza grease, bottomless iced tea, and damned great films wherever you may be. Wazak!

.MOV International Film, Music, & Literature Festival is the Philippines' first digital film festival, as well as the world's only creative initiative that celebrates film, music, and literature exclusively. www.movfest.org

Is There a Ghost in My House?

Khavn De La Cruz is an award-winning, internationally renowned filmmaker, composer and writer. He has thirty-one features and more than a hundred short films under his belt, including *Squatterpunk* (Rotterdam 2007), *The Muzzled Horse Of An Engineer In Search Of Mechanical Saddles* (Berlinale 2008), and *Manila In The Fangs Of Darkness* (Viennale 2008). He plays in three bands Fando & Lis, The Brockas, and Vigo. He is the president of Kamias Road, an independent film, music, and publishing company, and the festival director of .MOV International Film, Music, & Literature Festival, the first digital film festival in the Philippines. www.khavndelacruz.org.

Write to us

Submissions are eagerly encouraged. We're keen on writings on cinema that include, but are not limited to:

- overviews of a director's work;
- photo essays celebrating or studying images in a film;
- explorations of one particular film or groups of films;
- analysis of moments within a film;
- situating a film within its historical/political context;
- stories or narrative non-fiction pieces inspired by films.

We are not looking for academic treatises, nor are we interested in lightly journalistic film reviews. We're keen on writing that is sharp, intelligent and knowledgeable, though not without humour. Each piece should be between 1,500 to 2,500 words long.

For submissions and letters to the editor, email:

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or write to:

**The Cinémathèque Quarterly
National Museum of Singapore
93 Stamford Road
Singapore 178897**

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Cover Image *The Colour of Pomegranates* (1968) by Sergei Parajanov, Image courtesy of RUSCICO **p32–47** *Confronting the Unrepresentable: Documentary Films and the Cambodian Genocide* © Tan Sihan, 2012 **p48–57** *Plural Identities, Reinventions and Revisions in Malaysian Cinema* © Vinita Ramani Mohan, 2012 **p58–73** *Interview: Ho Tzu Nyen* © Vinita Ramani Mohan and Shan Bertelli **p74–79** *Is there a Ghost in My House? On Alexis, Nika, and Holding the 4th .MOV Fest in Their Memory* © Khavn De La Cruz, 2012

The Cinémathèque Quarterly January – March 2012
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ISSN: 2251-2993

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About Us

About the National Museum of Singapore Cinémathèque

The National Museum Cinémathèque focuses on the presentation of film in its historical, cultural and aesthetic contexts, with a strong emphasis on local and regional cinema. Housed in the 247-seat Gallery Theatre, the National Museum Cinémathèque offers new perspectives on film through a year-round series of screenings, thematic showcases, and retrospectives that feature both essential and undiscovered works from the history of cinema.

Besides the presentation of film, the National Museum Cinémathèque is also active in film preservation, especially the heritage of Asian cinema, and has worked with regional film archives to restore and subtitle important film classics. With an imaginative and diverse programme that includes Singapore Short Cuts, World Cinema Series, and Under the Banyan Tree, the National Museum Cinémathèque aims to create a vital and vibrant film culture in Singapore.

About the National Museum of Singapore

With a history dating back to its inception in 1887, the National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum with a progressive mind. It is custodian of the 11 National Treasures, and its Singapore History and Living Galleries adopt cutting-edge and multi-perspective ways of presenting history and culture to redefine conventional museum experience.

A cultural and architectural landmark in Singapore, the Museum hosts innovative festivals and events all year round—the dynamic Night Festival, visually arresting art installations, as well as amazing performances and film screenings—in addition to presenting thought-provoking exhibitions involving critically important collections of artefacts. The programming is supported by a wide range of facilities and services including F&B, retail and a Resource Centre. The National Museum of Singapore re-opened in December 2006 after a three-year redevelopment, and is celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2012.

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www.sistic.com.sg / (65) 6348 5555

SISTIC counters islandwide or National Museum Stamford Visitor Services:
10am – 7.30pm

Concessions

Concession rates for most programmes are available to students (full-time, with valid student pass), seniors (aged 60 years and above, with valid identity pass showing proof of age), NSF (with valid 11B pass), National Museum Volunteers, National Museum Members, NHB Staff and MICA Staff. Passes have to be presented when purchasing tickets.

General Enquiries

(65) 6332 3659 / (65) 6332 5642

Film Classification Guide

- G *(General)* Suitable for all ages.
- PG *(Parental Guidance)* Suitable for all, but parents should guide their young.
- PG13 *(Parental Guidance 13)* Suitable for persons aged 13 and above, but parental guidance is advised for children below 13.
- NC16 *(No Children Under 16)* Suitable for persons aged 16 and above.
- M18 *(Mature 18)* Suitable for persons aged 18 years and above.
- R21 *(Restricted 21)* Suitable for adults aged 21 and above.

For further details and the latest film ratings, please visit
www.nationalmuseum.sg

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MRT

Train

Bras Basah MRT Station (5-minute walk)
Dhoby Ghaut MRT Station (5-minute walk)
City Hall MRT Station (10-minute walk)

B

Bus

YMCA Bus-stop (08041)

SBS: 7, 14, 14e, 16, 36, 64, 65, 111, 124, 128, 139, 162, 162M, 174, 174e, 175
SMRT: 77, 106, 167, 171, 190, 700, 700A, NR6, NR7

SMU Bus-stop (04121)

SBS: 7, 14, 14e, 16, 36, 111, 124, 128, 131, 162, 162M, 166, 174, 174e, 175
SMRT: 77, 106, 167, 171, 190, 700, 700A, 857, NR7



Taxi

Pick-up and drop-off points are at the Fort Canning entrance or the Stamford entrance.

P

Car

Limited parking facility is available at the National Museum. Other parking facilities are available at YMCA, Park Mall, Singapore Management University and Fort Canning Park.



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10 January

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WORLD CINEMA SERIES

The Colour of Pomegranates
Sergei Parajanov

13–14 January

Various timings (Page 20)

ASEAN MUSEUM

**DIRECTORS' SYMPOSIUM:
FILM AS A LANGUAGE OF
HISTORY**

26–29 January

Various timings (Page 24)

**THE GOLDEN AGE OF
MEXICAN CINEMA**

February

7 February

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WORLD CINEMA SERIES

Duvidha / In Two Minds
Mani Kaul

March

6 March

7.30 pm (Page 16)

WORLD CINEMA SERIES

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me
David Lynch

28–31 March

Various timings (Page 28)

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