

## ART OF FILMMAKING

## Capturing the pleasures and pratfalls of attraction

Hong Sang-soo, a South Korean director, avoids romantic conventions

BY NICOLAS RAPOLD

To premiere one film at Cannes is an honor. Being granted two slots in the lineup is a major distinction indeed.

But for the prolific South Korean director Hong Sang-soo, the two new films he is showing at the festival, “The Day After” and “Claire’s Camera,” do not even comprise his entire output in 2017. Earlier this year, Mr. Hong’s “On the Beach at Night Alone” was shown at the Berlin International Film Festival, where its lead actress won a prize.

This prodigious rate of creativity is normal for Mr. Hong, a chronicler of the human condition and the pleasures and pitfalls of attraction. Since his 1996 debut feature, “The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well,” the director, now 56, has averaged a film a year (and more recently, two), and most of them have won prizes at major festivals, including Cannes.

His two decades of disarmingly funny and honest storytelling most recently earned him a complete retrospective last year at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York.

“Nobody probes deeper into the ways that men and women misread each other’s feelings than Hong Sang-soo,” the critic and programmer Tony Rayns, an authority on Mr. Hong and Asian cinema, has written. “The Korean Woody Allen” is the way Thierry Frémaux, the director of the Cannes festival, referred to him.

Mr. Hong’s stories return to certain



URS FLUELLER/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

The Cannes veteran returns repeatedly to the entanglements of the heart in his films.

touchstones. A writer, a filmmaker, a student or some combination of these become romantically entangled. Drunken confessions and professional pratfalls invariably take place. Narratives are often retold from different perspectives, or ambiguously, as if they might be fantasies.

“Right Now, Wrong Then” observes a filmmaker taking up with a younger painter, then imagines that train of events unfolding with different results. In “Okja’s Movie,” Mr. Hong moves from the perspective of one character to the next in a prismatic collection of tales.

“I usually don’t worry about doing something new,” Mr. Hong wrote of his films, in an email from Seoul. “I’m anyway always different from yesterday, so I always react and collect and combine differently, however slightly.” His understatement belies the nimbleness and nuance that characterize these studies in romantic behavior.

In “The Day After,” which premieres in the competition at Cannes, a woman named Areum (Kim Min-hee) learns that her predecessor at work was having an affair with the boss, leading to complications for all.

Also being screened is “Claire’s Camera,” starring Isabelle Huppert as a mysterious music teacher with an uncanny knack for photography who helps another woman (Ms. Kim again) who has just been fired. Ms. Huppert worked with Mr. Hong once before, playing



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GERHARD JOREN/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

**Love Stories**  
The prolific filmmaker Hong Sang-soo has two movies at this year’s festival, “The Day After” and “Claire’s Camera,” at far left. At left, Mr. Hong in 2003 directing “Woman Is the Future of Man.”

three different roles in “In Another Country,” while Ms. Kim has become a fixture of his films.

Both features were produced in Mr. Hong’s customary run-and-gun manner. He avoids preparing a script in advance, preferring to start with only a basic treatment and then writing scenes during the shoot.

In South Korea, which has one of the world’s biggest film industries and is home to its own avid blockbuster culture, the indefatigable director has succeeded in making his movies his own way on budgets averaging little more than \$100,000. (For comparison of scale, Mr. Hong’s Korean compatriot at Cannes is Bong Joon-ho, whose film “Okja,” featuring Tilda Swinton and a computer-generated image of a creature, is a Netflix release.)

The production of “Claire’s Camera,”

which is a mere 69 minutes long, was especially resourceful. Mr. Hong shot for two weeks in Cannes during last year’s festival, when Ms. Huppert was in town to promote Paul Verhoeven’s “Elle” and Ms. Kim was there for Park Chan-wook’s “The Handmaiden.” (How did Mr. Hong get the project rolling with Ms. Huppert? “I called her,” he recounted, and said: “I’m interested in making a film in Cannes. Would you be interested?”)

The activity of the small production didn’t wholly escape notice, but that didn’t dampen Mr. Hong’s enjoyment of collaborating with the French star again.

“She is truly a great actress,” he said. “In the morning I give her the script, and she reads it and I might give her one or two suggestions or none. And when she starts playing the role, she is totally into the role, in a way that I like very

much.”

“The Day After,” starring Kwon Hae-hyo and Kim Sae-byek along with Ms. Kim, was shot in South Korea three months ago. In some ways, that production may have been more hectic for Mr. Hong than the fast-paced shooting schedule in Cannes. That is because in the past year, Mr. Hong has experienced the sort of complicated relationship drama that is characteristic of his films: Korean celebrity news reported assiduously on his separation from his wife and involvement with Ms. Kim.

“When I was shooting ‘The Day After’ on the streets in Seoul, I was harassed by paparazzi, but it was O.K.,” Mr. Hong said, glossing over the question of whether the media attention affected his creative flow.

He publicly acknowledged the romance at a Seoul news conference in

March to promote “On the Beach at Night Alone.” Critics at Berlin found it hard to miss echoes of Mr. Hong’s personal life in the film: It begins with an actress (played by Ms. Kim) hiding out after ending an affair with a married filmmaker.

Amid the frenzy of Cannes, however, the spotlight will fall directly onto the art and craft of Mr. Hong, a respected veteran of the festival. With “Claire’s Camera” and “The Day After,” he will have shown 10 films at Cannes (including the Directors’ Fortnight section).

It’s a difficult record for any filmmaker to match, as is his achievement of premiering three films at top-flight festivals in one year. The only man to top his productivity could be Mr. Hong himself, who confirms that he has “vague plans” to make another film in the fall.

It’s only May, after all.



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**Almost playing** From left, Julianne Moore stars in “Wonderstruck,” one of the most anticipated films at Cannes this year; Juliette Binoche in “Let the Sunshine In,” which debuts at Directors’ Fortnight; a scene from Karim Moussaoui’s “Until the Birds Return.”

## Familiar names and new faces at Cannes Film Festival

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The festival will also have its first full-fledged virtual reality entry in “Carne y Arena,” about the hardships of crossing the Mexican border with the United States, by the director Alejandro G. Iñárritu.

Television, already represented by the major players Netflix and Amazon, is another new wrinkle in this tradition-based festival. David Lynch’s much-anticipated “Twin Peaks” revival will be shown, as will Jane Campion’s and Ariel Kleiman’s “Top of the Lake: China Girl,” with Elisabeth Moss and the ubiquitous Ms. Kidman.

Last week, the festival announced a change in its rules in response to a controversy over streaming services and distribution. The new rule states that,

starting in 2018, “any film that wishes to compete in Competition at Cannes will have to commit itself to being distributed in French movie theaters.”

The festival’s lineup may give the impression that it is solely focused on famous names, but the 2017 edition embraces the opportunity to track filmmakers tackling new challenges: the New York filmmakers Josh A and Benny Safdie, with the Robert Pattinson robbery picture “Good Time”; Jacques Doillon, with his biographical picture “Rodin”; and Robin Campillo, with “120 BPM [Beats Per Minute],” a look at Act Up in the early 1990s. That list also includes filmmakers who stumbled somewhat with recent films, like Fatih Akin and Lynne Ramsay.

“The vocation of Cannes, or all major

festivals, is twofold: to honor great auteurs and make beautiful discoveries,” Mr. Frémaux said of the mix of filmmakers.

The Un Certain Regard section has typically been the platform where such discoveries are made, with selections from around the globe. Mr. Frémaux singled out Algeria (Karim Moussaoui’s “Until the Birds Return”) and Slovakia (György Kristof’s “Out”) as two rarely seen countries in the lineup, both with debut films eligible for the Caméra d’Or. Also featured will be the festival veterans Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Mathieu Amalric, Laurent Cantet, Sergio Castellitto, Michel Franco and Valeska Grisebach.

The festival is complemented by the vital selections of the Directors’ Fortnight, with additional movies in another

parallel program, Critics’ Week. The Fortnight features new films by Claire Denis, Philippe Garrel, Abel Ferrara, Bruno Dumont and Sean Baker. Critics’ Week includes a film by Felipe Barbosa and a dark comedy-drama by Atsuko Hirayanagi with two executive producers who are not usually mentioned at Cannes: Adam McKay and Will Ferrell.

“When I hear all the good things, I start doubting things — it’s too good to be true,” Ms. Hirayanagi said. “I think it’s Japanese of me.”

That trepidation is part of Cannes. It happens when the films have their debuts in front of the festival’s audiences, but it precedes the festival, as filmmakers rush to finish their films in time.

Ms. Denis’s “Let the Sunshine In” opens Directors’ Fortnight and stars Ju-

**Television revivals, streaming services and a virtual reality entry join the lineup in Cannes.**

liette Binoche, Gérard Depardieu and Alex Descas. The director remembered getting the welcome offer to open the Directors’ Fortnight before the film was actually complete.

“The Fortnight offer was sort of waving to us: Let’s meet, let’s be together, let’s come,” Ms. Denis said of the appeal of the deadline. “It was a possibility to experience happy fright.”

That could also describe the nervous excitement with which Cannes audiences await each film: hoping for greatness, not quite knowing what’s next.