

AN ELEPHANT SITTING STILL

A
FILM BY
HUBO





LOGLINE:

The story links together the lives of a number of protagonists, narrating the course of one single, tension-filled day from dawn to dusk, and along the way, painting a portrait of a society marked by selfishness.

SYNOPSIS:

Under the gloomy sky of a small town in northern China, different protagonists' lives are intertwined in this furious tale of nihilistic rage. While protecting his friend from a dangerous school bully, 16-year-old WEI Bu pushes the tormentor down a staircase. WEI escapes the scene and later learns that the bully is hospitalized and gravely injured. WEI's neighbor, the 60-year-old WANG Jin, is estranged from his family and, with nothing to lose, decides to join him. Later the pair is joined by HUANG Ling, WEI's classmate. She is bedeviled by a destructive affair with a married school official. Together, this unlikely and desperate trio, decide their only hope is to flee as the bully's gangster brother, enraged parents, and vindictive school authorities embark on a cold-blooded hunt for WEI across town. As WEI threads his way through the urban wilderness, he begins to come to terms with his own lost life. In the end, he boards a long-distance bus with HUANG and WANG toward a city in Manchuria, where it is a rumored that a circus elephant is said to be sitting still, seemingly oblivious to pain and tribulations of the world at large.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought that the world’s heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world’s pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower.” This quote from Cormac McCarthy is also the subject of this film. In our age, it’s increasingly hard for us to have faith even in the tiniest of things, and the frustration from which becomes the hallmark of today’s society. The film builds up personal myths in between daily routines. In the end, everyone loses what he or she values the most.



INTERVIEW WITH HU BO

(conducted during the press release of *Huge Crack* on December 28th, 2016)

You graduated from Beijing Film Academy with a degree in directing. Does your film study experience influence your creativity in any way? What roles do writing and filmmaking play in your life?

Hu: I keep film and literature very much apart from each other. I can only manage one of the two during a certain period of time, because they are completely different art forms.

In fact, I wish I could separate them even further, but I don't have enough brain for that. Making a film is very difficult. It has a lot of tedious requirements, and usually cannot be done. In that case, I have nothing to do but write. Writing is a very free medium, and requires no preconditions. Nowadays people like to say that films can be shot on mobile phones, but I think that is the same as saying writing can be achieved with just numbers.

Some people claim that your works deliver a lot of negative emotions such as decadence, dejection, and desperation. What do you think of these claims?

Hu: You can ask whoever made these claims to reflect on himself for just a second everyday when he wakes up, before he goes to bed, or when he fetches a cup of water at the water dispenser at work, and he will know he's only looking at his life through rose-colored glasses. All he's doing is posting Twits, living up to labels, or hoarding hundreds of pictures on his cell phone while waiting for a chance to flaunt them to others. I'm not disproving these behaviors. However, the truly valuable things lie in the cracks of the world, and not pessimistically so. If he can understand this, he may just be awed by the orders of life.

What is an ideal life to you?

Hu: I'm 28 years old now. I used to desire an ideal life when I was a teenager. I don't see it in this way anymore. There is simply no ideal life. It is only about choosing what kind of regrets you are willing to live with.

Do you intend on adapting stories from *Huge Crack* into films? Would you prefer writing and directing by yourself or collaborating with another director?

Hu: I separate film from literature, and I don't plan on adapting my own novels. If someone wants to adapt *Huge Crack*, I hope it won't be turned into a film about youth. Because the book is not about youth, but rather about the majority of junior college students in China. People often talk about the white-collar, the bottom class, the vested interest, the entrepreneurs, among other labeled social groups, and envelop their teenage years under a collective and polished term, youth. Such a definition is wrong. This massive group of





Chinese young adults, who do nothing but slump in their dorms all day and play videogames, lead heedless lives and go on pointless dates, don't have youth.

Their lives are rather filled with much more complicated things—as complicated as that in Camus's *The Outsider*. For instance, these people do not concern themselves with materialistic matters, and the older ones in the group often like to criticize everything. But can humans live on without worrying about substance? Class distinction did not exist decades ago. However, the youngsters today are burdened with something of enormous weight on their minds the day they step into the college gates. Did the age of bike-riding have that? Hence, I hope the young people of our age will not undermine their own lives, because the emptiness that the flesh-eating savages faced in the woods, or a dying soldier faces on the battlefield, is not so different from the emptiness that they face today.

Which story in the book *Huge Crack* are you most satisfied with? Why?

Hu: *An Elephant Sitting Still*. It is the last story I wrote in September this year. After I finished it, I felt that I have achieved a stage in my creative endeavor. This story has a great significance to me. It has brought me to completely negate myself, and thus extricated me from myself to go on writing other people's stories.

Many stories in the book *Huge Crack* leave people with very realistic impressions. Are any of them real life stories, or part of your own experience?

Hu: Every story has a real origin, and each of those origins follows a real emotional development with real details. You could see them as real stories, and I think they may very well happen in real life, but those that do take place in reality are more powerful than what I've written.

If you organize a book tour, will you “freeze” in front of your readers? Are you an inarticulate person in life? Is it because you are better at expressing yourself in writing that you are less so in communicating in person?

Hu: I don't think many people will come, so I probably won't “freeze.” Though I cannot be sure. I become nervous in front of a crowd, but not when I'm on a film set, since there are clear agendas during shooting. I'm clueless of what to do on occasions such as book tours and film roadshows. I don't think I have communication problems. It is usually the film crew who “freeze” and stare at me after I finish talking to them. So they are the ones with communication problems.

FROM PRESS

“*An Elephant Sitting Still*, that should become an enduring classic.”

“With its distinctive and hard-forged drama, style, and mood, it presents a comprehensive, diagnostic cross-section of China’s grave civic maladies and their intimate, agonized expressions.”

“*An Elephant Sitting Still*, with its chilling sense of a suspended time in which history, culture, beauty, and even memory seem erased, is among the greatest recent films.”

— **Richard Brody, *New Yorker***

“Hu’s first (and sadly last) feature weaves together its narrative threads clearly and sturdily.”

“Hu’s characters remain very real, and they are never shown as indulgent to the point of being above the banalities of everyday life.”

— **Clarence Tsui, *The Hollywood Reporter***

“*An Elephant Sitting Still* is the work of raw, intimidating talent driven by a creative fury”

“Hu’s screenplay is a rare creation of great ambition and patience.”

“He(Hu) writes microscopically, detailing the characters’ circumstances and choices at every turn, but addresses at the same time something on a much larger scale—an ancient civilization slowing losing its human touch”

— **Zhuo-Ning Su, *The Film Stage***

“Hu paints a picture of existential malaise with such a fine-tuned control of mood, imagery and pacing that the end result resembles a marriage of Jia Zhangke and Bela Tarr.”

“The film proves a delicately layered, deftly shot work that makes an incisive statement about the prevalence of apathy, arrogance and egotism in contemporary China and beyond.”

— **Sarah Ward, *ScreenDaily***

“Hu’s chosen aesthetic and mode of storytelling are entirely his own, staying close to the protagonists at all times, both literally and figuratively, the film patiently draws a profoundly empathetic portrait of human suffering that is at once epic and intimate ... The exceptional delicacy with which Hu delineates his characters’ trajectories transcends their wretchedness.”

— **Giovanni Marchini Camia, *BFI***

“Chinese independent cinema is on the verge of extinction, which makes Hu Bo’s first and last feature film even more remarkable”

“It is this sensation of compulsive solitude that Hu Bo’s film not only explores but also manages to render in aesthetic terms.”

“Hu’s films retain the carnality of punk and operate on a lower stratum of perception, like an obsessive bassline from a Joy Division song.”

— **Celluloid Liberation Front, *Cinema Scope***

TESTIMONIES FROM FILMMAKERS

Bela Tarr:

Dear Friends,
I'm deeply sorry I couldn't be at this screening with you and my "student", my friend, my nearest and dearest.
I'm writing this message from the same hotel where I met him...
Hundreds of Chinese filmmakers applied to work with me, but when I met him, I knew this was it.
Without any doubt!
He was full of dignity and amazing to work with.
His eyes showed an uncommonly strong personality.
Anyway, I don't want to talk about my feelings.
I just wanted to tell you that I met a person with a broad vision of the world. During our last meeting in Wuhan he showed me his cast and locations and gave me his book.
He wrote a dedication: "to my godfather".
Shit!
I feel guilty I couldn't protect him properly. It's a shame.
But how can one protect a person constantly surrounded by a storm?
He wrote books, scripts, plays...
Horrible...
Without end...
While working, however, he was very sensible and kind.
He listened to everybody and paid attention to detail.
He was constantly in a rush.
Maybe he knew he didn't have much time.
He burned his candle at both ends.
He wanted to have everything right now.
He couldn't accept the world and the world couldn't accept him.
Though we lost him, his movies will be with us forever.
Please welcome Hu Bo's film and love him like I do,
(From pre TIFF screening speech)

Gus Van Sant:

AN EXTRAORDINARY FILM!

Wang Bing:

Hu Bo's work, *An Elephant Sitting Still*, is A METEOR THAT HAS PASSED THROUGH THE DARK SKY and fell in heat and pain, like the artist himself. The film reflects the inner anxiety of most Chinese people suffering the process of new centralized system and the real-life scene that people betray and hurt each other. Although the night has arrived, people should embrace each other and release their love to resist worry and fear.

Lee Chang-dong:

An Elephant Sitting Still is the film that follows arrows that are off target to the end. It is the film that has unforgettable ending but never ends.

Hou Hsiao-hsien:

To be honest, I'm moved and shocked. It's really amazing!. He is doing better than when we were young.

Ang Lee:

In many instances, we are desperately working to shoot a film. We burn ourselves, put the whole vitality into the movie, maybe not to lighten the world, but to share our heart and soul with the audience. This work is a good illustration of how a creator puts his life in a film. That's extraordinarily moving. I'm glad that this year's Golden Horse Awards can invite it. (Speech from Golden Horse Best Picture awards)



CREDITS
Director: Hu Bo
Screenwriter: Hu Bo
Director of Photography: Fan Chao
Sound: Ren Yiming
Editor: Hu Bo
Composer: Hua Lun
Production Designer: Xie Lijia
Sound Designer: Bai Ruizhou

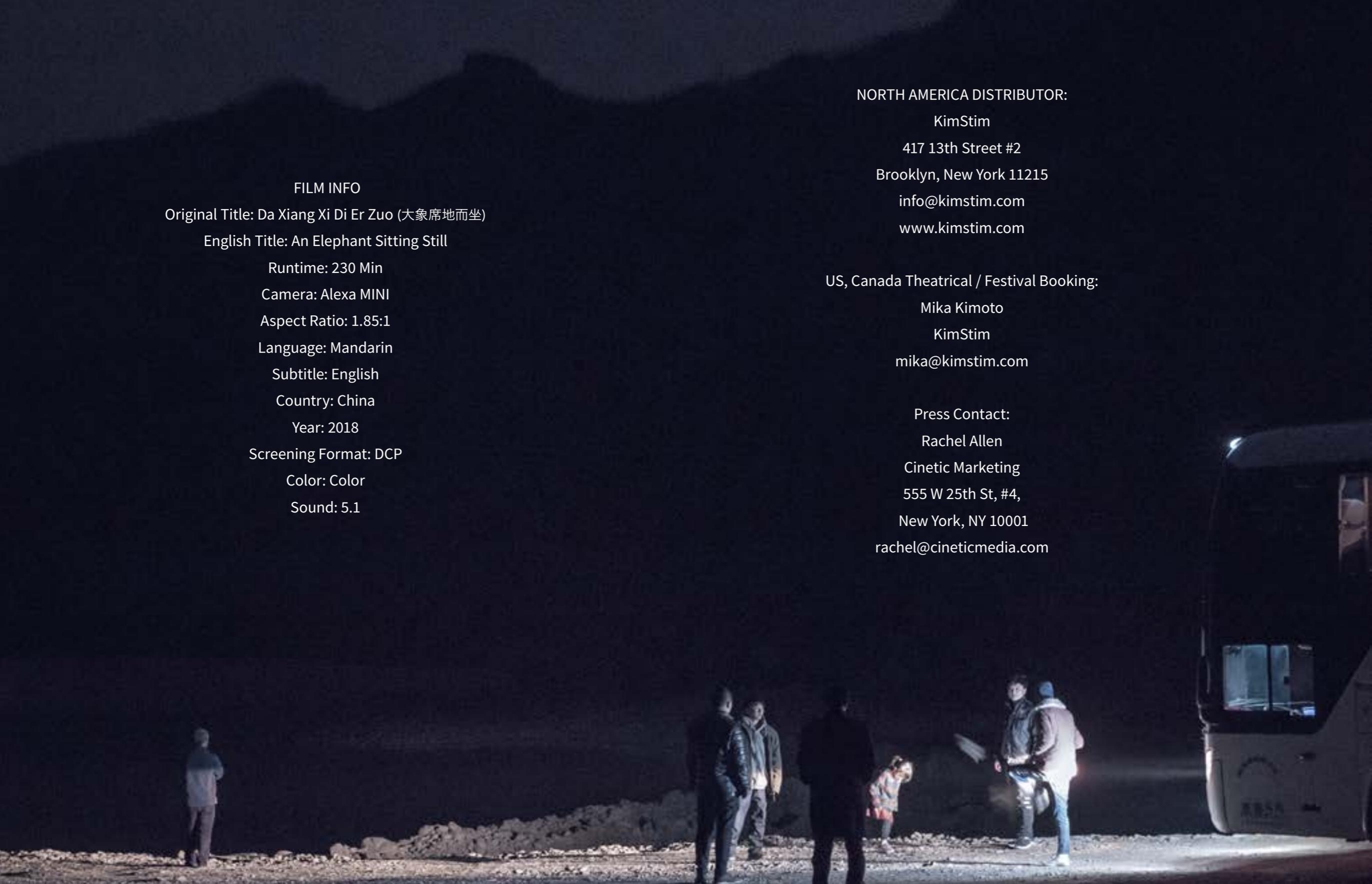
Starring:
ZHANG Yu As YU Cheng
PENG Yuchang As WEI Bu
WANG Yuwen As HUANG Ling
LIU Congxi As WANG Jin

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Hu Bo (Writer and Director) Born in 1988 in China, Hu Bo graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 2014 with a B.F.A. degree in directing. His short film *Distant Father* (2014) won Best Director at Golden Koala Chinese Film Festival, and *Night Runner* (2014) was selected by Taipei Golden Horse Film Academy. His debut feature *An Elephant Sitting Still*, which was then still in progress, was selected by the FIRST International Film Festival Financing Forum in 2016. In the following year, Hu Bo participated in FIRST Training Camp under the supervision of Béla Tarr, where he completed the short film *Man in the Well*. He has also written two novels *Huge Crack* and *Bullfrog*, both published in 2017.

Hu Bo took his own life soon after finishing *An Elephant Sitting Still*.





FILM INFO

Original Title: Da Xiang Xi Di Er Zuo (大象席地而坐)

English Title: An Elephant Sitting Still

Runtime: 230 Min

Camera: Alexa MINI

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1

Language: Mandarin

Subtitle: English

Country: China

Year: 2018

Screening Format: DCP

Color: Color

Sound: 5.1

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SELECTED FEESTIVALS AND AWARDS

Berlin International Film Festival : Berlin Best First Feature Award Special Mention, FIPRESCI Prize

Hong Kong International Film Festival : Audience Choice Prize

New Directors New Films, NY

Moscow International Film Festival

Sydney International Film Festival

Edinburgh Film Festival

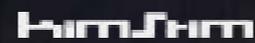
Kalvory International Film Festival

New Horizon International Film Festival

Locarno International Film Festival

Totonto International Film Festival

55 th Golden Horse Best Feature, Best Adapted Screen Play, Audience Choice Awards



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