



DREAM PALACE

Goodbye, Dragon Inn

Introduced by director Peter Strickland (26 May screening only).

Tsai Ming-liang on dream palaces and ‘Goodbye, Dragon Inn’

Taiwan Movie theatres are like temples. You will always meet a true god. You can discover the details of extreme close-ups, and the breadth of extreme long shots. Then you experience the moments of magic that only a movie theatre can bring. When I was a child, my grandpa and I were always in and out of different movie theatres. In Kuching, a small town in Malaysia, these theatres weren't far from each other and played various types of movies. Odeon Theatre specialised in Cantonese films from Hong Kong, opera or Taiwanese films. Capital Theatre was the exclusive theatre for Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers Studios, and also showed commercial films from Japan. Rex Cinema was the world of Hollywood. In the 1960s, these theatres were a large part of my childhood; in the 1980s, just a few years after I left my hometown, they were all razed to the ground. I thought I had forgotten them, but occasionally they return to my dreams.

***Sight & Sound*, Winter 2020-21**

I made *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in my 30s. I'd found a cinema that was closing in the suburbs of Taipei. All the cinemas in that style were closing down, and this was one of the last ones left. I was filming *What Time Is It There?* (2001), and there was a scene that took place in that cinema. After I wrapped, I held a single screening there. It was raining outside, but there were a thousand people in this about-to-close cinema. The cinema owner called me asking if we might be able to collaborate, and I said no.

He was trying to convince me to run the cinema because I'd managed to pack it out. Instead I said, 'Rent me the cinema and I'll make a film here.' I had no idea what I was going to make, but I took it for a year. I didn't run it, I just rented it from him. Then, of course, I forgot all about it. It was my producer who reminded me in the last month that I had it, and he asked what I wanted to do with it.

So I wrote just one page, that was basically just a short piece of poetry, and had a thought of screening *Dragon Inn* on the final day. It was after that I wrote the film and acquired the rights to the King Hu, then shot it over the last ten days – four shots a day. It's a film that deals with memories. The memories of that cinema became the memories of cinema.

Interview by Matthew Thrift, bfi.org.uk, April 2019

Lights in the Dark

As a singularly self-infatuated medium, almost as soon as cinema learned to walk, it toddled to the mirror and, with its first self-regarding gaze, reflected upon the means and methods of its own exhibition and reception. For about the first half of its life to date, 'the cinema' referred to both an artform and to the venue where that artform was, during that period, exclusively displayed, and in very little time the former was being used to contemplate the latter. Take D.W. Griffith's short *Those Awful Hats* (1909), in which the sightlines of

an audience attending a melodrama screening are violated by a parade of patrons wearing ostentatious top hats and millinery, the illusion of a film projection achieved through double printing and a travelling matte.

Griffith, the electric Victorian, helped to build cinema a bridge into the 20th century. Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), restored last year by the Cinematek in Brussels and newly available on Blu-ray from Second Run, feels almost like the first film of the 21st, reflecting in a eulogistic tone on the last stages of a long-ongoing uncoupling between cinema, the art, and cinemas, the physical places. Tsai's film is set almost entirely on the precincts of the Fu-Ho Grand, a rundown 1,000-seat Taipei movie theatre, and almost entirely during a final, sparsely attended screening of King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1967) on the eve of what has been billed as the theatre's 'temporary closing'. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* acts as a farewell, saying 'so long' not only to the lively neighbourhood cinemas of Tsai's boyhood, evoked in a packed-house flashback overture; but to the popular Greater Chinese cinema represented by a figure like Hu, who had died in 1997 as the Taiwanese and Hong Kong industries were in economic freefall; and even to the second life enjoyed by cinemas like the Fu-Ho, acting as cruising spots for the city's gay men.

In looking towards cinema's uncertain future, Tsai recalls its early history, having by this stage, his sixth theatrical feature, achieved a pared down style consisting of wide shots and locked-down camera set-ups that might suggest the vocabulary of primitive cinema. Structured as a series of vignettes, his film includes several set pieces in which cruising Japanese tourist Mitamura Kiyonobu has run-ins with inconsiderate cinema patrons, gag scenes which aren't so far in simple set-up and execution from *Those Awful Hats*.

The Tsai of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, however, is interested in another primal draw. This is the erotics of the cinema space, as described by Roland Barthes in his 1975 essay 'Leaving the Movie Theatre', which described the cinema as an arena of inchoate longing, proclaiming: 'The movie house (ordinary model) is a site of availability (even more than cruising), the inoccupation of bodies, which best defines modern eroticism – not that of advertising or striptease, but that of the big city.'

Tsai's film explores the etiquette of cruising in the Fu-Ho, which, according to the director, at the end of its functional life – it had ceased playing second-run double-bills by the time of the *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* shoot – became a hub for gay men. A stint as a porn theatre was, in many cases, the last gasp for cinemas before the wrecking balls inevitably came to do their duty. As multiplexes proliferate, smaller theatres have disappeared, and the air of precarity found in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is by no means unique to Tsai's cinema-on-cinemas film. Given to morbid self-examination as the seventh art is, it stands to reason that it should also be a particularly hypochondriacal artform, which in no year since that of its birth hasn't been poked and prodded in search of the telltale signs of a fatal disease.

Nick Pinkerton, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 2020-21

GOODBYE, DRAGON INN (BÚ SÀN)

Director: Tsai Ming-liang
Production Company: Homegreen Films
In collaboration with: Council of Cultural Affairs
[International sales]: Homegreen Films
Executive Producer: Tsai Ming-liang
Producer: Liang Hung Chih
Assistant Director: Vincent Wang
Screenplay: Tsai Ming-liang
Director of Photography: Liao Pen-jung
Lighting Director: Lee Lung-yu
Stills Photography: Lin Meng-shan
Editor: Chen Sheng-chang
Art Director: Lu Li-chin
Costume Designer: Sun Huei-mei
Sound Design: Du Tuu-chih
Sound Recording: Tang Hsiang-chu
Publicity: Chang San-ling

Cast:

Lee Kang-sheng (*projectionist*)
Chen Shiang-chyi (*ticket woman*)
Kiyonobu Mitamura (*Japanese tourist*)
Miao Tien
Shih Chun
Yang Kuei-mei
Chen Chao-jung
Lee Yi-cheng

Taiwan 2003
82 mins

Courtesy of Second Run DVD

**DREAM PALACE:
THE FILMS THAT CINEMAS WERE BUILT FOR**

Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Bú sàn)

Wed 26 May 18:10 (+ intro by Peter Strickland); Wed 2 Jun 20:50

The Gleaners & I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse)

+ pre-recorded intro by Zhu Shengze

Thu 27 May 18:15; Fri 26 Jun 14:30

Hair + pre-recorded intro by Kleber Mendonça Filho

Fri 28 May 17:45

The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)

+ pre-recorded intro by Mike Williams, Editor *Sight & Sound*

Fri 28 May 20:50; Wed 30 Jun 14:30

The General

Sat 29 May 12:45

Footloose + pre-recorded intro by Francis Lee

Sat 29 May 18:00

Winner of the Dream Palace Audience Vote: Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)

Sun 30 May 12:20

Broadcast News

Sun 30 May 15:40 (+ intro by Sarah Smith);

Sat 19 Jun 20:20

Beau Travail + pre-recorded intro by Kirsten Johnson

Sun 30 May 18:20

Car Wash

Mon 31 May 18:50

Blow Out

Tue 1 Jun 20:40

The Shout + pre-recorded intro by Mark Jenkin

Thu 3 Jun 18:00

The Wonders (Le meraviglie) + pre-recorded intro by

Mark Cousins

Thu 3 Jun 20:30

Magnificent Obsession + **Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)**

Sun 6 Jun 18:40

Black Narcissus

Mon 7 Jun 17:50

Mirror (Zerkalo) + pre-recorded intro by

Malgorzata Szumowska

Wed 9 Jun 14:30

David Byrne’s American Utopia

Mon 14 Jun 18:00

The Elephant Man + pre-recorded intro by Prano Bailey-Bond

Tue 15 Jun 17:45; Sat 19 Jun 12:00

Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawat) + pre-recorded intro by Chaitanya Tamhane

Sat 19 Jun 17:50

The Warriors

Mon 21 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia); Mon 28 Jun 14:30

Beginning + pre-recorded intro by Luca Guadagnino

Tue 22 Jun 20:30

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

Thu 24 Jun 20:30

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