

**AKANGA FILM ASIA
PRESENTS**

DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE

**WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
VLADIMIR TODOROVIC**



**OFFICIAL SELECTION
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2013**

PRODUCTION NOTES

FILM INFORMATION

Director: Vladimir Todorovic

Script: Vladimir Todorovic

Producer: Fran Borgia

Line Producers: Ivana Brankovic (Serbia), Gerard Marco (Spain)

Cinematography: Hideho Urata, Jelena Prekajski, Ferran Castera

Editor: Shantha Kumar

Music: Brian O'Reilly

Main Cast: Hiroyuki Machida
Bobbi Chen
Petar Vasiljevic
Adam Vukovic
Goran Andrejin
Ives Laborie
Carolina Torres
Jordi Palau Castro

Location: Shot on locations in Singapore, Serbia and Spain

Production Company: Akanga Film Asia (Singapore)

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Shooting format: Super16mm Film, 1.85:1

Sound Format: Dolby SR

Country: Singapore

Language: Japanese, Mandarin, Serbian, Spanish, English

Duration: 67 minutes

Logline

Immigrants in three different situations attempt to find the lost or never established connections between their new and old homelands.

Synopsis

Three stories set across Serbia, Singapore and Spain follow immigrants and their uneasy relationships with foreign landscapes. In Serbia, a man comes back to his hometown after years living abroad. He feels estranged while visiting places he once knew well, and is confused about the disappearance of the intimate connection he had with once familiar landscapes. In Singapore, an expatriate couple living a monotonous life face upheaval after an encounter with cosplayers in their neighborhood. This is followed by a trip to a coral reef, which has managed to survive in an industrial area. In the final segment, a couple from Latin America arrives in Spain to search for a better life. They are ready to explore the new landscapes, but uneasiness and fear of the unknown haunt them.

Director's statement

The initial idea for this project was to start a meditative and ambiguous story about the relationship between men and landscapes. We chose the form of a film triptych in which, the second story has similar importance to a central plate in a painterly triptych. The first and last segments have a supporting and complementary role. The opening of the film is about one's resignation to the landscapes from the past, the ones that are constantly fading away. The middle segment depicts the revelation of emigrant couple that the connection to the landscape where they live can exist only with a level of artificiality; and in the third part, even before the couple start getting attached to it, the landscape is already foreign. The idea was to interconnect these issues and create a portrait of a generic emigrant by following some rules or the structure of a painting triptych.

The editing of the first part of the triptych reflects the natural stream of thoughts, particularly memories that appear in more a random than linear order. What is apparent is the protagonist's observational rather than participatory role. In a similar manner, both couples from the second and third parts are observers trying to decipher the meanings and their own role within unknown and alien landscapes. This uneasiness when confronting the distant and unknown is similar to the situations where all protagonists are. All of the protagonists also desperately long to reconstruct a once comforting, and now lost, feeling of belonging to a place or a landscape.

With this film we attempt to archive and document such disappearances and losses in various landscapes. To work with super 16mm film was practically and conceptually appropriate, because of the ability to get closer to the image (one might say representation) of reality with the best film material for our purpose. The treatment of the celluloid medium, closely related to home movies in the past as well as professional film-making remind us once again of the power of cinema and its (in)capability to get us close to the image or representation of reality. The characters in the film are always resigned to the central idea of the film: that they are just observers of the landscape that is disappearing.

It took us ten months to edit this film. During this period, a lot of very intimate and personal memories were projected into the picture. The idea was to document and frame the segments of the immigrants' lives, in this I would say not very conventional story telling method. A humble intention of the film was to create a picture that is moving and that can communicate these ideas not only to immigrants but also to the others who never emigrated before.

An interview with Vladimir Todorovic by Ben Slater

Ben Slater is an author, film critic and screenwriter based in Singapore

Ben Slater: What was the original intention behind *Disappearing Landscape*, and how did it develop over the two (or so) years you spent working on it?

Vladimir Todorovic: The intention was to do a film triptych that interconnects the fragments of immigrants' lives in three different places with three different time frames. The first segment in Serbia renders fragments from the past; the middle one in Singapore focuses on the present time, and the final segment, which is shot in Spain, is about the future. I wanted to portray the relationships and similarities between these experiences. In Serbia we dealt with places that we are familiar with – places from our memories. In Singapore, we documented our relationship to the present landscape, the one that is being rapidly destroyed. And in the Spanish section, we wanted to capture the character's relationship to a new space, uncertain and unfamiliar.

In terms of the process, producer Fran Borgia and myself decided to collaborate and do this experiment on film with very limited financial resources. We spent two months on the script and preproduction and shot everything in an extremely packed seven days. We edited effectively for about 10 months over a year and a half period.

BS: What did you discover during the editing process?

VT: The film had so many different versions that I've lost count. We tried a lot of things but they didn't work. They gave us interesting material, but they could not hold together. After so many alterations and attempts, numerous suggestions and feedback I decided to try to edit everything according to the initial script and after so much time had passed the cut started to feel more compact. Together with my wife Tatjana whose contribution to this project was huge, we decided that shots of the landscapes should have more importance than any narrative structure. I got rid of a forced narrative that had emerged during the editing, and then the landscapes started to disappear in a nice way in this version. I think this was the crucial decision, to return to first principles.

BS: The contrasts between radically different landscapes seems to be one of the key elements in the film. What did you think the contrast would yield, and did it meet your expectations?

I was hoping that the contrasts would create a picture that compares, analyzes but also in a way equalizes these three different situations. Or perhaps form a circle between the three segments. Obviously the three different landscapes/environments affected the features of the characters, but my idea was that they would all portray almost the same character – like a generic immigrant couple and their relationship to the new and old homelands. All characters are unsettled and they are constantly trying to

make a connection to the landscape.

When filming the landscapes I focused on using almost a photo-documentary approach and filming them in the most truthful way. That's why I would suggest that the negotiation and differences between the three different landscapes happens naturally.

BS: This question may be "on the nose", but I'm curious where you think the disappearance of the title takes place?

VT: We could say that the title disappears when we get engaged with the film, when we forget about the title. Then it appears again in moments when we are confused in the film and when the film leaves us without much to hold on.

We shot on super 16mm and that helped us capture the disappearances of various things, but most importantly the disappearance of actual moments, or if you wish the frames of the film itself. While watching the film, each frame passes and the title becomes self-reflexive. I feel that the structure of the film (as a triptych) pushes the title to disappear literally.

BS: Talk about why you decided to shoot on film. It's increasingly an unusual decision.

I'd seen the work of cinematographer Hideho Urata who shot a short film *The Meaning of Style*, also produced by Fran Borgia and directed by British artist Phil Collins. It was also shot on S16mm and I was really intrigued by the nature of the material. There was something very real and at the same time magical about that footage and it felt that reality was captured properly. Shantha Kumar who edited our film also edited that project.

After working with film I must say that it enabled us to capture reality and landscapes in the ways I imagined them to be. Film enables you to capture details that you cannot get easily with digital technology. The idea of not knowing what you shot and seeing the scan also brings uncertainty and excitement back into the process. I remember that when we scanned the footage, suddenly all the characters got a new life and were really different from what we saw when shooting. I have a theory that film is capable of capturing what these characters are meant to be. Maybe this sounds strange, but it feels like it is more sensitive to that than digital technologies. If we shot this film on digital, it would be very different.

BS: In voice-over the Chinese woman refers to "tourists with expensive cameras", which seems to be a self-reflexive joke about this kind of process of film-making. There's a great deal of photographic or even painterly beauty here, both in archetypal landscapes, and in the more alienating constructions of Singapore. How do you avoid this becoming a slide-show?

For quite a few months as we were editing, I was avoiding that, but while finalizing it, I felt that using moving sequences almost in the manner of a slide-show could work for us in the same way as micro-narratives and scenes work in painterly triptychs. When she says that this makes us closer to her and takes us further from the landscape shots. This happens throughout all three stories - we get a bit closer to the characters and further from the photographic nature of the film.

Everything is new to us and everything is beautiful, like when we watch a new film. But also we use our expensive cameras and we document everything. We observe, we process and we forget. I feel that this fits into various ideas I've explored in my other films. The ideas of chance, and filming events that happen in front of us without any need of altering their momentum. Some people have joked that this as a very Buddhist approach.

BS: The Singapore and Spanish story are about couples in different environments, how did this relate to the more ethereal journey in the Serbian episode, which seems like a kind of childhood memory.

VT: In the Serbian story we follow a guy who has come back to his home country for a holiday. When he is there alone, he is constantly reminded of some memories from the past. In that segment, the character is alone facing the disappearance of the landscape from the past. In that story there is no female character to support him. In the Singapore story the focus is slightly geared towards the woman who cannot comprehend the disappearance of the natural landscapes that are destroyed by industry. Her partner is there to try to help her comprehend this, but it doesn't look like he is capable of helping. In the Spanish story, the man is the one who processes the disappearance of the landscape that hasn't even appeared in front of him, but has already started disappearing. In Deleuzes' text *Deserted Islands*, he claims that we already desert the island even before we've arrived on it.

BS: Is there a particular gaze or position for each segment that's reflected in how you filmed them?

VT: The Serbian segment was filmed so that we cannot tell the difference between the reality and the dream or the memory. The Singapore part was meant to be a pure and dry reality showing the rituals and routines with no emotions. In Spain we had an idea of filming something new, bright, filled with hope and new beginnings. For each segment there was a different cinematographer (Jelena Prekajski shot the Serbian segment and Ferran Castera shot the Spanish part). Each segment treated the camera differently in terms of movement, but at the end, as we edited, we removed camera movement as much as possible. The notion of landscapes and our protagonists' relationships to them is what connected these three different segments. That is why it is important to say the title first and hopefully make it disappear later while you, the audience, allow yourself to be projected into the landscapes.

WRITER & DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



VLADIMIR TODOROVIC

Vladimir Todorovic was born in Zrenjanin Serbia. He is a filmmaker and visual artist. His generative film, SILICA-ESC has been awarded *Special Mention* at the Visions from the Future 2010 Iridescent Worlds and jury recommended work for Japan's Media Art Festival. His debut feature WATER HANDS premiered at the 40th international Film Festival Rotterdam 2011. WATER HANDS received a *Special Mention* award at Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in 2012 and Best Feature Film Award in fLEXiff 2011, Sydney. His new film DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE will premiere in Rotterdam in January 2013.

His films and projects participated in numerous festivals and exhibitions including: Busan International Film Festival, Paris Project, FEST, Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, CINDI, Cottbus, BIFFES, SEAFF, Five Flavours Film Festival, Punto y Raya, Adventures in Motion, Cinemanila, 39th and 40th International Film Festival Rotterdam, Impakt, ISEA2010, Ars Electronica, File2011, l'Alternativa 2010, Curtas Vila do Conde, Rencontres Internationales 09, Videoformes, ICA Singapore, ISEA08, Enter3, Wired NextFest, Dislocate07, ISEA06, Siggraph 06, Transmediale 05, File 2004, MuseumsQuartier Vienna, Machinista, Entermutlimediale 2, WRO 05, Museum of Contemporary Arts Belgrade, and many others.

Director's filmography

- 2012 DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE (feature film)
- 2010 WATER HANDS (feature film)
- 2010 SILICA-ESC (short)
- 2009 THE SNAIL ON THE SLOPE (short)

PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY



FRAN BORGIA

Born in southern Spain, Fran Borgia studied filmmaking in London, Barcelona and Singapore. In 2004, he wrote and directed his first short film, ASIA. He shot his second short film, PARA ASIA, in 2007. In 2008, Fran co-directed and produced THE KING LEAR PROJECT, a theatre performance commissioned by Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels and the Singapore Arts Festival. In 2009, he wrote and directed FILM – FAUST for Singapore's Esplanade Theatre Studios, a theatre production inspired by Goethe's masterpiece.

He was the Producer and Editor for HERE, Ho Tzu Nyen's first feature film that was presented at the 41st Directors' Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 2009; and for the medium length film, EARTH, presented at the 66th Venice Film Festival 2009 and the 39th International Film Festival Rotterdam 2010.

He has produced MASALA MAMA, a short film presented at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival 2010; and SANDCASTLE, Boo Junfeng's first feature film that premiered at the 49th Critics' Week, Cannes Film Festival 2010, and won the Best Film, Best Director and NETPAC Awards at the Vietnam International Film Festival in 2010.

He also co-produced TIONG BAHRU by Christine Molloy & Joe Lawlor, a short film presented at the 40th International Film Festival Rotterdam 2011; and produced THE MEANING OF STYLE by British artist Phil Collins, presented at the Singapore Biennale 2011; and THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING by Ho Tzu Nyen, presented at the Singapore Pavilion – 54th Venice Biennale of Art 2011, at the 64th Locarno Film Festival and at Sundance Film Festival 2012.

His most recent film, DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE, by Serbian-born Singapore-based filmmaker Vladimir Todorovic, will premiere at the 42nd International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2013.

Fran is the Founder of Akanga Film Asia, an independent production company based in Singapore.

CREWS' BIOGRAPHY

HIDEHO URATA – CINEMATOGRAPHER (SINGAPORE SEGMENT)

Originally from Tokyo, Hideho earned a Master's degree from New York University. He began his career in the United States as a camera operator for NYPD Blue — a four-time Golden Globe winner — television drama starring Dennis Franz. He has worked as a camera assistant for cinematographers such as Ernest Dickerson and Stephen H. Burum. He is now a cinematographer with a wide experience in feature film, TV commercial and music video production. One of the feature films KAMATAKI won Best Director, Ecumenical Prize, International Film Critics' Award, Most Popular Canadian Film, People's Choice Award at Montreal World Film Festival 2005 and Special Mention at Berlin International Film Festival 2006. Hideho won the Best Cinematography award at Montreal Fantasia Film Festival 2009 and the Best Visual Achievement at New York Asian Film Festival 2009 on his work THE CLONE RETURNS HOME.

BRIAN O'REILLY – MUSIC COMPOSER

Brian O'Reilly works within the fields of electro-acoustic composition, moving images and noise music. Also he is a contrabassist focusing on uncovering the inaudible textures and hidden acoustic microsounds of his instrument through the integration of electronic treatments and extended playing techniques. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on a scholarship for sculpture during which time he perused independent studies in improvisation and composition with members of Chicago's AACM.

After which he relocated to Paris to research the composition methods of the composer Iannis Xenakis, receiving an appointment as Musical Assistant at Xenakis' studio. He pursued graduate studies in Electronic Music at the University of California Santa Barbara's Media Arts and Technology program, where his collaborations with Curtis Roads began with the project "Point Line Cloud" which won an Award of Distinction at Ars Electronica in 2002.

As Operations Manager of Recombinant Media Labs in San Francisco He worked on many projects for the Asphodel record label & recording studio, and has received several international residencies/commissions including invitations to work as a guest artist at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Germany, the SH Festival in Shanghai and All Tomorrow Parties festival curated by Autechre in the UK. He has worked on projects with Eliane Radigue, Luc Ferrari, Curtis Roads, Zbigniew Karkowski, Otomo Yoshihide, Matmos, Maryanne Amacher, Zeitkratzer, Christian Marclay, William Basinski, Fe-Mail, Yasunao Tone, Francisco López, Garth Knox, Steina and Woody Vasulka, amongst others. Currently he is performing audio and visuals solo and in the groups Game of Patience & Black Zenith, and is a lecturer at LASALLE's School of Contemporary Music.