



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10:00 WEDNESDAY 7 MAY

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL REVEALS FOCUS ON CHINA: REBELS, GHOSTS AND ROMANTICS PROGRAM

The 61st Sydney Film Festival announced a Focus on China program featuring six feature films and one short film.

“We’ve selected the widest variety possible of the best new Chinese films”, says **SFF Focus on China guest programmer, Shelley Kraicer**. “We offer the glossy commercial hit *Up in the Wind*’s pointed examination of middle-class anxieties; homespun indie doc *Beijing Ants*’ ground-level view of marginal urban existence; *Dancing in the Room*’s romantic but blackly comic take on youthful boredom; *Mothers*’ nuanced look at bureaucracy; *Lake August*’s starkly beautiful portrait of death and love in the hinterlands; and *’Til Madness Do Us Part*’s epic ode to passions that thrive in the remotest corners of the state. In our Official Competition, the noir-mystery-arthouse mash-up of passion and murder in *Black Coal Thin Ice* landed it the prestigious Golden Bear at the Berlinale. Chinese cinema offers unlimited delights: its rebels, ghosts and romantics come to life through its screens to our imaginations.”

Shelley Kraicer is guest programmer of SFF’s Focus on China. A China-based writer, critic and film curator, he has written for magazines and journals including *Cinema Scope*, *Positions*, *Cineaste*, *The Village Voice* and *Screen International*. Since 2007 he has been a programmer at the Vancouver International Film Festival, and has worked as a consultant for the Venice, Udine, Dubai, and Rotterdam film festivals.

SFF 2014 Focus on China films:

Beijing Ants China | 2014 | 88 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director, Producer: Ryuji Otsuka | Production Company: Yellow-Green Pi

Ryuji Otsuka and Huang Ji are the ‘main characters’ in this very personal homemade documentary that’s funny, angry, scary and stirring all at once. He’s the Japanese director of the film; she’s his wife and a prizewinning filmmaker in her own right. For independent artists and filmmakers, finding an affordable place to live with their young daughter is a never-ending struggle. A side effect of China’s astonishing prosperity is sky-high property prices – about \$10,000 per square metre in Beijing. The landlords, movers and neighbours they encounter seem bent on driving them nuts. But never underestimate the resilience, determination and lung power of enraged, protective young Chinese parents. Otsuka’s sometimes concealed camera reveals intimately how life feels, from ground level, in urban China today.

Dancing in the Room China | 2013 | 90 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | International Premiere
Director, Screenwriter: Peng Lei | Producer: Gan Tian | Cast: Jiang Yuchen, Li Jing, Zhang Nan | Production Company: QIBO Golden Age Culture Media

Chinese independent films come in different flavours. The latest from Peng Lei (*The Panda Candy*, *Follow Follow*) is a droll, oddball, low budget, sort-of-black, rather cute non-romantic comedy that’s a first of its kind

for China. Huabian (newcomer Jiang Yuchen, a sort of Chinese Greta Gerwig) is a young woman newly arrived in Beijing; the only job she can find is one clicking website links. An experiment in Internet dating results in an icky encounter with a cosplay nerd. Her loyal new cat starts to give her ideas about how to deal with a city so enraptured with its own rising prosperity that it ignores young people like her. Director Peng Lei, leader of the hip Beijing alternative band New Pants, has a flair for capturing twentysomething Chinese urban angst with an offbeat sense of humour.

Lake August China | 2014 | 113 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director, Screenwriter: Yang Heng | Producers: Kong Lihong, Yang Heng | Cast: Tian Li, Shang Xiaoling, Yao Maosheng | Production Company: All Ways Pictures, Xiangxi Yangheng Image Workshop

Yang Heng (*Betelnut, Sunspots*) is China's finest indie protagonist of very slow, very beautiful cinema. In a series of precisely composed, startlingly expressive long shots, Yang paints a China largely absent from Western media. These small backwater towns, pastoral rivers and tacky motels contain an intensely vivid world of adultery, betrayal, suicide, pornography, abortion... but at a marvellously controlled, utterly objective distance. A young man's father commits suicide; his girlfriend dumps him. Set adrift, he winds up in a riverside hotel where his old schoolmate's mistress seems lonely and available. Consuming a vast amount of cigarettes and beer, he floats and drifts above undercurrents of boredom and despair, finding unexpected companions – perhaps even solace – in the least expected places.

Mothers China | 2013 | 68 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director: Xu Huijing | Producers: Ben Tsiang, Hao Zhiqiang | Production Company: CNEX Foundation Limited

Zhang Qingmei is both a psychic and a family planning official in a Chinese village, where quotas often lead to forced sterilisation. China's now somewhat less strict one-child policy is still accumulating real casualties, like villager Rongrong, who feels the committee's pressure and goes into hiding with her two sons. In this bird's eye view from the inside, filmmaker Xu Huijing has secured astonishingly free access to these local bureaucrats and residents – those affected, those in power and bystanders. Against our expectations, he turns them all into three dimensional human beings.

The Private Life of Fenfen USA, China | 2013 | 29 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director, Producer: Leslie Tai

Leslie Tai's short is a documentary film experiment that tells its tragic love story as a video installation. In 2007, filmmaker Leslie Tai gave Fenfen – a feisty young migrant worker in southern China – a video camera with which to start filming a video diary. In the film, however, fragments of Fenfen's video life – constructed out of over 100 hours of footage – are broadcast 'live' on TV in various migrant-worker locations across China. Inside cheap restaurants, hole-in-the-wall cigarette shops and back-alley hair salons, everyone is watching Fenfen and consuming her real life as entertainment. It is a brilliant experiment that asks us precisely how we as 'First World' viewers watch a woman like Fenfen expose her own private world.

'Til Madness Do Us Part Japan, France, Hong Kong | 2013 | 228 mins | In Yunnan dialect with English subtitles
Director: Wang Bing | Producers: Louise Prince, Wang Bing | Production Company: Y. Production

Wang Bing (*West of the Tracks*, SFF 2004) is one of the greatest documentary filmmakers working today. His newest film explores the patients of a mental institution in southern China. Wang's astonishingly observant camera burrows deep into their lives, revealing their inner beings, their loves and their madness with absolute respect and limitless compassion. "In 2003, I happened upon a mental hospital near Beijing. The hospital refused to let me shoot a film. In 2012, I went to a different mental hospital; this time they let me get inside with my camera. There is no freedom in this hospital. But when men are locked behind bars, they are capable of creating a new world, without restrictions of morality or behaviour. Under the night light, their bodies are like ghosts, craving love, physical or sentimental." —Wang Bing

Up In the Wind China | 2013 | 106 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director: Teng Huatao | Screenwriter: Bao Jingjing | Producers: Chen Rong, Teng Huatao, Hao Wei, Zhong Shi, Bill Kong, Han Sanping, Gu Yongjiang | Cast: Ni Ni, Jing Boran, Liu Yase | Production Company: Perfect World Pictures

A Chinese journalist finds spiritual comfort on assignment in Nepal in this gorgeously shot feature from Teng Huatao (*One Hundred...*, *The Matrimony*). Part travelogue, part quest tale, Cheng Yumeng (rising star Ni Ni) is sent by posh Shanghai magazine *Chic* to Nepal to write about 'happiness'. Joining her group is boorish rich boy Wang Can (played by music star Jing Boran). Chinese commercial cinema is box-office gold these days, and would normally play this as a shallow rom-com. But director Teng and hit writer Bao Jingjing have other ideas. The expected romantic payoff doesn't quite materialise. Instead we have an unexpectedly thoughtful, very moving critique of what's missing from Chinese prosperity: a sense of meaning. Ni Ni is superb in conveying a woman's passion and frustration, seeking to define herself in a world without a moral compass.

Chinese Official Competition Feature:

Black Coal, Thin Ice

China, Hong Kong | 2014 | 106 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian Premiere
Director, Screenwriter: Diao Yinan | Producers: Qu Vivian, Wan Juan, Shen Yang, Zhang Dajun | Cast: Liao Fan, Gwei Lun Mei, Wang Xuebing | World Sales: Fortissimo Films

Winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, this film noir is a stylish and exhilarating look at a police investigation in contemporary China. Following a mysterious killing in a small town in the industrial north, a police investigation uncovers multiple suspects but the case ends in tatters when police officers are killed and wounded in the course of the investigation. Forced to retire, injured officer Zhang Zili (Liao Fan) takes on a demeaning job as a security guard and drowns his sorrows. Years later, a series of uncannily similar murders come to light, and Zhang sets about solving the mystery which is centred around a beautiful woman. Director Diao Yinan has cited John Huston, David Lynch and the Coen Brothers as influences on the film, and this paired with a gritty Chinese milieu makes for a potent combination. With astonishing setpieces at the start and the end of the film, and a complex performance from Liao, which earned him the Best Actor prize in Berlin, *Black Coal, Thin Ice* is both powerful and memorable.

Black Coal, Thin Ice: filmmaker guest, Diao Yinan

Diao Yinan is a leading writer/director in China's avant-garde theatre. His debut feature, *Uniform*, won the Dragons & Tigers Award at Vancouver International Film Festival. In 2007, his second film, *Night Train*, premiered in Un Certain Regard at Cannes.

The 61st Sydney Film Festival is supported by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia-China Council of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.



The 61st Sydney Film Festival runs 4-15 June and brings a packed program of screenings and special events to even more venues across Sydney. For tickets and full up-to-date program information visit sff.org.au

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

Sydney Film Festival screens feature films, documentaries, short films and animated films across the city at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, the Art Gallery of NSW, Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, the Apple Store, SFFTV at Martin Place, Skyline Drive-In Blacktown, and the Festival Hub at Town Hall.

The Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest-running film festivals. For more information visit www.sff.org.au

Sydney Film Festival also presents 12 films that vie for the Official Competition, a highly respected international honour that awards a \$60,000 cash prize based on the decision of a jury of international and

Australian filmmakers and industry professionals. Previous Sydney Film Prize winners include: *Only God Forgives* (2013), *Alps* (2012), *A Separation* (2011) – which went on to win an Academy Award, *Heartbeats* (2010), *Bronson* (2009) and *Hunger* (2008).

The 61st Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

What: Sydney Film Festival

When: 4-15 June, 2014

Tickets & Info: 1300 733 733 sff.org.au

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Principal State Government partner



Strategic partner



Government partners

