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Augustin, roi du kung-fu

Augustin, King of Kung-Fu

Anne Fontaine

FRANCE/SPAIN, 1999

84 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **ciné b/Les Films Alain Sarde/France 2 Cinéma/Boca Boca Producciones**

Producers: **Philippe Carcassonne, Alain Sarde**

Screenplay: **Jacques Fieschi, Anne Fontaine**

Cinematographer: **Christophe Pollock**

Editor: **Luc Barnier**

Production Designer: **Katia Wyszokop**

Sound: **Jean-Claude Laureux, Nicolas Naegelen**

Principal Cast: **Jean-Christien Sibertin Blanc, Maggie Cheung, Darryl Cowl, Bernard Campan**

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Toronto IFF 1999

Anne Fontaine is developing a wonderful talent for bringing the strange and the offbeat to the screen. Her previous films – *Augustin* and *Nettoyage à sec* – brought us characters and situations that were unique. Here she has added another dimension to her vision. Augustin is one of those eccentric characters, out of step with society and the times; his fascination with Chinese martial arts films takes him into a sector of society that further isolates him from his roots – French Chinatown! This is a part of Paris never seen on film; Fontaine manages to convince us that we are not really in France anymore, but in a genuine suburb of China.

Augustin is a bit-part actor, hopelessly bad, who nevertheless harbours thoughts of making it. His true passion is the highly kinetic martial arts films that he watches repeatedly. He practices kung fu alone in his room, but he knows that to play the lead in one of these films he will have to undergo further training. Unable to go to China, he does the next best thing – he packs up his apartment and bicycle and moves to Paris' Chinatown. When he experiences dizziness in his martial arts classes, he goes to a local acupuncturist. The attractive Dr. Ling, marvelously played by Maggie Cheung, has just moved to France and is lonely. Soon, the two of them are seeing each other... or are they?

Augustin, roi du kung-fu is more than a warm, affectionate, gentle film about a misfit meeting an attractive foreigner. It deals with a kind of reverse colonialism in a shrewd

and insightful manner. Augustin's attempts to become a martial arts star reveal a man who is prepared to live his dream while being totally unaware that it may not be the right one for him. But, it is in the final section of this smart film that Fontaine subtly makes her points about love and cultural differences.

■ Piers Handling

Anne Fontaine was born in Luxembourg in 1959. She worked as a dancer and actor from 1978 to 1988, before turning to film directing in 1992. Films include: *Les histoires d'amour finissent mal en général* (92), *Augustin* (95), *Nettoyage à sec* (97) and *Augustin, roi du kung-fu* (99).

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