

“!magine Fest” invites audiences to open door of creativity and inspiration together

The Film Programmes Office (FPO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) will present “!magine Fest” from December 10 to January 27 next year at the Cinema of the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA), the Lecture Hall of the Hong Kong Science Museum (HKScM) and K11 Art House. The programme will showcase 17 world cinema works with highly imaginative stories, allowing audiences to open their imaginations. Some of the screenings will be accompanied by post-screening talks or seminars.

Selected films include the epochal sci-fi masterpiece directed by Stanley Kubrick, “2001: A Space Odyssey” (1968), which examines topics of human evolution and the meaning of existence through a computer mutiny, reflecting the dominance and threat of technology towards humankind. Also set in space, the characters of “High Life” (2018) are in a protracted seclusion amid an interstellar journey, facing the disorder and fear brought by the gradual breakdown of humanity.

There are also films exploring the theme of artificial life, including “The Bride of Frankenstein” (1935), which delves into the complexities of human nature through the loneliness of the monster. The film is also hailed as an example of a perfect sequel in cinema history. “Ex Machina” (2015) explores this theme with the humanoid robot Ava, who possesses self-awareness. It reveals the discomfort and distrust of humans towards artificial intelligence technologies with a drama fueled by secrets, tests, and lies. What is more, the newly released French animation “Mars Express” (2023) explores the contradictions between humans and robots, and depicts a futuristic fantasy in which humans colonise Mars, and souls of the deceased are converted into androids.

Films with the theme of life and death are also among the selection. “A Matter of Life and Death” (1946) depicts a story in which the protagonist must make an appeal in a heavenly court to stay alive after his miraculous survival of a battle due to an angel's oversight. In Hirokazu Kore-eda's early work “After Life” (1998), the deceased can bring with them to heaven a memory that they cherish the most. The film depicts precious affection through imagination.

The festival has also selected the restored versions of two masterpieces. “Orlando” (1992) is an adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel of the same name. The story follows the androgynous nobleman Orlando on a fantastical journey of self-discovery spanning four centuries. In Agnès Varda's recently restored “The Creatures” (1966), which has been recently premiered at the Venice International Film Festival, a writer relocates to an island after a car crash, where strange things happen and the boundaries

between reality and fantasy break down.

The remaining four selected films explore different themes through rich imagination. Adapting fantasy stories from the 18th century, "The Fabulous Baron Munchausen" (1961) combines animation and live-action performances to deliver a dreamlike rhapsodic fantasy with the use of heavy tinting. The Japanese New Wave masterpiece "The Face of Another" (1966) reflects the loss of identity and angst of modern people through the experiences of the protagonist after a facial transplant surgery. "Stalker" (1979) turns the protagonists' exploration of a mysterious forbidden zone into a spiritual journey of the inner self, encouraging audiences to self reflect. Through oil painting-like images and rich symbolism, "The Spirit of the Beehive" (1973) examines the fear of death and historical traumas through the eyes of a young girl, Ana, in the wake of the Spanish Civil War.

The festival also features two family-friendly animations. The winner of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film in 2009, "WALL-E" (2008), depicts a solitary robot which discovers signs of the Earth resurrecting from its ruins. The film has minimal dialogue at the beginning but captivates audiences with its rich audio-visual details. "Ernest & Celestine" (2012), based on a Belgian picture book, highlights the theme of overcoming prejudice through the friendship between a bear and a mouse.

The FPO and the HKScM will co-organise two free fringe activities, including free screenings of "A Trip to the Moon" (1902) and "Forbidden Planet" (1956) on December 30 (Saturday) and January 27 (Saturday) respectively at the Lecture Hall of the HKScM. They will be followed by post-screening talks hosted by director Willis Wong, and curator Ernest Chan and assistant curator of the HKScM Dr So Chu-wing respectively. Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

In addition, the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) parent-child stop-motion animation workshop "STEAM Laboratory: Animate it!" will be held after the post-screening talks of "A Trip to the Moon" at the laboratory on the G/F of the HKScM for parents and children. Hosted by an illustrator, participants will learn the principles of moving images by making stop-motion toy modules together. Online registration for the free workshop will be available on the website of the HKScM (hk.science.museum/en/web/scm/event/scifi/fpo.html) starting 10am on December 1 (Friday). Admission is free with a limited quota on a first-come, first-served basis.

The FPO will also hold two seminars hosted by Chan at the HKFA Cinema on December 17 (Sunday) and December 24 (Sunday). Writer Kevin Yan and psychologist Dr Ken Fung will be the speakers for the former, titled "The Magic of Imagination", while four local animation artists: Lee Kwok-wai, Nic Ho, Mak Siu-fung and Tsui Ka-hei, will be the speakers for the latter titled "To Infinity and Beyond – The Power of Animated Fantasies". The seminars will be conducted in Cantonese. Admission to the seminars is free with limited seats available on a first-come, first-served basis. Audiences may queue at the 1/F Foyer of the HKFA 15 minutes before the seminar begins.

"A Trip to the Moon" is a silent film without subtitles. "The Creatures" and "The Fabulous Baron Munchausen" are with English subtitles. All other films are with Chinese and English subtitles.

Tickets for screenings at the HKFA priced at \$60 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For screenings at K11 Art House, tickets priced at \$110 and \$130 are now available at K11 Art House and the website of MCL Cinemas (www.mclcinema.com). For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2734 2900 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/fp/en/listing.html?id=56.