



## Media Release

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# Australian Academy opens arms to Asian region with AACTA Award for Best Asian Film

The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) today announced the launch of the **Asia International Engagement Program** at a star-studded event in Shanghai, China. The foundation of which will be the introduction of the **AACTA Award for Best Asian Film**, recognising excellence in filmmaking throughout the Asian region.

AFI and AACTA Award-winning actors **Sam Neill** (HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE, THE DAUGHTER, JURASSIC PARK, SWEET COUNTRY) and **Rachel Griffiths** (HACKSAW RIDGE, SAVING MR BANKS, and director of upcoming Michelle Payne biopic RIDE LIKE A GIRL) announced the Program in China at a special event as part of Shanghai International Film Festival. Among those who joined Neill and Griffiths at the exclusive event were: AACTA Best Asian Film Grand Jury member and Golden Rooster Award-winning Chinese director, screenwriter and producer **Lu Chuan**; Chinese actor **William Feng**; DNSW Regional Manager China **Nathan Pei**; and Australian Consul General in Shanghai, **Graeme Meehan**.

The AACTA Asia International Engagement Program aims to foster the burgeoning relationship between the film industries of Australia and its closest Asian neighbours. The Program will not only champion the skills and achievements of Asian filmmakers to audiences and industry in Australia, but will also promote Australia's highly skilled screen practitioners to the booming industries of Asia, developing meaningful pathways for collaborations between Australia and the Asian region.

The inaugural AACTA Award for Best Asian Film, the cornerstone of the Program, reflects the popularity and importance of Asian films in Australia. The growing Chinese and Indian diaspora have had a substantial impact on Australian box office and cinema trends, and films from these thriving filmmaking nations, along with those from the esteemed industries of South Korea, Japan and 15 other countries in the region, will now be honoured and celebrated, alongside Australia's best and brightest, to an increasingly diverse Australian audience. The Best Asian Film Award, presented at the 2017 AACTA Awards Ceremony presented by Foxtel on Wednesday 6 December 2017 at The Star Event Centre in Sydney, will acknowledge the finest Asian films of the last 12 months.

"As the Asian screen industry continues to grow and the traditional borders to content distribution are breaking down, audiences across the world are discovering what other regions have to offer," said **AFI | AACTA CEO Damian Trehwella**. "There is strong audience demand for Asian cinema in Australia and an increase in co-productions between Western and Asian filmmakers. Our Program seeks to bring the best and the brightest from both regions to new audiences."

A Grand Jury of highly regarded film industry leaders from around the world will determine the recipient of the Best Asian Film Award. Oscar® and multiple AFI | AACTA Award-winning Actor **Russell Crowe** (THE MUMMY, GLADIATOR, LES MISERABLES, THE WATER DIVINER) will act as the President of the Best Asian Film Grand Jury.

Crowe will be joined a panel of eight jurors, including: Chinese director, screenwriter and producer **Lu Chuan** (BORN IN CHINA, CHRONICLES OF THE GHOSTLY TRIBE); acclaimed South Korean writer, director and producer **Kim Ki-Duk** (SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN, WINTER...AND SPRING, 3-IRON, PIETA); five-time National Film Award of India Best Actress winner **Shabana Azmi** (NEERJA, THE

BLACK PRINCE, ARTH); Golden Rooster Award-winning Chinese actor **Ye Liu** (THE FOLIAGE, DARK MATTER, BLOOD BROTHERS); Oscar®-nominated producer **Gary Kurtz** (THE DARK CRYSTAL, STAR WARS: EPISODE V – THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV – A NEW HOPE); British producer and distributor of Japanese and South Korean films, and Managing Director of Third Window Films **Adam Torel** (THE LAND OF HOPE, LOWLIFE LOVE); Australian film critic, producer and presenter **Margaret Pomeranz AM** (THE MOVIE SHOW, AT THE MOVIES); and prolific Indian actor **Anupam Kher** (SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM, A WEDNESDAY!).

AACTA will also develop a range of film forums in Australia and regionally as part of the Asia International Engagement Program. These forums present a significant opportunity to share knowledge and foster cultural understanding, allowing for greater harmony and engagement between the Australian and Asian screen industries and audiences, including the continually-evolving diaspora of Asian communities living in Australia and becoming active in our local industry.

The Asia International Engagement Program is being undertaken by AACTA in partnership with PR Asia. “As the achievements and potential of Asian media industries continue to grow and evolve, PR Asia is extremely proud to be partnering with the Australian Academy on the new AACTA Asia International Engagement Program,” said **Co-Founder and Vice President of PR Asia Amy Xu**.

Further information on the Asia International Engagement Program, the AACTA Award for Best Asian Film and the Best Asian Film Grand Jury can be found at <http://www.aacta.org/the-awards/asia-international-engagement-program.aspx>.

**The AACTA Awards are proudly supported by the New South Wales Government through its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.**

**– ENDS –**

## **ABOUT AFI | AACTA**

Formerly the Australian Film Institute (AFI), the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) has been honouring and celebrating excellence in Australian film and television since 1958, when the first ever film excellence Awards were held. The AACTA Awards are Australia’s highest screen accolades and are considered the Australian equivalent of the Oscars and the BAFTAs.

Some of the biggest names in Australian and international screen have been awarded by AFI | AACTA, including Geoffrey Rush (AACTA President), Cate Blanchett (AFI | AACTA Ambassador), Dr George Miller (AFI Patron), Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe, to name a few. The AACTA Awards are celebrated annually in Sydney, home of the AACTA Awards.

## **GRAND JURY BIOGRAPHIES**

Please find the biographies of Russell Crowe, Kim Ki-Duk, Shabana Azmi, Ye Liu, Lu Chuan, Gary Kurtz, Adam Torel, Margaret Pomeranz and Anupam Kher on the following pages.

## **ABOUT PR ASIA**

PR Asia is a dynamic full service PR, media production and financing operation, based in Melbourne, Sydney and Beijing. With deep reach into film and television markets globally, the company is developing several co-productions between Australia and China for international audiences using its network of capital combined with production and distribution ability. With a full slate of projects and discussions with USA studios, plus combined management team with considerable experience, the combined PR Asia subsidiary companies can work with film markets to finance, produce and distribute.

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## – GRAND JURY BIOGRAPHIES –

### RUSSELL CROWE

**Russell Crowe** is an Oscar® winner who is regarded as one of the finest actors of our time. Crowe's many acting honors include three consecutive Best Actor Oscar® nominations: for his work in the acclaimed 1999 drama **THE INSIDER**; the 2000 Best Picture winner, **GLADIATOR**, for which he took home the Oscar®; and 2001's Best Picture, **A BEAUTIFUL MIND**.

In addition to the Oscar®, Crowe's performance as Maximus in **Ridley Scott's GLADIATOR** earned him Best Actor honors from several critics' organizations, including the Broadcast Film Critics and London Film Critics Circle. He also received Golden Globe, BAFTA Award and Screen Actors Guild Award® nominations.

The year prior, Crowe had gained his first Oscar® nomination for his portrayal of tobacco company whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand in **Michael Mann's THE INSIDER**. He was also named Best Actor by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, Broadcast Film Critics Association, National Society of Film Critics and National Board of Review, and garnered Golden Globe, BAFTA Award and SAG Award® nominations.

Crowe's masterful portrayal of Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash Jr. in Ron Howard's **A BEAUTIFUL MIND** brought him his third Oscar® nomination, as well as his third consecutive Critics' Choice Award from the Broadcast Film Critics Association. He also won Golden Globe, BAFTA and SAG® Awards, and several other critics groups' Best Actor Awards.

Reuniting with Howard in 2005, Crowe earned Golden Globe and SAG Award® nominations, and won an Australian Film Institute (AFI) Award, for his portrayal of Jim Braddock in **CINDERELLA MAN**.

In 2015, Crowe made his directorial debut on the sweeping epic **THE WATER DIVINER**, in which he also starred. The film won three AACTA Awards, including Best Picture.

Born in New Zealand, Crowe was raised in Australia, where he was first honored for his work on the big screen and began gaining international attention. He was recognized for three consecutive years by the AFI, starting in 1990, when he was nominated for Best Actor for **THE CROSSING**. In 1991, he won the AFI Award for Best Supporting Actor Award for **PROOF**. The following year, he received Best Actor Awards from the AFI and the Australian Film Critics for his performance in **ROMPER STOMPER**. Additionally, the 1993 Seattle International Film Festival named him Best Actor for his work in both **ROMPER STOMPER** and **HAMMERS OVER THE ANVIL**.

Crowe made his American film debut in 1995 in **Sam Raimi's** Western **THE QUICK AND THE DEAD**. He went on to earn acclaim for his role in **Curtis Hanson's** crime drama **LA CONFIDENTIAL**.

He has since starred in a long and diverse list of films, including the **Ridley Scott**-directed projects **A GOOD YEAR**, **AMERICAN GANGSTER**, **BODY OF LIES** and **ROBIN HOOD**. Among his other credits are **MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD**, for which Crowe earned a Golden Globe nomination; **THE NICE GUYS**; **PROOF OF LIFE**; **3:10 TO YUMA**; **STATE OF PLAY**; **THE NEXT THREE DAYS**; **THE MAN WITH THE IRON FISTS**; **NOAH**; **FATHERS & DAUGHTER'S**; **WINTER'S TALE**; **MAN OF STEEL**; **LES MISERABLES**; and **BROKEN CITY**. He will next be seen in Universal's modern day reboot, **THE MUMMY**, alongside **Tom Cruise**.

## SHABANA AZMI

**Shabana Azmi** is an internationally renowned Indian film actress who has more than 140 films to her credit. Her performances have earned her praise and a reputation as one of the finest actresses in India. Filmmaker **Satyajit Ray** said of her, that “she is the finest dramatic actress in the country”.

Shabana has received multiple accolades, including a record of National Film Awards of India Best Actress Awards. She has also received five Filmfare Awards and was awarded the fourth highest civilian honour of India in 1988 when the Government of India awarded her with the Padma Shri.

Some of her notable films are: **Shyam Benegal's ANKUR** (1974), **SUSMAN** (1986) and **ANTAMAAD** (1992); **ARTH** (1982); Venice Film Festival Golden Lion nominated film **PAAR** (1984); Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or nominated film **Genesis** (1986); **John Schlesinger's MADAME SOUSATZKA** (1988); **Roland Joffe's CITY OF JOY** (1992); **FIRE** (1996); **Deepa Mehta's GODMOTHER** (1999) and **MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN** (2012); and **NEERJA** (2016).

Shabana believes that art should be used as an instrument for social change, and is a respected social activist who works for the rights of women and slumdwellers as well as a former Member of India's Parliament.

## ANUPAM KHER

**Anupam Kher** is one of India's most renowned actors, appearing in over 500 films during his 35 year career, as well as many plays.

Kher studied at the National School of Drama, graduating with a Gold Medal in Acting, before beginning his illustrious career with Award-winning roles in films such as **SAARANSH** (1984) and **DADDY** (1989).

He continued to receive critical and audience acclaim for his acting, with roles in blockbuster films including **KARMA** (1986), **LAMHE** (1991), **DILWALE DULHANIYA LE JAYENGE** (1995), **MAINE GANDHI KO NAHI MARA** (2005), **HUM AAPKE HAI KAUN** (1999), **KHOSLA KA GHOSLA** (2006), **A WEDNESDAY** (2008), **SPECIAL 26** (2013), **BABY** (2015), **PREM RATAN DHAN PAYO** (2015) and **M.S. DHONI – THE UNTOLD STORY** (2016).

He has also appeared in acclaimed international films including Golden Globe nominated **BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM** (2002), **Ang Lee's** Golden Lion Award-winning **LUST, CAUTION** (2007), **Woody Allen's YOU WILL MEET A TALL DARK STRANGER** and **David O. Russell's** Oscar-winning **SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK** (2013) alongside Oscar winning actors **Jennifer Lawrence** and **Robert De Niro**.

Since 2015, Kher has featured in the Emmy-nominated television series **SENSE8**. Kher currently has three Hollywood film releases lined up for 2017: Australian and American co-production **HOTEL MUMBAI**, **THE BIG SICK** and **HEADHUNTERS CALLING**.

Kher has received a record eight Filmfare Awards, winning the Award for Best Performance in a Comic Role five times. The Government of India has also honoured him with the Padma Shri and Padma Chushan Awards in 2004 and 2016 respectively for his contribution to the field of cinema and arts.

In 2005, Kher established Actor Prepares, an Indian acting school, of which he is currently the Chairman.

Outside of acting, Kher has been the Chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification and the National School of Drama in India, and was a UN Ambassador for the HeForShe campaign in 2015. In 2008, Kher established the Anupam Kher Foundation to spread education to less privileged children, and was awarded the Dalai Lama Award for his work with underprivileged children.

## KIM KI-DUK

**Kim Ki-duk** is a South Korean writer, director and producer. His films have received numerous accolades in the international festival circuit, earning him a reputation as one of the most important contemporary Asian film directors.

Kim studied fine arts in Paris from 1990-1992. In 1993, after returning to South Korea, he won the award for Best Screenplay from the Educational Institute of Screenwriting for **A PAINTER AND A CRIMINAL CONDEMNED TO DEATH**. He went on to receive two more screenplay awards before making his directorial debut with **CROCODILE** (1996). He has gone on to direct over 20 films, including: **WILD ANIMALS** (1997); **BIRDCAGE INN** (1998); **REAL FICTION** (2000); **THE ISLE** (2000), which was selected to screen at the Toronto International Film Festival; and his most widely known feature, **SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER...AND SPRING** (2003), which was included in film critic Roger Ebert's *Great Movies* and served as the official South Korean entry for the Oscars® Best Foreign Language Film.

In 2004, Kim received the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin International Film Festival for **SAMARIA**. The same year Kim also received the Silver Lion for Best Director at the Venice International Film Festival for **3-IRON**.

Kim's documentary **ARIRANG** (2011) received the Best Film Award in the Un Certain Regard category at the Cannes Film Festival. The following year, his film **PIETA** received the Golden Lion Award at the Venice International Film Festival – the first Korean film to receive a Best Film honour at any of the top three international film festivals (Venice, Berlin and Cannes). **PIETA** was also the official South Korean Best Foreign Language Film entry for the 85th Oscars®.

## GARY KURTZ

**Gary Kurtz**, the award winning producer of many films including **AMERICAN GRAFFITI**, **STAR WARS**, **THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK**, and **THE DARK CRYSTAL**, has been active in all areas of the film and television industries for the last fifty years. Recently he has spent time working with film students and young filmmakers in several countries around the world.

He is currently producing the World War Two drama **NIGHT WITCHES**, which will be filmed in Europe in 2018. He is also developing several projects for Unanico Entertainment, including an animated feature **OZI** with a Chinese co-production partner, to be filmed in 2018 and 2019.

## LU CHUAN

**Lu Chuan** is a Chinese director, screenwriter, and producer. He graduated from the Nanjing People's Liberation Army Institute of International Relations and the Directing Program at Beijing Film Academy.

In 1999, Lu wrote the popular political drama **BLACK HOLE**, a thirty-episode series that brought him widespread recognition. He followed that with his directorial debut, **THE MISSING GUN** (2002), which he also wrote. The Taiwanese Government Information Office selected the screenplay as one of the year's ten outstanding Chinese-language scripts. It was presented at the Venice International Film Festival and garnered Lu numerous domestic and international awards.

Lu's next film was **KEKEXILI: MOUNTAIN PATROL** (2004), which he wrote and directed. The film domestically received various official film prizes such as the Huabiao Film Award and internationally received the Special Jury Prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

His controversial film about the Nanjing Massacre, **CITY OF LIFE AND DEATH** (2009), took home numerous international awards including the Golden Seashell at the 57th San Sebastian International Film Festival, Best Director at the 3rd Asia-Pacific Screen Awards, and Best Director at the 4th Asian Film Awards.

In 2012, Lu's film **THE LAST SUPPER** once again prompted intense debate among critics and audience and was one of the five nominees for the Grand Prize at the 7th Asian Film Awards.

In 2015, Lu Chuan wrote and directed the 3D VFX fantasy adventure blockbuster **CHRONICLES OF THE GHOSTLY TRIBE**, which premiered in China to a box office of \$107 million USD. The film's impressive visual effects set a new standard for CGI in Chinese film and filled the void for Chinese-language, live-action monster films. It was hailed in the media as "China's answer to the Hollywood blockbuster" and "the new breakthrough in producing Chinese commercial genre films." At the same time, it took home the Best Director and Golden Angel awards at the 2015 Chinese American Film Festival, the Best Director and Special Jury Prize awards at the 49th Houston International Film Festival, and Best Director at the first-ever Global Chinese-Language Sci-fi Nebula Awards.

In 2016, Lu Chuan directed the Disney-natural produced wild animal themed movie, **BORN IN CHINA**. The film broke the domestic natural film box office's record in China, and on 21 April 2017 was released in North America. As on June 2017, the film has made \$13.75 million in North America and \$23.84 million globally.

## MARGARET POMERANZ

**Margaret Pomeranz AM**, began her career in film and television as a screenwriter in the 1970s after attending the Playwrights' Studio at NIDA.

She joined the nascent SBS in 1980 as a producer/writer which is where her official involvement with the AFI began when she co-produced the broadcast of the AFI Awards for the network.

She shared a long-term screen partnership with **David Stratton**, firstly on SBS's **THE MOVIE SHOW** and then on ABC's **AT THE MOVIES**. She has been President of the Australian Film Critics Circle and both President and Vice-President of Watch on Censorship and a member of the Australian Advertising Standards Board.

She is currently presenting on Foxtel Movies Masterpiece channel for her program **MARGARET POMERANZ PRESENTS** and as co-host of **SCREEN**, a weekly program on the Foxtel Arts channel with Graeme Blundell.

## ADAM TOREL

Based in Japan, **Adam Torel** is a British producer and distributor of Japanese and South Korean films. Torel founded independent distribution company Third Window Films in 2005 which has since released around 90 films in the UK, often working with directors such as **Sion Sono**, **Lee Chang-Dong**, **Shinya Tsukamoto**, **Miki Satoshi** and Venice Film Festival Golden Lion Award-winner **Takeshi Kitano**.

In 2012, Third Window Films launched a production arm, and have since produced **Sion Sono's THE LAND OF HOPE**, **Yosuke Fujita's FUKUCHAN OF FUKUFUKU FLATS** and two films from **Eiji Uchida**, **LOWLIFE LOVE** and **LOVE AND OTHER CULTS**.

## YE LIU

**Ye Liu** is a Golden Rooster Award-winning Chinese actor who has appeared in over 45 productions.

Liu received his first Golden Rooster nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his first prominent role in **POSTMEN IN THE MOUNTAINS** (1999). Shortly after graduating from the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, Liu won Best Actor at the Golden Horse Awards for his performance in **LAN YU** (2001). Three years later he won the Golden Rooster Award for Best Actor for **THE FOLIAGE** (2003).

In addition to his Award winning roles, many of Liu's films have received critical acclaim at international film festivals including Golden Globe nominated **BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS** (2002), the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or nominated film **PURPLE BUTTERFLY** (2003) and Venice Film Festival Golden Lion nominated film **THE FLOATING LANDSCAPE** (2003).

Liu starred alongside **Meryl Streep** in his first Hollywood film **DARK MATTER**, based on the 1991 University of Iowa shooting. **DARK MATTER** was released in the United States in April 2008 and won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival.

Liu has not only earned the love of audiences and critics, but has also received praised from leading directors and producers for his remarkable acting skills, including BAFTA and Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or winning director **Chen Kaige** (**THE PROMISE**, 2005), BAFTA Award-winning director **Zhang Yimou** (**CURSE OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER**, 2006) and Venice Film Festival Golden Lion Career prize recipient **John Woo** (**BLOOD BROTHERS**, 2007).

Some of his more recent credits include: **POLICE STORY: LOCKDOWN** (2013) alongside **Jackie Chan**; **COCK AND BULL** (2016) for which Ye Liu won the Golden Goblet for Best Actor at the 2016 Shanghai International Film Festival; **Lu Chuan's THE LAST SUPPER** (2012) and **CITY OF LIFE AND DEATH** (2009); **THE FOUNDING OF A REPUBLIC** (2009); and **CONNECTED** (2008), a remake of the American film **CELLULAR**.