When Strangers Meet: Visions of Asia and Europe

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

**Fri 18 May**
8.00 pm  
*The River* by Jean Renoir (1951, France-India)

**Sat 19 May**
1.30 pm  
*Perfumed Nightmare* by Kidlat Tahimik (1977, Philippines-France)
4.00 pm  
*The Year of Living Dangerously* by Peter Weir (1982 Australia-Indonesia)

**Sat 26 May**
8.00 pm  
*Merry X'mas Mr Lawrence* by Nagisa Oshima (1983, Japan-UK)

**Sun 27 May**
1.30 pm  
*Short Films Programme* (Duration approx. 1 hour)
4.00 pm  
*Tropic of Emerald* by Orlow Seunke (1997, Netherlands-Indonesia)

**Fri 1 June**
8.00 pm  
*The Last Emperor* by Bernardo Bertolucci (1987, Italy-China)

**Sun 3 June**
4.00 pm  
*Moving* by Park Ki-young (2011, Korea-New Zealand)
Shot entirely on location in India, *The River* is Jean Renoir’s and also India’s first Technicolor film that beautifully unfolds like a series of impressionistic paintings. The film was adapted from Rummer Godden’s novel, *The River*, which Jean Renoir was attracted to due to its absence of orientalism and exoticism that plagued much western representations of India.

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

*The River* won the International Award at the 1951 Venice Film Festival. It remains one of the most seminal cinematic representations of India for Western audiences, and continues to garner critical praises. Martin Scorsese mentioned that it is one of his “most formative movie experiences,” and positioned it as “one of the two most beautiful colour films ever made.”
Much like a colourful scene of cruising Jeepneys, a popular form of commuter transport in the Philippines which are extravagantly refashioned from US Army jeeps, Kidlat Tahimik’s debut feature Perfumed Nightmare creatively appropriates and navigates through the colonial remnants within the Philippines with a great abandon for cinematic conventions. It splices together found, stock and shot footage, in a concoction of autobiography and fiction.

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

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

With support from:

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

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

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

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

With support from:
Saturday 26 May, 8pm
Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence
By Nagisa Oshima
1983 / UK-Japan / 124 min / 35 mm / Rating TBC
In English and Japanese with English subtitles

Opening remarks by H. E. Yoichi Suzuki, Ambassador of Japan.

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

Set within a prison camp during WWII, it explores the clash between cultures and the power struggle between British POWs and Japanese soldiers. It revolves around the relationship between Major Jack Celliers, a rebellious prisoner played by David Bowie, and Captain Yonoi, the young Japanese commander played by Ryuchi Sakamoto who also composed the film’s enigmatic score. Their relationship is played out with an uncannily emotional level, with a looming sense of homoeroticism too much for Yonoi to bear, and a spectral possibility of friendship negated by historical circumstances.

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

*With support from:*

![Japan Creative Centre](image-url)
Sunday 27 May
Visions of Today: Short Films from Europe and Asia (1:30pm)
2011 / various / 90 min / Digital / Rating TBC
In various languages with English subtitles

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

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

CONSTRUCTION – DECONSTRUCTION
(AUFBRUCH – ABRUCH)
Directed by Julia Drack and Clemens Hufnagl
2008 / Austria / 11 min / Digital / Rating TBC

As China awakes to the capitalistic overture of the world, cities across the vast country are modernising rapidly and none more so than the city of Shanghai. In the heat of the furor for being the most progressive city of the world, many are left behind. Filmmakers Julia Drack and Clemens Hufnagl present Shanghai as a place of contradictions. They achieve this via a construction of the idea of the city of Shanghai by way of deconstruction. Familiar images of Shanghai City are juxtaposed in apparent rhythmic randomness giving way to a singular view of the social, economic and visual antagonisms of this vibrant city.

IRON & BUTTERFLY
Directed by Dominik Hartl
2008 / Austria / 7 min / Digital / Rating TBC

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” wrote Rudyard Kipling in The Ballad of East and West in 1889. While Kipling was lamenting the gulf between the British and the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, the same sentiment can well be applied to another massively popular cultural artefact from the Victorian age – Madame Butterfly, which first appeared in 1898 in the form of a short story. The tragic tale of Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton and Cho-Cho San has captured the public’s imagination ever since. Cinema creators ranging from Mary Pickford and Anna May Wong to David Cronenberg and even Frederic Mitterand had one time or other contend with the material. Dominik Hartl astutely re-imagined the drama in a WWII setting, while paring the imagery into its bare essence, presenting a succinct representation of this of this oft-told tale.

r.i.
Directed by A. Dananjaya
2010 / Indonesia / 28 min / Digital / Rating TBC
In Bahasa Indonesian and French with English subtitles

r.i. seeks to shed light on an little-known but hugely significant consequence of the repression brought about by the New Order regime during the events of 1965 in which a large number of left-leaning and
Communist intellectuals and artists were forced into exile. The political circumstances led to the opening of a restaurant in Paris (simply named Restaurant Indonesia) which is a symbol of solidarity among the exiles, and has since become a beacon of the emancipation movement of the Indonesians who cared about human rights issues among other immigrants. Through interviews with the prominent members of the community and archival footages, *r.i.* is a touching monument that contributes to the current political and historical discourses in Indonesia and Europe.

**PARADISE LATER**  
Directed by Ascan Breuer  
2010 / Austria, Germany, Indonesia / 14 min / Digital / Rating TBC  
In German with English subtitles

Of all the world’s emerging markets, Indonesia, with a population of millions, represents the best opportunity for unbridled international capitalism. Social and ecological standards are increasingly compromised with the surge of relentless industrialisation and market expansion. A direct consequence is the proliferation of an entire population in profound poverty edging out a living on the fringes of society, subsisting on the refuse of the ever expending consumer society. With *Paradise Later*, filmmaker Ascan Breuer crafted an evocative political commentary. The camera follows the course of a lazy river on the edge of a large tropical metropolis, while the soundtrack is punctuated by excerpts from Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*. The juxtaposition of the literary text and the unhurried, deliberate images of misery produce an unconventional and ambivalent critique of globalisation: Apocalypse now – Paradise later!

**AU REVOIR PHILIP**  
Directed by Sigrid Andrea P. Bernardo  
2010 / France, Philippines / 30 min / Digital / Rating TBC

*Au Revoir Philip* follows the adventures of Luz, an OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) who tries her luck in France as a domestic helper. The narrative progresses in the form of love letters addressed to her lover whom she left for greener pastures. We are granted special privilege into Luz’s personal life as Luz recounts her encounters, employees, loves and disappointments with uninhabited candidness and considerable wit. Letter after letter, Luz struggles with her newly adopted country as she alternately pines for and criticizes the country she left behind. This is cinema in the first person. Filmmaker Sigrid Andrea P. Bernardo cleverly weaves the narrative through such various permutations as the diary, travelogue, notebook while ultimately revealing itself as a potent self-portrait.
In Tropic of Emerald, Dutch director Orlow Seunke crafts a captivating historical epic set in 1940s Indonesia. Weaving historical events into a tropical love story, the film spans the pre-war colonial era ruled by the Dutch plantation owners to the Japanese invasion and prison camps, ending with the violent independence struggle against the Dutch. Sympathetic to both sides, this epic goes surprisingly deep into the social and political climate.

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

With support from:

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

Thrown into the turbulent waves of social and political transformations, Pu Yi resembles a puppet passively controlled and exploited by both local and foreign political forces. Yet his detachment enables a vantage point in which we observe an individual's precarious identity shaped by the towering forces of the masses and the relentless movement of history.

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

With support from:
Moving in both senses of the word, Park Ki-young’s simple and straightforward documentary consists of a single interview with Jung Jin-sung and Lee Kyung-Mee, a South Korean couple who migrated to New Zealand in 2003. Held amidst the aftermath of the February 22 earthquake, the highly personal interview tells the story of their tribulations within a new country in which they painstakingly set up their restaurant business, only to have it unexpectedly reclaimed by the forces of nature.

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

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

With support from:

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