

CITY OF WIND (A Young Shaman)

Mongolië, Frankrijk, Nederland, Portugal, Duitsland, Qatar, – 103”

Distributie Benelux: Arti Film – Hilversum – Nederland
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Lange synopsis

ZE is een 17-jarige zachte jongen die hard studeert en voorbestemd is om goed terecht te komen in de samenleving van het moderne Mongolië. In zijn vrije tijd is hij spiritueel sjamaan en communiceert met de geest van zijn voorouders. Hij helpt daarmee heel wat mensen in zijn gemeenschap. Op een dag doet hij een seance voor leeftijdsgenoot Maralaa die een operatie moet ondergaan. Zij introduceert hem in het uitgaansleven van het moderne Ulaanbatar. Hij moet dan jongleren tussen zijn spirituele leven en het moderne leven wat ook begint te trekken.

Korte synopsis

ZE is een 17-jarige jongen die hard studeert om goed terecht te komen in het moderne Mongolië. In zijn vrije tijd is hij spiritueel sjamaan en communiceert met de geest van zijn voorouders. Op een dag doet hij een seance voor leeftijdsgenoot Maralaa. Zij introduceert hem in het uitgaansleven van Ulaanbatar wat begint te botsen met zijn spirituele leven.

Oneliner

Een jonge student in Mongolië moet balanceren tussen zijn spirituele leven als sjamaan en het bestaan in de moderne maatschappij van Ulaanbatar.

Achtergrond

Regisseur Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochirs filmdebuut is een coming-of-age verhaal rijk aan visuele composities en narratieve warmte. Op delicate wijze wordt Mongolië geschilderd, een land dat net zo veel transformaties en onzekerheden ondergaat als de hoofdpersoon zelf, gespeeld door Tergel Bold-Erdene die voor zijn debuutrol werd bekroond met de Orrizonti-prijs voor Beste Acteur in Venetië.

Festival selecties en awards

- * Officiële Selectie Filmfestival Venetië – Orrizonti 2023
- * Winner Best Actor – Orrizonti Award Venetië
- * Officiële selectie Toronto International Film Festival 2023
- * Oscar Nominatie Best International Feature 2024 – Mongolië





Conversation with director and scriptwriter Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochir

What is the starting point for 'City of Wind'?

- The film was born out of an encounter not unlike in the film. My mother took me to a shaman to consult a family matter. We arrived late to the ceremony and didn't get to see the shaman before the ceremony. Afterwards, as I sat waiting for my mother, a young man came and sat next to me. He seemed very cool, had both arms filled with tattoos and an earring on one ear. He started to play a game on his phone. Once we stepped out of the house, my mother informed me that he was the shaman we had just consulted. I had gone to shamans and seers before, but never to a shaman younger than I was. This moment had a profound effect on me because suddenly I felt seen. I had a moment of comprehension about myself as a young Mongolian, about my mid-20's burnout, about the different masks I wear and the roles I play. We harbor many identities and responsibilities towards these identities, and it can feel very heavy at times. I've noticed that young people in the West are much more carefree, more light. In Mongolia, you feel already tired by the time you graduate highschool. I think this is the consequence of having too many expectations from society at large. This is the starting point of the film. I also saw very clearly the scene of the film where the shaman takes off his ceremonial headdress to reveal a young man. It struck a chord in me because visually it was the most direct way to express how it feels to be a young Mongolian today. I think all modern-day Mongolians will identify with this scene.

ZE encounters a lot of internal conflicts that are part of puberty, but he also needs to deal with the responsibility of being the community shaman and of dealing with his inner spirit. How do these conflicts intertwine?

- It was very important to me that the topic of "tradition vs. modernity" wasn't portrayed in a dualistic, dialectical way. The feeling I wanted to express in regards to having a traditional role and a modern role is not one where you are stuck in between the two and have to make a fatal choice for one over the other. This is not how I feel as a young Mongolian. I feel I am quite comfortable with being modern and traditional at the same time. This fact only enriches my life, both my exterior and interior worlds. But it does feel

overwhelming at times. It can feel heavy to have to be sensitive towards many different directions and obligations. And this is what I want to portray in the film: a portrait of life in Mongolia that is more of a mosaic made up of small moments and encounters that range on a scale from “traditional to modern”. So you have a young shaman of 17 years doing ritualistic ceremonies, but you also have a classroom of 17-year-olds watching porn together. It’s not a matter of contradicting these elements dramatically, but more of presenting them matter of factly and building the narrative and tension through the build-up of emotions in the protagonist. In this film, it was important for me not to exploit the topic of tradition dramatically. I didn’t want to make a film about a choice between love and tradition, or a loss of faith in spirituality, etc. Ze does lose faith, but in himself. This film is about Ze disconnecting from himself because his senses and emotions are overwhelmed. And all moments of hostility between characters due to difference of opinion and belief, I reconcile within the narrative of the film. The conflict between tradition and modernity is there, but always digested and dispersed. Ze and Maralaa, having different opinions regarding shamanism and their futures, can still tease each other and carry on their relationship. This is why the scene on the bridge, where they draw each other, is my favorite scene. It says a lot about how Mongolians relate to one another, about the multiplicity of our lives and dreams, and about our acceptance of each other.



Spirituality is an important aspect in understanding Mongolia and the inner struggles of Ze, how did you approach the problem of rendering something on screen that is, by essence, invisible?

- I really didn’t want to go down the route of magic realism because that implies that there is something magical about shamanism. That it is either an illusion or that it is super-natural. But in fact, in Mongolia shamanism is completely the opposite of these things; it is nature itself, it’s natural. Therefore my approach to spirituality and to the whole film was naturalism. I wanted to document, not seduce or dramatize. What you see in the film is my experience of shamanism. It is, above all else, an emotional event. People don’t go to shamans to talk about the weather. People go to shamans because of the enormity of their emotions and their need to talk about it and to be heard. Especially in a society that is so neglectful of its citizens as modern day Mongolia. So my exploration of spirituality is emotional; it’s between people. In fact, I’m looking for spirituality within



small and subtle moments between people, in their gazes, in their sighs, in their whispers. People who see each other, recognize each other, acknowledge each other. People who are a community. And this spirituality is also between people who are no longer present in this world. With shamanism, we see, recognize, and acknowledge our ancestors. For me this is an enormously important part of the emotional landscape of Mongolians. For us, this is spirituality, connection amongst people, even those who are no longer with us. And this emotional connection also extends towards nature, the mountains and rivers, the sun and the moon... I really wanted to show how Mongolians interact with nature on a daily basis. On a different note, some moments in the film could be interpreted as supernatural. But for me, these moments are not above nature, they are a part of nature. We experience nature through time. Our protagonist Ze is literally the passage between the ancestors and the descendants, between the past and the future. So Ze is someone who can access the multiplicity of nature, of time. So what we see as supernatural is natural for him. Aesthetically I approached these moments just as I would approach any other scene in the film.

The film is set in Ulaanbaatar, being born, and growing up there yourself. How important was it for you to showcase the different aspects of the city? And how does the city give form to the story of ZE?

- It was important for me that the film is set in the yurt districts of Ulaanbaatar because the yurt districts, although they are geographically on the margins of the city center, are actually the largest part of the city in area, where more than 60% of the population of the city live. The yurt districts are not the margins, they are the city of Ulaanbaatar itself. This is the idea that is portrayed in the film. Ze's universe is in the yurt districts. The city center is in the distance, in the background, engulfed in a haze of smoke. It symbolizes the "Mongolian Dream" that the Mongolian youth is striving for, including Ze. The city center is an escape, almost fantastical, a place where Ze can let go of reality. This is why he loves going to the mall. Together with Maralaa, he takes his first steps out of the normalcy of the yurt districts into the "strangeness" of the city center. The primary audience I had in my mind as I made the film is the youth of Ulaanbaatar. 70% of people aged 34 and under are living in the yurt districts. The future of Mongolia is living here! It was important for me to acknowledge the dignity of their lives and their struggles, and completely flip this idea that they are on the margins, that they are poor and helpless. The film is my attempt at empowering the youth, both spiritually and in spirit.

Tell us a bit more on how you worked with your 2 main cast, was it a first experience?

- The protagonist ZE is played by an amateur/first-time actor named Tergel Bold-Erdene, and Maralaa is played by a last-year acting student named Nomin-Erdene Ariunbyamba who had a lot of experience already and who comes from an acting family. Nomin had the confidence and the experience that Tergel lacked, so this actually created a tension between them that was impassable. Ultimately I decided that this tension doesn't go against and could even work with the core idea of the relationship: two people who wouldn't normally become friends, end up becoming intimate due to the uniqueness and intensity of their encounter. Working with the two of them together was challenging because I didn't want to "over-rehearse" Nomin for fear of her settling into a manner of acting, but I needed to "rehearse" Tergel because he needed the confidence and the experience. Ultimately these sessions were loosely based on the script and focused more on conversations and sharing. And they usually ended with Tergel exasperating Nomin with his jokes and antics which she found difficult because she wanted to be a serious actress. For me, it was a complete joy to be around them because I'm one of those directors who like actors.



As a director, what are your influences in cinema ? What films or directors inspire you ?

- I like all cinema that attempts to express what words cannot express. I like cinema that goes beyond communication. This might be why I am interested in spirituality in general. As a spectator, I feel the need to be aware of "something" beyond the audible and the visible when I'm watching a film. Films and directors are too many to list. But when I was filming "City of Wind", after the first week of shooting, I felt a great need to be inspired, and I re-watched the first episode of "The Decalogue by Kieslowski". Never, never grows old!



BIOGRAPHY LKHAGVADULAM PUREV-OCHIR



Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochir is a Mongolian scriptwriter and director, born in 1989. She has directed few short films including "Mountain Cat" (2020), selected among others at the Cannes Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Busan Film Festival and "Snow in September" (2022) which has won the Golden Lion for Best Short Film at the Venice Film Festival (Orizzonti) before winning the IMDB Short Cuts Award for Best Short Film at the Toronto Film Festival. "City of Wind" is her first feature film. Lkhagvadulam graduated from Dokuz Eylul University (Turkey) with a BA in film direction and interned at the Mongolian National Broadcaster. She also completed an academic certificate in screenwriting from FAMU (Czech Republic) in 2015. Alongside this, she also studied an MA in screenwriting at KinoEyes European Filmmaking Masters (Portugal).

Furthermore, she taught History of Film and Film

Direction classes at the Mongolian School of Film, Radio, and Television

FILMOGRAPHY LKHAGVADULAM PUREV-OCHIR

2021: Mountain Cat Short Film – Cannes Competition 2020, Busan 2020, Sundance 2021

2022: Snow in September Short Film – Golden Lion for Best Short Film at the Venice Film Festival (Orizzonti) & IMDB Short Cuts Award for Best Short Film at the Toronto Film Festival.



CAST

ZE	Tergel Bold-Erdene
Maralaa	Nomin-Erdene Ariunbyamba
Oyu	Anu-Ujin Tsermaa
Ze's mother	Bulgan Chuluunbat
Ze's father	Ganzorig Tsetsgee
Neighbor-Grandpa	Myagmarnaran Gombo
Maralaa's mother	Tsend-Ayush Nyamsuren

CREW

Director	Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochir
Screenplay	Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochir
Director of Photography	Vasco Viana
Editing	Matthieu Taponier
Sound	Benjamin Silvestre
Original music	Vasco Mendonça
Electricity and Grip	Tuvshintugs Badral
Production design	Bolor-Erdene Naidannyam
1st Assistant Director	Anne Chapelot
Script supervisor	Noëllie Maugard
Production Manager	Nicolaï Iarochenko
Production Manager Mongolia	Oyundari Khurelbaatar
Sound Edit	Ranko Pauković
Sound Mix	Paul Jouselin
Color grading	Rita Lamas
VFX	Francisco Carvalho
Post-production	Joana Vaz Da Silva, Elisabeth Motte
Casting	Ariunchimeg Tumursukh
Wardrobe design	Khorol-Enkh Gunchin
Makeup Design	Chogjuumunsel Dashmyagmar
Production	Aurora Films
Producers	Katia Khazak, Charlotte Vincent
Coproductions	Guru Media, Uma Pedra no Sapato, Volya Films, 27 Films Production, VOO by mobinet
Coproducers:	Ariunaa Tserenpil, Rachel Daisy Ellis, Filipa Reis, Denis Vaslin, Fleur Knopperts, Oliver Damian, Munkhzorig Bayasgalan

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