

Acropolis Cinema and MUBI present
The Exclusive Los Angeles Theatrical Presentation of



On the Beach at Night Alone

A FILM BY HONG SANGSOO

November 21 & 24 — 8pm
Downtown Independent

ON THE BEACH AT NIGHT ALONE

101 min // South Korea // 2017

Art imitates life in this quietly devastating masterpiece from Hong Sangsoo. Kim Minhee (The Handmaiden, Right Now, Wrong Then)—in the role that won her the Silver Bear for best actress in Berlin—plays Younghee, an actress reeling in the aftermath of an affair with a married film director. Younghee visits Hamburg then returns to Korea, but as she meets with friends and has her fair share to drink, increasingly startling confessions emerge.



There Is No Such Thing As Reality: Hong Sang-Soo Discusses “On the Beach at Night Alone”

By Christopher Small

The following article was originally published in MUBI's Notebook

NOTEBOOK: You mentioned before that you can usually tell from the level of applause how successful the film is...

HONG SANG-SOO: Yes, we had the premiere yesterday, and the applause was very warm. I don't know if I am right or not but I think I can feel it.

NOTEBOOK: This is one of three projects that you made in one year. Is that right?

HONG: Probably.

NOTEBOOK: Could you speak about the relationship of those movies and this one?

HONG: I never thought about the relationship between these features. Maybe I told you before, I just decide when I will shoot, I decide the important locations and the important actors. Then I write in the morning when I shoot. I just accept whatever occurs in my mind. Probably reflecting my state of mind during those times, which is quite... complex. So I cannot really pinpoint what the relationship is between these three projects. It is hard to describe. My feeling is actually the better description of the movie, about what I was feeling and what I was thinking during that time.

NOTEBOOK: On the Beach at Night Alone is a very angry film. There are a couple of humorous scenes but generally the mood is very dark and somber.



HONG: It's okay. [Laughs] Sometimes it is okay to be dark and somber.

NOTEBOOK: Given the autobiographical nature of this material, I was curious about how much you worked with Kim Min-hee on her character. Was she involved in any of the development of Younghee on the page or earlier?

HONG: No, it's just me. I know about [Kim Min-hee] more than other actors. I know her just being herself. I had a lot of things in my mind. What she did, what she said. What I saw from her. It all influenced me. Of course, I cannot distinguish between the things she might have said and the things I wrote and even things I took from other people. What really influenced me was her just being herself, knowing her so well, for making this film.

NOTEBOOK: How has the dynamic changed since Right Now, Wrong Then? Do you give many directions, if at all?

HONG: I usually give very little direction. Maybe I told you before, but I don't believe in giving a lot of direction to actors. If you write down the right words in the script, then you don't have to explain or direct a lot. If the script is right, when they read it they understand that when they speak it feels right. And even sometimes they can memorize better because it is natural to them. For me, it is much more important to get the casting right. The right person can mean many things for you, but for me, that person can mean different things. They mean something special for that period of time, for that state of mind. If I choose the right person, and I talk with them, write the right script, the right dialogue, then all I have to do is give them the print out and they can do it. Only when they misinterpret what I wrote down do I correct them. "Oh, no I didn't mean it like that." "It's different intonation, you have to do it like this..." Or sometimes, there is some abstract content in the dialogue, some concepts or ideas that they may not be familiar with. Then I explain beforehand. Or when some things are more important for me, then I explain myself. I tell them: "Each line is important, it should be correct." But that's very rare. In terms of quantity of direction, not a lot. For me, the dialogue is more important.

NOTEBOOK: You still write that the morning of the shoot.

HONG: Usually. These days I spend longer writing. Ten years ago, I wrote in two hours and then shot. Nowadays, it takes me four hours, sometimes five hours. So I wake up at 3am, and then I might not finish until 11 o'clock. And the crew are all waiting for me. They have been waiting two or three hours for me to finish. I don't know why but it takes me longer and longer every time.

NOTEBOOK: Do you start with the scene in mind, or do you just wake up and start from the beginning?

HONG: No, it is everything. If I had material from the day before, I base it on that. The first day of shooting is the most difficult. You really feel in the front of your mind that you have several ways of proceeding. You expend a lot of energy and make mistakes but the second day is easier, then the third day you already know about the structures, sometimes. Then you only think about the connection from the previous scene, and about the scene in question: what do I want to do today? How will I spend my energy? How will I use these actors who are providing me with their time? But the very first day is the hardest. For two hours, I think about this direction, then I write some pages,

and then I discard what I have and think about another direction. The first day is very hard. After that, it is okay. At first, I considered using the first part of this film as a short feature on its own. But then I showed it to some people and they liked it. I was thinking either I could either use this as a first part and then continue from there or I can shoot something entirely different and start from the beginning and make an entire feature film. I had to decide, so one or two days before the shooting of the second part, I showed the first part to some people and they encouraged me to go on.

NOTEBOOK: Do many of the scenes you write and shoot get cut out of the movie?

HONG: No, not many. Maybe percentage-wise... more than 95% of what I shoot is used in the film. Less than 5% is cut. These are scenes I shot that were okay technically but when I edit I feel like I don't need it. I can jump to the next one. Then I discard that material. That happens very rarely. The only time I discarded a large amount of scenes I shot was on Woman is the Future of Man [2004]. I discarded ten scenes, I think. I don't remember exactly, but it was the ending I cut. It was unnecessary. All the other features, it is a very small percentage.

NOTEBOOK: How does writing scenes in the morning relate to ideas of structure, specifically the big structural devices that until now characterized all of your movies?

HONG: That comes on the first day. You have to think about structure and about everything. But you just have to decide. I shoot something after deciding on something on the first day. Then the second day, write something believing that the first idea was right. By the end of that day, I know whether that was true or not. I think it is about the third day I usually know the structure or direction. Then I don't have to worry too much about it. It's okay. But you don't see the big devices in this film?

NOTEBOOK: No, and it goes back to what I was saying about the anger and melancholy that I think are front and center here. Usually the structural devices, like the doubling of Right Now, Wrong Then, are almost a way to subvert the narrative. That isn't the case here.

HONG: When I made those choices, I didn't have a reason. I just felt that this was the right direction. But for the sake of explanation, I guess I was more into the personality of this character, her struggle. I identified with the character

more than usual, and at the same time I felt that I wasn't really interested in forms. I didn't think about forms. I didn't need to.

NOTEBOOK: I think that's where the film's strength comes from. You make so many movies that we have come to expect certain variations on the material. Then when they are not there, it focuses our attention on the emotions in front of us. There is only really the abduction at the end of part one that stands out as a structural red-herring.

HONG: All I can say about these unreal things is that I like Luis Buñuel a lot. I feel good when I watch his films, that much I can say. You know, there is no such thing as reality. We are bound to feel certain things by our circumstances. We work and move around, not really believing in things, just automatically doing them and thinking them based on this false conception of reality. And our feelings follow that because we have done all these things so many times. We feel these sensations, pleasure or pain, so it becomes more real for us. Sometimes, when come across, say, a poetic moment in life, you see things differently from just an everyday setting. You can discover something totally different. You can feel it, but this feeling goes away quickly and you return to that normal state.

I know that reality is something I can never reach out and grab. We are all living under the influence of being human beings, so it is a good thing that it is unattainable. Even though I feel totally lost, even though I feel pain, it's not real, in a way. Because we feel these things, we tend to believe that this is real...Sometimes, I am reminding myself that there is a reality that I will never know, that we will never know, that we will never possess. It is a good feeling. It makes you feel free.

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