



Press release

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Jia Zhang-Ke, Guest of Honour 2024



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Visions du Réel is delighted to announce that the Guest of Honour for its 55th edition (12 – 21 April) will be the exceptional Chinese filmmaker, Jia Zhang-Ke. A leading figure in independent Chinese cinema, and contemporary cinema more broadly, Jia Zhang-Ke will be presenting a masterclass exploring his captivating and multifaceted oeuvre which examines the history of his country and the characters who inhabit it. A retrospective of his films will run throughout the edition. A tribute made possible once more thanks to the precious collaboration with the Cinémathèque suisse and ECAL (university of art and design in Lausanne).

"Since the outbreak of Covid-19, I haven't left China for almost four years. The 55th Visions du Réel will be my first trip to Europe after these four years. I feel like embracing the world again, as excited as a child about to go on a long trip for the first time. I am heading to Nyon, for cinema that reveals the world as it really is." - Jia Zhang-Ke


Born in 1970 in the mining region of Shanxi, bordered by the Great Wall of China, Jia Zhang-Ke is a leading light in contemporary cinema. He belongs to a generation of Chinese filmmakers who were profoundly affected by the Tiananmen Square protests. His diverse filmography, which comprises more than 20 short and feature works, borrows elements from both genre and non-fiction cinema. "Switching from taught thrillers to documentaries and encompassing a myriad hybrid formats woven together by non-professional actors, fictional works on a canvas of reality, and fantasies bypassing otherwise restrained stories, Jia Zhang-Ke has spent two decades creating a filmography as coherent as it is shifting. I am deeply moved to be welcoming such an essential filmmaker, whose work we have been dreaming of honouring for years. I am especially thrilled to be sharing his inspiring body of work with the public, and to pick his mind about his singular approach during the masterclass," says Emilie Bujès, Artistic Director of Visions du Réel.

His stylistically diverse oeuvre deploys the full range of cinematographic techniques (16 and 35mm, DV, HD, etc.). Approaching his subject as a visual artist, Jia Zhang-Ke offers a subtle and subversive immersion in Chinese society, imbued with a sublimated realism. Resisting censorship and tirelessly defending the cultural significance of his country's cinematic output, Jia Zhang-Ke weaves long-form, epic-style stories to

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explore personal and multifaceted journeys that challenge the notion of dissolution of the individual within the national narrative.

Ever willing to wrestle with the realities of China's recent history, the filmmaker offers a profoundly humanist representation that draws on memories and recollections. To achieve this, Jia Zhang-Ke creates a narrative polysemy that focuses its gaze on the everyday lives of ordinary people living in "intermediate towns" scattered between the rural life and that of the country's burgeoning megacities.

By doing so, Jia Zhang-Ke's films dissect the promises and mirages offered under the forced march of modernisation in effect since the 1960s. They examine the effects of this collective story, specifically the imposition of state capitalism on human beings, by providing a romantic and sensitive counter-narrative. An essential and uncompromising filmography that has often fallen foul of the government's strict censorship regime.

Director biography

Graduating in 1997 from the Beijing Film Academy, Jia Zhang-Ke returned to his home city of Fenyang in the Shanxi province to create his first full-length feature, *Pickpocket* (1997). Conceived with meagre resources and without authorisation, the film cast a disillusioned eye, in a distinct documentary style – like several of his other titles – on Chinese society, landing it with a national broadcast ban. His next three works met the same fate: *Platform* (2000), *The Condition of Dogs* (2001) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002). However, the latter was included in the Cannes Film Festival's Official Selection. His melodrama, *The World* (2004), was the first of his films to be screened in Chinese cinemas, and starred his wife, the actor Zhao Tao, who has appeared in all of his fiction films since 2000. She won numerous awards for her performances in *Mountains May Depart* (2015) and *Ash Is Purest White* (2018).

Starting with 2006's *Dong*, the filmmaker then embarked on an expansion into non-fiction cinema, by adopting the viewpoint of the painter, Liu Xiaodong. He followed this up with *Useless* (2007), an exploration of the textile industry in China, and *24 City* (2008), which examines the disappearance of workers' towns and the country's modernisation. He recounted the history of Shanghai in *I Wish I Knew* (2010) and gave voice to three Chinese writers on the changes taking place in their country in *Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue* (2020).

His work has received many accolades, including the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival as well as the award for Best Director at the Asian Film Awards for *Still Life* (2006) and the award for Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival for *A Touch of Sin* (2013). His entire career has also been honoured at some of the world's most renowned film festivals, including Locarno, where he received the Golden Leopard in 2010, and the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes, which awarded him the Carrosse d'Or in 2015.

Alongside his work as a director, Jia Zhang-Ke also contributes to China's film production. *Mr. Tree* (2011), *Dead Pigs* (2018), *The Best Is Yet to Come* (2020), *The Calming* (2020) and *White Building* (2021) are among the many films he has co-produced. In 2017, he and the legendary film historian and festival director, Marco Müller, founded the Pingyao Crouching Tiger Film Festival (PYIFF), which aims to promote the work of young Chinese filmmakers.

In April, Jia Zhang-Ke will join other leading figures in contemporary cinema previously honoured by Visions du Réel, including Lucrecia Martel, Marco Bellocchio, Claire Denis, Werner Herzog and Emmanuel Carrère, among others.

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