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Author(s)	Dan Fainaru
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The World (Shijie)

Dan Fainaru in Venice

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REVIEW



LOW LIFE

Im Kwon-Taek's latest is likely to mean a lot more to Korean audiences than to the international brigade, says Lee Marshall

REVIEW



THE WORLD

Jia Zhang-Ke's first film

Dir. Jia Zhang-Ke. China-Japan. 2004. 140mins.

China's censorship board had previously banned the work of film-maker Jia Zhang-Ke – that is until his latest film, *The World*, which is as subversive and critical as any of his earlier features.

While some board members may have chosen to regard it as a travelogue selling the charms of Beijing's gigantic World Park, with all its 106 replicas of global monuments, they could not have missed its essential message: that China is becoming more like the rest of the world - and it's nothing to be proud of.

The World is overlong, repetitive and overstates its case, yet is clear and eloquent in its harsh indictment of the new China. Better organised and more controlled than Jia's previous work, it is also visually more appealing than anything he has done before. But it is still tough to swallow because of its fractured narratives and, while festivals may like it (it played both Venice and Toronto), but action beyond that is more difficult to predict.

Jia, whose fondness for stage has been evident in the past, starts by taking his camera into the backstage area of the theme park to trace the personal stories of those living, performing and working there.

Among them are Tao (Zhao Tao), the fiercely independent showgirl who has an affair with less-than-faithful security guard Taisheng (Chen Taisheng); Xiaowei (Jing Jue) who taunts her boyfriend, Niu (Jiang Zhongwei), another member of the troupe, by turning off her mobile phone and refusing to tell him how she spends her time away from him; and You You (Xiang Wan), who gets promoted after flirting with the boss.

But there is far more to it than that. Behind the park's glossy sets and costumes, beyond the miniaturised, whitewashed copies of the Arc De Triomphe and Taj Mahal, the Twin Towers (still there) and the Pyramids, is the changing image of a people who still officially call each other "comrade" yet risk losing their identity without gaining a new one.

The guards who eat their lunch on the top floor of the Eiffel Tower and the girls who dress in kimonos to decorate the Japanese quarter are not citizens of the world. Once they remove their costumes and uniforms they are just like any one else. Most are freshly arrived in the city from the countryside and looking for a break, but ultimately end up living in communal hovels until something better comes along, willing to do anything if the price is right.

Their world is one where money is worth begging, stealing and sacrificing one's life for. Mobile phones and SMS have replaced human contact, Westernised slogans are used to sell virtual dreams ("Give us an hour and we'll give you the world" promises one) and the



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to escape censorship at home is clear and eloquent in its harsh indictment of the new China, says Dan Fainaru

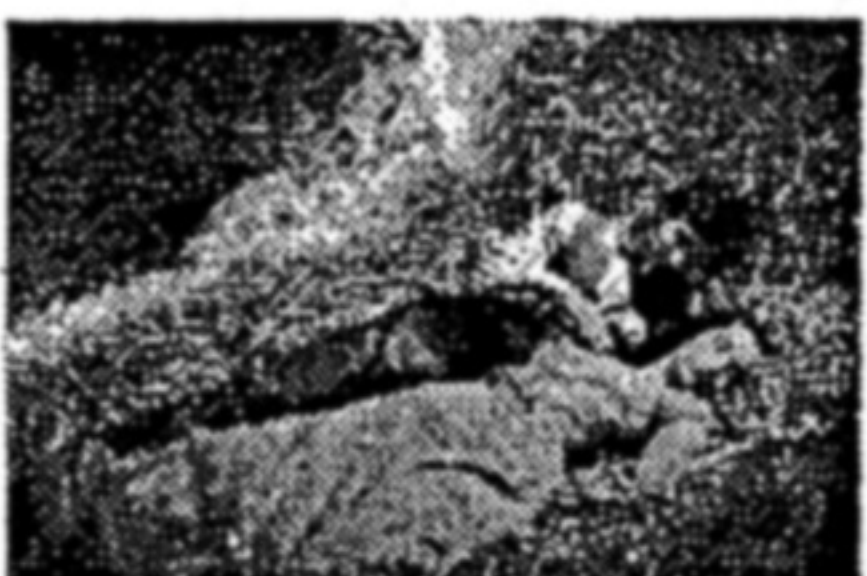
REVIEW



A GOOD WOMAN

The latest adaptation of Oscar Wilde loses some of its wit in translation but will still entice upscale audiences, says Allan Hunter

REVIEW



ARSENE LUPIN

The latest incarnation of the French gentleman criminal boasts superlative technical credits but suffers from a miscast lead, says Dan Fainaru

REVIEW



STRAY DOGS

Marziyeh Meshkini's look at street children in Kabul is a devastating portrait of human folly and what it does to its most defenceless victims, says Dan Fainaru

best business plan, short of going to the West, is to copy it to perfection.

Cinematographer Yu Lik Wai (a director in his own right) provides Hia with long, complicated, masterfully executed shots, astoundingly exploiting the park's structures. By doing so he affords the actors an unusual degree of freedom in their movement, alternating between sleek images of Westernised shows for the tourists and the squalor of back street lodgings.

Zhao Tao, who has already worked with Jia in *Platform* and *Unknown Pleasures*, is perfect as the new type of Chinese woman who will not be ruled by men any more. But it is the ending, with its suggestion that something in China is dead, and that this is only the beginning and that worse is yet to come, that expresses Jia's disappointment most bitterly.

Prod cos: Office Kitano, Xtrem Picture, Lumen Films

Int'l sales: Celluloid Dreams

Prod: Shozo Ichiyama

Cine: Yu Lik Wai


Ed: Kong Jinglei

Prod des: Wu Lizhong

Music: Lim Giong

Main cast: Zhao Tao, Chen Taisheng, Jing Jue, Jiang Zhongwei, Wang Yiqun, Wang Hongwei, Liang Zhongdong, Xiang Wan, Liu Juan



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