



Dunya and Desie, directed by Dana Nechushtan.



E. Sha Age, directed by Waro Hsueh.



Half-Life, directed Jennifer Phang.



Heartcut, directed by Anne Sewitsky.



Katia's Sister, directed by Mijke de Jong.



Reflections, directed by Emanuela Ponzano.

Not your average chick flicks

Women Make Waves Film Festival focuses on the stories of women in contemporary transnational migrations

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

This year's Women Make Waves Film Festival (女性影展) focuses on contemporary migrants' search for home and identity and encompasses a wide range of fictional and non-fictional works, as well as a mini retrospective on African-American female director Julie Dash.

The festival has come a long way from its humble origins 16 years ago, but the recent economic downturn posed a challenge for this edition. Sponsorship decreased by NT\$1 million from last year, according to festival director Azed Yu (游婷歌).

Unlike the government-funded Taipei Film Festival (台北電影節) and Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (台北金馬國際影展), this annual showcase organized by the Taiwan Women's Film Association (台灣女性影像學會) faces financial uncertainty.

Money aside, the now well-established Women Make Waves Film Festival may need to delve deep within itself for new ideas if it wishes to draw interest from younger generations of festivalgoers and distinguish itself from the smorgasbord of Taiwanese film festivals.

"The establishment of Women Make Waves Film Festival is closely related to the rise of feminism and gender study in Taiwan. But what used to be influential social thought now seems to hardly be an issue. The times have changed," Yu said.

With a lineup of 60 films screened over 10 days, the event includes movies that examine various social issues. Among the most gripping is *Begging Naked*, an arresting documentary that took director Karen Gehres nine years to complete. The film, set primarily in Central Park, New York City, follows her friend Elise Hill's startling journey through heroin addiction, stripping, prostitution, self-made artistry and homeless paranoia.

In the festival's Women in Diaspora: Journeys Before Home section, *Katia's Sister* tells a poignant tale about 13-year-old Lucia and her all-female family of Russian immigrants in Amsterdam. With deliberate pacing, the hand-held camera follows the lonely teenager as she retreats more deeply into emotional isolation, helplessly watching the lives of her prostitute mother and stripper sister spiral inevitably downwards. Instead of preaching or indulging in its misery, the film imbues its bleak social portrait with warmth and compassion, encouraging viewers to understand rather than pass judgment.

Half-Life centers on a dysfunctional Asian-American family coping with life in a California suburban. Living with their mother



Begging Naked, directed by Karen Gehres.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WOMEN MAKE WAVES

and her much younger boyfriend, eight-year-old Timothy and older sister Pam deal with the anguish of growing up by escaping into fantasies.

The first feature-length film by an African-American woman director to receive a general theatrical release in the US, Dash's 1991 masterpiece, *Daughters of the Dust* tells the story of a Gullah family, composed of former African slaves and their descendants, who migrate from the Sea Islands to mainland US at the turn of the 20th century. Narrated through an unborn child, the film is imbued with a mythical aura, weaving together dreamlike imagery and songs to accentuate ancient African beliefs and traditions. Director Dash will attend the festival and hold lectures as well as question-and-answer sessions after screenings.

On the documentary side, director Sophie Bredier's *Looking for Asian Women* explore popular images of Asian women that have fascinated Western male audiences. In addressing this controversial issue, Bredier conducts interviews with French artists such as fetish photographer Romain Slocombe and graphic designer Jean-Paul Goude.

Anna, Seven Years on the Frontline is a profoundly affecting documentary about Anna Politkovskaya, the Russian journalist and human right activist known for her opposition to the Chechen conflict who was murdered in 2006. Politkovskaya's life story is told through the memories of her colleagues and friends and is interwoven with words from the journalist's own expressive reporting.

Women Make Waves will tour the country from Oct. 26 to Dec. 31.

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: The 16th Women Make Waves Film Festival 2009 (2009第十六屆女性影展)

WHEN: Today through Oct. 25

WHERE: Shin Kong Cineplex, Taipei City (台北新光影城), 4F and 5F, 36 Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路36號4-5樓)

ADMISSION: NT\$160 for weekday matinee screenings, NT\$200 for weekday evening and weekend screenings, available through NTCH ticket outlets or at www.artsticket.com.tw

ON THE NET: www.wmw.com.tw

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS



Ghosted

In a week with three film festivals, eight new features and three DVD promotional releases, the only film with a Taiwanese connection among them might struggle to compete. This German/Taiwanese co-production is directed by Monika Treut, who returns to Taiwanese themes once more after shooting documentaries on a local schoolgirl in 2005 and three notable women the year before. In *Ghosted*, a Taiwanese journalist (Hu Ting-ting, 胡婷婷, daughter of Taichung Mayor Jason Hu, 胡志強) looks into the death of a Taiwanese woman in Germany and hooks up with a German woman who knew her to find out what happened. There are ghosts and sexual attraction involved, but that hasn't stopped the film from attracting terrible reviews.



A Perfect Getaway

Get away from it all with this ironically titled eye-candy-filled suspense film set in Hawaii. A couple (Milla Jovovich and Steve Zahn) hike out into the wilderness and meet two other couples in the process. Eventually the six join forces after it's revealed that a homicidal couple is loose — and possibly among their number. Any film that keeps critics guessing is probably worth a ticket, but in this case a good sense of humor seals the deal.



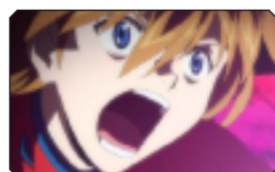
The Informant!

Matt Damon plays real-life executive Mark Whitacre, whose bizarre role of self-aggrandizer while acting as an FBI informant makes for a juicy if platonic comedy from director Steven Soderbergh. Damon volunteers information to FBI agents about a price-fixing conspiracy that sends him on a jetsetting journey looking for incriminating evidence, but that's not the half of it. Soderbergh's *Che* films look positively experimental compared with this one, yet even this has elements that many moviegoers will not have seen before. If Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* fails to secure a release in Taiwan, this jaundiced view of corporate America will do just as well.



Skate or Die

Two kids who spend most of their time skateboarding are witnesses to a murder and suddenly find that their acrobatic skills will prove useful if they are to avoid the same fate. A French film with little fanfare and even less critical support, this might be diverting enough for Francophiles and skateboard enthusiasts. But it is the kind of film in which a cellphone goes off at exactly the wrong time.



Evangelion 2.0 - You Can (Not) Advance

The second in the rebooted, theatrical version of Japan's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* phenomenon continues the saga of a gaggle of traumatized warrior teens, their nifty biomechanical vehicles and a range of lethal machines from outer space known as Angels that would destroy all humanity. Warning: This film punishes impatient viewers who walk out the moment the credits roll.



Les Destinées

Director Olivier Assayas adds to his impressive CV with an epic — but not bloated — story of how a romantic relationship starts, changes and endures over several decades in early 20th century France. Righteous Protestant minister Jean (Charles Berling) leaves his wife (Isabelle Huppert) after suspecting her of being unfaithful and hooks up instead with admirer Pauline (Emmanuelle Béart), whom he marries. After some time he is forced back into the family business, which offers significant existential challenges. With this cast and director you can't go wrong, even if it is a lengthy journey. Based on the book *Les Destinées Sentimentales*, which is the French title for the film.



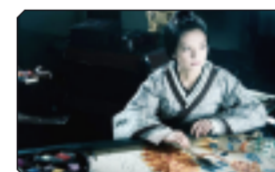
Goemon

Yosuke Eguchi stars as the titular character in this period piece/action romp. He's a thief who attracts the attention of some very powerful officials in 16th century Japan when he steals a precious box that contains a valuable secret. This mixture of classic feudal intrigue, melodrama and high-impact combat has been praised for its visual innovation but not for its ability to engage with anything more substantial, which might make this Japan's answer to Zack Snyder's *300*.



More Than a Game

Anyone who suffered through the Taiwanese basketball doco *Attitude* (態度) could be forgiven for wanting to steer clear of basketball flicks — no matter where they're from. But this documentary from the US about LeBron James' famed high school team might make you think twice. Full of action, personality and real personalities, this pulled some good reviews in its limited theatrical release last year, though the *Village Voice* did warn of fact sanitizing by Nike and LeBron's PR team. Still, there's more to this show than LeBron.



Shanghai Film Festival

The Spot theater, in conjunction with the Taipei City Government, is matching the mood of all things detente with this mini-festival of films under the misleading title of "Shanghai" — the selection has nothing to do with the city, and is more a mish-mash of six films of various themes and vintages, including two animated films. Screens from today until Monday, so get in quick.



Zandalee

No, this is not a remake of the Nicolas Cage potboiler about lust and infidelity in the Deep South — it's the 1991 original, enjoying a brief DVD promotional release amid a more liberal censorship regime. So now's your chance to see a much younger Cage and Judge Reinhold (*Beverly Hills Cop*) spar over Reinhold's smoldering and frequently naked wife Zandalee (Erika Anderson, who hasn't made a film in the last decade). Real movie buffs will jump at the chance, however, to watch Joe Pantoliano (*The Matrix*) as a gay confidant. Steve Buscemi and Marisa Tomei also star in this flick, which never made it to US theaters.



Honor

The co-director of the Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle *Kickboxer* offers up another slice of hand-to-hand combat in this feature from 2006, also a DVD promotional release. Eclectic fighting styles are at the fore as a series of real-life wrestlers (Roddy Piper, for example) and other fighters portray badass Los Angeles thugs and war vets looking for or eschewing criminal glory. Notable for starring Joanna Pacula, who seems to have largely gone under the radar — but who has worked consistently — since coming to fame in 1983's *Gorky Park*. Starts tomorrow.



Sema, The Warrior of Ayodhya

Another film focusing on combat, this time from Thailand, *Sema* tells the tale of a humble rural lad who becomes a soldier and romances a woman betrothed to a powerful rival, triggering jealousy and many fight scenes. Released in 2003, this is the third DVD promotional release of the week. Low-budget, but there's enough fight scenes and melodrama to impress uncritical fans.