

Korean Cultural Centre UK presents

KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2019

MAY TO JUNE

*Home
Truths*

Korean Film Nights 2019: Home Truths

The Korean Cultural Centre UK would like to welcome audiences once again to Korean Film Nights, our year-round programme of film screenings and talks. With the aim of fostering a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Korean cinema amongst London audiences through thematically curated strands, these screenings have presented everything from little-known classics to UK premieres of rare indie gems over the past 10 years.

We invite you to see our first season of 2019 as a stunning, light-filled 6-bed house - we know you'll love it as soon as you step inside. This traditional 60s Korean hanok has had quite a journey over the years. It was refurbished with outlandish modernist designs in the 70s, but stripped bare in the 90s. It's since seen tasteful millennial renovations. Nearby are the best schools, and well-reviewed motels for you to escape to with your lover. A beautiful mixture of traditional and modern, when you enter you'll experience over 50 years of Korean domestic life.

From Kim Ki-young's unforgettable 1960s classic *The Housemaid* to 2018's London Korean Film Festival opener, Jeon Go-woon's *Microhabitat*, Korean cinema has always had a dialogue with the home. *Home Truths* ventures into various on-screen Korean homes with a programme of carefully selected titles. We explore how Korean domestic space shapes on-screen identities, and how its architectural structure can reflect the social mores of a time. A house can reveal much about both its residents and the world outside its doors.

Like every dwelling, our season is packed to the rafters with the personal: objects, histories, identities. Whether a rural *hanok* (traditional Korean houses) or Seoul high-rises, you can tell a lot about a person by rifling through their belongings, or watching them within the comfort of their home.

When we are invited into a home, we cross the threshold into someone's homespun space. When a new energy enters, be it guest or intruder, this may radically shift the dynamics. Much of *Home Truths* deals with such guests, revealing desires and secrets previously hidden beneath stable domestic routine.

We begin with a look at the 'Golden Age' of Korean cinema, specifically the post-war melodramas of the 60s and 70s. Turbulent yet formative, in this era the nation underwent unprecedented rapid economic development. In Shin Sang-ok's gentle Chopin-scored *Mother and a Guest* (1961) the unseemly

possibility of romance between a widow and a male house guest occurs within the hanok. Here the traditional architectural feature of the *sarangbang* (the segregated guest quarters) allows a man to stay within a widow's home without arousing controversy, but remains symbolic of a society's unshifting pressures.

At the other extreme is celebrated auteur Kim Ki-young's crazed *Woman of Fire* (1971), a technicolour retelling of *The Housemaid*. Set in a strangely modern and lurid farmhouse, a young housemaid is set on destroying her employers after the master takes advantage of her. Through blackmail and torment she exacts her revenge within the family home - the family too fearful of outside judgements to refuse any diabolical demand.

However a guest isn't always necessary to reveal a home's true mechanics. Fast-forwarding to the 90s, our films depict characters turning houses into a sanctuary, be that to conceal illicit activities or simply to escape the outside world. Here we reject restrictive tradition and seek refuge in motels, abandoned lots, and empty real estate. Both celebrate the freedom of privacy, bringing a sense of detachment from reality.

Secrets continue to pervade interior spaces in Jang Sun-woo's transgressive *Lies* (1999) and E J-yong's exquisite *An Affair* (1998). Except here, the walls are no longer bound to domestic living. Lovers find solace from the prying eyes of the modernised, disconnected society the homestead represents. They move through an endless variety of new spaces, rejecting any notion of settling down.

Finally in the 2000s, the home becomes an inescapable, defining facet of identity. In *The Room Nearby* (2009) a young tutor finds safety and respite from a busy world in a unique new environment. Although she creates a safe physical space it cannot shut out the truths housed within her. In the crushing *The World of Us* (2016) a child's world exists within two spaces - the school and the home. Capturing contemporary Korea through the eyes of its youngest generation, the film shows how these environments offer both positive and negative aspects: a loving family and new friends on the one hand; an alcoholic father and school bullies on the other.

So come stay for a night - or all six! Under our roof you'll enjoy a fascinating season of films chronicling a brief history of Korean domesticity, flavoured with high melodrama, simmering love affairs, and touching family stories. The rent is free too...

Ben Driscoll & Annie Mullineux

THURSDAY 2ND MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

The World of Us

우리들



SOUTH KOREA, 2016

DIRECTOR: YOON GA-EUN

CAST: CHOI SOO-IN
SEOL HYE-IN
LEE SEO-YEON

94 MINS / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWING AT
DEPTFORD CINEMA
ON 28TH MAY AT 7.30PM

Sun is a lonely primary school girl who, though desperate to make friends, has remained socially-outcast. When transfer student Jia joins her class, the two become close friends, spending time at each other's houses during the summer vacation. Initially, Jia's home brings the security and comfort that neither Sun's own domestic space nor her classroom are able to provide. At the beginning of the new semester, however, their new friendship is tested as Sun continues to be the target of bullying by their other classmates...

Director Yoon Ga-eun invites us to closely observe the dynamic relationship of these two young girls, immersing us in their small world through its simple, unadorned storytelling. Sun's experiences act as a microcosm through which we can observe how larger issues of social class differences and pressures filter down to affect even the lives of children. Yoon's confident debut feature picked up numerous nominations and awards both at home and abroad, including Best New Director at Korea's prestigious Blue Dragon Film Awards in 2016.

Valerie Li

THURSDAY 9TH MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

An Affair

정사



SOUTH KOREA, 1998

DIRECTOR: E J-YONG

CAST: LEE MI-SOOK
LEE JUNG-JAE
SONG YOUNG-CHANG
KIM MIN

108 MINS / ENG SUBS

Architect's-wife Seo-hyun (Lee Mi-sook) is constrained by domesticity, until one day she meets her younger sister's 27-year-old fiancé, Woo-in (Lee Jung-jae). Seo-hyun promises to help find the perfect home for him and her sister, before her sister returns from the US to marry Woo-in. Some 10 years her junior, Woo-in is refreshingly endearing and charming, bringing Seo-hyun a new lease in life. Emotions simmer and start to crystallise; soon both face an overwhelming desire to risk all that they once held dear....

It's an oft-told story of desire and betrayal, but *An Affair* is recounted with clarity and restraint against a metallic 90s colour palette. Just as the bold hues of the classic melodrama spoke to heightened emotions, *An Affair's* pre-millennial minimalism echoes the introversion of its characters. A star-making breakthrough for both Lee Jung-jae and director E J-yong, this beautifully shot film also saw the comeback of one of the biggest actresses of the 1980s, Lee Mi-sook. The ultra-modern interior design and various apartments it visits create a Seoul built upon loveless spaces – but *An Affair* still cries out for the bliss of companionship, boldly prioritising it above family, children and the home.

Ben Driscoll

THURSDAY 30TH MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

The Room Nearby

그녀들의 방



SOUTH KOREA, 2009

DIRECTOR: KO TAE-JEONG

CAST: JUNG YU-MI
YE SOO-JUNG
HEO EUN-KYOUNG
SIN JIN-HUI
PAIK SOO-JANG

106 MINS / ENG SUBS

Private tutor Eon-ju is living rent-free in a tiny box-room of a goshiwon complex (a unique type of dormitory-style single housing, often as small as two-by-two metres) where she works part-time at the weekends. The only visitors allowed in this cramped space are the camera and us; with her wellbeing constantly under threat from her living conditions, Eon-ju is desperate to break out.

Whilst going door-to-door in search of new students, Eon-ju comes across a large residence and notices its gate left wide open. Fueled by a strange curiosity and the desire to escape the harshness of her reality, she steps inside. Will this be the place where Eon-ju can finally feel at home and protected?

A Room Nearby features a powerful lead-performance from frequent Hong Sang-soo collaborator Jung Yu-mi, who recently gained international attention from her starring role in the critically acclaimed *Train to Busan* (2016). Premiering at the prestigious 2008 Busan International Film Festival, Koh Tae-jong's debut is a touching and absorbing look at the everyday struggles faced by young women in Korea.

Octavian Dăncilă

THURSDAY 6TH JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

Lies

거짓말



SOUTH KOREA, 1999

DIRECTOR: JANG SUN-WOO

CAST: LEE SANG-HYEON
KIM TAE-YEON

112 MINS / ENG SUBS

NOTE: THIS FILM CONTAINS
SCENES OF A HIGHLY-EXPLICIT
SEXUAL NATURE THROUGHOUT
WHICH SOME MAY FIND
DISTURBING

After some steamy phone calls, J and Y meet and begin exploring each others bodies with a rabid intensity that takes them deep into the realms of shocking sadomasochism. J is a man, a sculptor in his late thirties, and Y an 18 year old girl about to go to college. They enact their transgressive fantasies in bare motel rooms, far away from more traditional dwellings. In the company of others they act distant and cordial, but behind closed doors, and within any four walls that will hold them, their passion erupts in an intense exploration of power play, with a strangely tender consensual dimension to it.

When screened at festivals in the 90s, *Lies* only bolstered director Jang Sun-woo's reputation as Korea's enfant terrible of the time, and many critics condemned it as pornographic indulgence. While debate over Jang's intentions and gaze remain, *Lies* holds up as a unique depiction of sexual obsession told with a heart on its sleeve and a whip in its hand.

Ben Driscoll

THURSDAY 13TH JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

Woman of Fire

화녀



SOUTH KOREA, 1971

DIRECTOR: KIM KI-YOUNG

CAST: YOUN YUH-JUNG
JEON GYE-HYEON
NAM KOONG WON

98 MINS / ENG SUBS

Woman of Fire sees Kim Ki-Young remake his stunning classic *The Housemaid* (1960) with an energy and passion that would come to define Korean cinema of the 1970s. Focusing on the role women play within the home, the film follows a composer and his wife, whose lives are thrown into turmoil by the introduction of a new housemaid. The film features stunning cinematography (from regular Kim collaborator Jung Il-Sung), with striking red and blue hues allowing the film to transition seamlessly from moments of peace to ones of manic melodrama.

The small chicken farm forming the backdrop of the film becomes a pressure cooker of contrasts, whether it be divided affections or the stark contrast between urban and rural culture. Tensions build steadily as Kim navigates us through a narrative that keeps the audience guessing at every twist and turn. *Woman of Fire* can be seen as a high-stakes chamber drama where the aesthetic brilliance of Douglas Sirk meets the intense close quarters of Henrik Ibsen, one of Kim's favourite playwrights.

Joel Whitaker

THURSDAY 20TH JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

Mother and a Guest

사랑방 손님과 어머니



SOUTH KOREA, 1961

DIRECTOR: SHIN SANG-OK

CAST: CHOI EUN-HEE
JEON YOUNG-SUN
KIM JIN-GYU
HAN EUN-JIN
DO KUM-BONG

102 MINS / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWING AT DEPTFORD
CINEMA ON 25TH JUNE AT 7.30PM

The precocious Ok-hee lives in a household of widowed women: her mother (played by one of 50s' and 60s' Korea's biggest stars, Choi Eun-hee), grandmother and their housekeeper. When a charming friend of her late father arrives at the house as a guest, six-year-old Ok-hee casts her affections toward him, seeing him as the paternal influence sorely absent from her life at home. She quickly takes it upon herself to play cupid between the man and her mother. Featuring touching displays of cinematic yearning, *Mother and a Guest* reflects on the societal expectations of female fidelity and desire across the divides of generation.

Directed by Shin Sang-ok, one of the most prolific and respected figures of the Golden Age of Korean Cinema, the film's use of black-and-white cinematography purposefully contrasts the vast, open spaces and wider shots of the exterior with the smaller, restricted areas and tighter shots within the hanok, where emotions and desires heighten and simmer.

Viknesh Kobinathan

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ATTENDING KOREAN FILM NIGHTS

Admission is free, but booking is required for each screening.
To reserve your place, please visit www.kccuk.org.uk

Information on Deptford Cinema screenings: www.deptfordcinema.org
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