

# 180°

## tiff. | Bell Lightbox

Programme Guide September–November 2010  
Films | Exhibitions | Special Events | Education

### Exclusive Engagements

- Cannes Palme d'or winner  
*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall  
His Past Lives*
- Xavier Dolan's  
*Les Amours imaginaires*
- Olivier Assayas' *Carlos*

### TIFF Cinematheque

- The Essential 100  
films of all time including:
- *Breathless*
  - *L'Avventura*
  - *The Third Man*
  - *Psycho*
  - *Chungking Express*
  - *Taxi Driver*

### Special Presentations

- *Essential Cinema* exhibition
- Guy Maddin's *Hauntings*
- DJ Spooky's *Rebirth of a Nation*  
and other live concerts
- Culture Days Free Screenings  
and Events



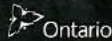
## Essential Cinema

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**ESSENTIAL  
CINEMA**

# WHAT IS ESSENTIAL CINEMA?

NOAH COWAN

**Cinema**, perhaps more than any other medium, has had much of its critical and scholarly history tied to list-making. A vast and often disreputable early output, coupled with the late arrival of intellectually respectable film critics, meant that some form of shorthand was required for the curatorial sorting and canon formation required of such an enormous body of work. The list remains just as crucial today, as our increasingly fragmented, decentralized media landscape provides constant access to innumerable simultaneous film-viewing experiences. Whether issuing from such august bodies as *Sight & Sound* (whose decennial top ten poll of critics, scholars and filmmakers commands near-Biblical reverence from many cinephiles) or any number of contemporary tastemakers multiplying as quickly as social media niche communities can generate them, lists remain a crucial tool of navigation. However provisional or even silly such lists can be, they nonetheless serve a powerful and necessary role as a collective act of remembering, helping to ward off those small cultural extinctions brought about by neglect, ignorance, and the film industry's perpetual preference for novelty over preservation.

To that end, for our first show at TIFF Bell Lightbox we sought to create our own list, one that would contribute to a collective, ongoing reflection on the history, culture and future of cinema and also reflect our own individual identity as a modern film organization. After much haggling over vocabulary, our panel of in-house experts—Piers Handling, Cameron Bailey, Steve Gravestock, Andréa Picard and myself—settled on a list of the “Essential 100” films, “essential” being defined as that murky, treacherous zone between “best” and “most influential.” By introducing an inescapably subjective word like “best,” we were able to push our experts into overtly personal territory—an implicit acknowledgment that great cinema should inspire a passion beyond the borders of conventional canonical thinking.

This made for lively debate and some unusual choices. In general, we argued through directors to individual films, and then later returned to great films made by less-revered filmmakers (*The Wizard*

*of Oz*) and films from genres rarely represented in such lists, from the avant-garde (*Wavelength*) to the martial arts (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). We would discuss the issue of a certain film's influence within cinema and/or upon the culture at large (*The Birth of a Nation*), then we would champion our favourites. Afterwards, we went back to check that we had not overlooked any major generic or stylistic developments, which led to re-votes for a few filmmakers. (Screwball comedy had somehow been overlooked, so Howard Hawks ended up being represented by *Bringing Up Baby* rather than *Red River*, for example). We then addressed the need for broad international representation, and sought to reserve some space for more contemporary work to stand alongside the familiar milestones. A final debate related to films from “outsider” genres and under-represented demographics: some felt that we had a disappointing allotment of documentaries, horror films and, most problematic of all, films directed by women. Many of us also felt that the absence of such categories as propaganda (the unavoidable *Triumph of the Will*) and pornography (*Behind the Green Door*, anyone?) omitted the tremendous cultural impact that these genres have had throughout the century-plus life of the medium. But the votes were clear: no porn, no Nazis.

To the final, necessarily imperfect but still impressively eclectic result of our debates we then added a second layer of voices: a large-scale public survey of our long-time audience and stakeholders, which elicited 2,000 replies that were then ranked by number of votes. This public list had some interesting characteristics. First, there was a remarkable overlap in the directors featured in the expert and survey lists, but not always the same films. Second, the survey tended towards a somewhat more conservative canon, featuring longstanding classics such as *Rashomon* and *The 400 Blows* which were not necessarily priorities for the experts. Yet at the same time, the survey reflected a passionate commitment to contemporary cinema, particularly to films that the Toronto International Film Festival had championed.

The fusion of these two lists, the expert and the public, produced an enticingly eccentric amalgam

of the popular and the scholarly, the cult and the clichéd, old and new. It became clear that the list reflected all of the multiple identities inherent in the respective yet fundamentally linked success of the Festival, TIFF Cinematheque, the Film Reference Library and Film Circuit. This is a list forged through diversity of experience, one that embraces various levels of accessibility and refuses to legislate a single, unilateral mode of film experience. To that end, the list of the Essential 100 has served as the foundation for a larger project of exhibitions, installations and live performances—which we have dubbed *Essential Cinema*—that seeks to explore the myriad ways in which cinema permeates both our individual lives and our communal visual, aural and experiential environment.

The list also anchors our continued commitment to viewing films in the manner they were intended: in a dark theatre, on the big screen. The situation for the continued appreciation of film via celluloid is rather dire these days, as cinemas the world over are making the transition from analogue to digital projection. TIFF is therefore undertaking a project to purchase prints of many of the films on the Essential 100 list and to support the creation of new prints for those titles in poor condition. TIFF Bell Lightbox will be an island where the magic of light moving through a transparent medium will be supported indefinitely in newly-built cinemas for this very purpose. The films one will see at TIFF Bell Lightbox will come from all corners of the earth courtesy of multiple curatorial voices, addressed to different audiences and evoking different passions.

The Essential 100 is our first proposition for this all-embracing, endlessly multi-faceted ideal of cinema that we hope to embody in TIFF Bell Lightbox, an open church of appreciation, discovery and preservation that offers numerous paths to the same shared goal. Our Essential 100 may not be yours, nor indeed is it intended to be—its aim is to continue that ceaseless, sometimes contentious and even controversial dialogue that has sustained the cinema as one of our most vital and valued art forms.

Noah Cowan is the Artistic Director of TIFF Bell Lightbox.

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## Eastern Promises

How cutting-edge Asian cinema redefined global film culture

NOAH COWAN

Much of my early career was devoted to cinema from East Asia. For a young film programmer in the late 1980s and 1990s, that's where the action was.

The Asian cinema that so energized and inspired me during this time is represented on the Essential 100 list by two films by Chinese directors: Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Dust in the Wind* and Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*. Two remarkable individuals used these films to teach me about the surprising fluidity of film criticism, the ability of the film business to open up new possibilities in our art form and the responsibilities and demands that come with a life in the movies.

Hou Hsiao-hsien is a towering figure in contemporary film. We could have chosen any of about ten of his films to be on this list. The late David Overbey, a legendary critic and programmer, championed *Dust in the Wind* above all other Hou films and used it as an instructional example of how to identify, write critically about and defend original talent early in my career. Seeing in Hou a direct lineage to the careful craft of Yasujiro Ozu (*Tokyo Story*), David was surprised on meeting Hou for the first time to learn that the young Taiwanese director had actually never seen any of Ozu's films. But David remained convinced that great directors

share certain aesthetic and narrative affinities, even when separated by geography, language, culture and sensibility. More than any other art form, the cinema—still a young and developing medium—defies linear models of influence. As I began sleuthing my way through the history of cinema, the tracing of these occasionally improbable connections brought added layers of meaning to every film I saw. (Hou, it turns out, watched *Tokyo Story* at David's urging; it has become his favourite film).

Even though many critics argue that Wong Kar-wai's previous film *Days of Being Wild* first introduced the Hong Kong auteur's iconic elliptical narratives and medium-stretching visual sense, *Chungking Express* made it sumptuous and sexy. The film's greatest champion was a former programmer-turned-sales agent named Wouter Barendrecht. A contemporary and a great friend, he leveraged the film into an enormous international success, ensuring the continuing distribution of cutting-edge Asian cinema in the global marketplace for years to come. He had an intelligence and sense of purpose around this film; he never spoke about it in the crypto-racist terms ("exotic and inscrutable!") so prevalent in the period. He insisted this was to be the new mainstream of cinema, or at least of global art cinema. His example and his success inspired me to champion challenging films from around the world during a decade-long foray in film distribution.

It seems odd to talk about a canonical list in personal terms. But great cinema has more than an educational function: it adheres to our memories and allows us to recall moments of great happiness with the people who changed our lives.

Noah Cowan is the Artistic Director of TIFF Bell Lightbox.

Chungking Express



"Great directors share certain aesthetic and narrative affinities, even when separated by geography, language, culture and sensibility. More than any other art form, the cinema—still a young and developing medium—defies linear models of influence."



**GHOST  
STORIES**

Guy Maddin's *Hauntings*

Winnipeg's *enfant terrible* unveils  
his spectral recreations of films lost or never made  
as part of *Essential Cinema*

*Hauntings I*: September 12–October 23

*Hauntings II*: September 9–19

Suzanne Pringle in Josef von Sternberg's  
unrealized *Woman of the Sea*

Udo Keir and Tattiawna Jones  
in Fritz Lang's unrealized *Lilith and Ly*



"I've been commissioned to spook up the joint a little bit," says Guy Maddin about the new exhibition he'll be presenting this fall at TIFF Bell Lightbox, a series of short film installations collectively known as *Hauntings*, inspired by lost or aborted works by well-known filmmakers. "They're films with no known final resting place," explains the director, whose own filmography includes a few titles that might convincingly pass for fortuitously unearthed relics. "They might have been burnt at a studio family picnic to clear shelf space, or disappeared due to sloppy shipping and receiving practices. It could have been bad storage, which produces bad chemical reactions in the nitrate stock. It might have just been carelessness. I mean, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* was discovered in 1980 in a janitor's closet at a mental hospital in Oslo."

"When you think of somebody who has lost a loved one," Maddin continues, "there is this terrible lack of closure until the body is found. I feel like these films are ghosts, abandoned or else buried in unconsecrated ground, doomed to roam the landscape of cinema history like restless spirits. I very much like the idea of them haunting a brand-new building. It's like ghostbusting in reverse."

The celluloid séance will be conducted in two parts, beginning during the 35th Toronto International Film Festival, when TIFF Bell Lightbox will literally make good on its name: some of Maddin's pieces, designated *Hauntings II*, will be projected outwards from a bay of windows on the north side of the building's fifth floor every night of the Festival, from September 9 to 19. The phantoms will be more securely contained in the main gallery together with the *Essential Cinema* exhibition, which runs from September 12 to October 23, where eleven projections dubbed *Hauntings I* will act as shadow companions to the Essential 100 showcase. The difference is that Maddin's roll call allows elbow room for outsiders. Here, the likes of Louis Chaudet and Oscar Micheaux rub shoulders with Fritz Lang and Kenji Mizoguchi, the ridiculous and the sublime united, first in frustration and then in resurrection. "I wanted to mix the canonical and the not-so-canonical together," explains the director. "Maybe it's sort of a fourth-dimensional canon. I'm on the outside of [the *Essential Cinema* exhibition], on what [TIFF Bell Lightbox Artistic Director] Noah Cowan calls 'the unconsecrated ground.' And I'm quite happy with the company that I'm keeping there."

Maddin is loath to say too much about the content of the films themselves, although will offer a few hints about some of the material he's working with. "I'm very excited about this lost aviation film by Mizoguchi called *Out of College*, and there's a Fritz Lang film called *Lilith and Ly*." There will also be at least one piece based not on a lost film but rather two posthumously intimate screen legends. "Bing Crosby and Bela Lugosi are buried side-by-side in Hollywood, and there's this enchanting woman who comes to the cemetery and just flings herself onto their graves, one after the other. I've got some footage of her, so I'll be cutting that in there. I wanted to include it because it really does feel haunted."

The director has a few other ideas as well involving local cinematic icons. "Perhaps I can convince Piers Handling to make a silhouette of himself bullwhipping some employees or something like that. All of these tortured ghosts working beneath the lash of Noah, Piers and Cameron Bailey. I haven't shot anything like that yet, but don't put it past me."

Adam Nayman is a film critic in Toronto for *Eye Weekly* and *Metro* and a contributor to *Cinema Scope*, *Cineaste* and *Reverse Shot Online*. He is also a frequent guest at TIFF's Reel Talk and a member of the programming committee for the Toronto Jewish Film Society.