

STRAY DOGS by TSAI MING-LIANG

VENICE 2013 (IN COMPETITION)

SELECTED QUOTES

A soaring masterpiece, a huge and complex work of art, and one for the ages.
Neil Young, INDIEWIRE

Venice gets its first bona fide masterpiece in the latest film from Taiwan's Tsai Ming-liang. (...) With Tsai Ming-liang's Stray Dogs, it takes no less than three shots and maybe two edits before you know – for absolute certain – that you're in the close company of a master filmmaker, a man who is in complete control of every detail of every frame he films. (...) Lee Kang-sheng's sad-eyed performance here is canon-worthy, the burning human force which complements Tsai's extraordinary long takes. (...) Technically, it defies belief. (...)

Every shot in this film instantly etches itself on the memory, but you'll have to find a special place for the last three which are some of the most extraordinary ever committed to film.

David Jenkins, LITTLE WHITE LIES

If Stray Dogs really is the last movie of Tsai Ming-Liang, then it would be one of the harshest losses of modern cinema, but at the same time one of the most powerful retirements in the history of the medium. In his latest effort, the Taiwan-based director explores the power of the cinematic image to its core. (...) Tsai Ming-Liang is not a director of the surface. He goes way deeper. There is the famous statement by Pablo Picasso, that if you have a look at something for a few minutes it gets boring but if you keep on looking, it gets interesting again. The same is true for the beautiful composed shots of Stray Dogs. (...) Flawless composition and a marvelous interplay of sound and image show the rare talent of the filmmaker. Every new shot (though there are only few) is important and transfers an emotion. (...) Tsai Ming-Liang has made a movie that reflects on life and cinema at the same time. Just like the rain in the movie, the film attacks you, isolates you, and cleans you up to a point where one can feel the purity of a stray dog that just needs someone to give him food, or in the case of the audience, a picture.

Patrick Holzapfel, TWITCH

One of the standout latterly-shown films here. (...) What's superb here is the striking of that balance. Dramatic images and startling compositions abound as much for their own sake as for their storytelling efficacy. (...) Unforgettably vivid.

Nick James, SIGHT & SOUND

If this is Tsai's last film, he's leaving cinema better than he found it.
Jake Cole, FILM.COM

One of the most distinctive and beguiling films of the festival. (...) Every shot feels perfectly composed, while often surprising, and every time Tsai makes a cut, you can't see how it could have been done any other way. While their sheer duration might test some's patience, the cabbage scene proves to be a wryly funny highlight of the film, and while the penultimate scene does seem to go forever, when the payoff comes, it turns out to be deeply, deeply moving, and so much of that is about the amount of time the set-up took. So the filmmaking here is almost impossibly well-realized, right down to the evocative sound design, adding up to an fairly unforgettable experience. (...)

A film that anyone who's serious about cinema needs to make the time to see.

Oliver Lyttelton, THE PLAYLIST

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A resonant film (...) Promises to make it onto at least a couple of critical years' best lists.

Lee Marshall, SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

By turns sad, bleakly funny and absolutely terrifying, and in a meticulously calibrated performance, Lee makes us feel all three in our bones. (...) The detailed ambient sound anchors you in the reality of every scene even as Tsai's painterly compositions force you to consider them from a distance. Every shot of Stray Dogs has been built with utter formal mastery; every sequence exerts an almost telepathic grip. This film could have been beamed to Venice from another planet.

Robbie Collins, THE TELEGRAPH

Stray Dogs is not some impenetrable endurance test. (...) Looking beyond its epic long takes, Tsai's latest is small and human and primal—a howl from the gutter, and a survival story about life on the fringe. (...)

The full force of its compassion bowled me over. It's a fiercely humanistic movie.

A.A. Dowd, A.V. CLUB

Astonishing (...) Perhaps my favorite movie of the festival. (...)

As with his previous films, Tsai shoots in long takes from a fixed camera position—though he makes one startling exception here—and it's always a pleasure just to live in those frames for a while. We become so accustomed to scenes cut to hash that it's a relief to spend time contemplating each shot and puzzling over what Tsai is showing us and why.

Scott Tobias, THE DISSOLVE

If this, truly, is his send-off, Stray Dogs is a finish for the history books.

Nick Newman, THE FILM STAGE

A masterpiece (...)

Remarkably affecting images.

Andrew Schenker, SLANT MAGAZINE

The film's achievement is that its rigorous formal structure – including a few almost impossibly elongated takes – heightens rather than flattens the emotional content. Don't mistake Mr. Tsai's spartan style for minimalism; there's more cinematic savvy in any one of his ingeniously arranged frames than you'll find in the whole of most other movies.

Adam Nayman, THE GLOBE AND MAIL

One of the most refined and most radical films ever made by this master of Taiwanese Cinema. (...) Once you get submerged by the hypnotic beauty of the images and the amazing precision of the sound, the cinematographic experience starts to make all sense. (...) Tsai MingLiang choses to film human distress to finally transcend it into a true piece of art. When the last shot arrives, time - maybe for the first time in the history of cinema - stands still.

Franck Nouchi, LE MONDE

The most flamboyant, most confident, most masterful, purest and most hypnotic film of the festival is Stray Dogs by Tsai Ming-Liang.

Michèle Levieux, L'HUMANITÉ