

The Museum of Modern Art

Mike De Leon: Self-Portrait of a Filipino Filmmaker

November 1–30, 2022

The Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters

Mike De Leon, the producer and cinematographer of Lino Brocka's haunting masterpiece *Manila, In the Claws of Light* (1975), is one of Filipino cinema's most fiercely political and dramatic storytellers in his own right. This complete retrospective, the first ever presented in North America, brings together all of De Leon's feature films and shorts as a writer and director. De Leon's films are presented alongside some of the few surviving classic melodramas, musicals, costume dramas, and noir films of the 1930s–'60s to come out of the greatest of all Filipino studios, LVN Pictures, which was founded in 1938 by De Leon's grandmother Doña Sisang. Inspired by this storied history of popular moviemaking in the Philippines—one he experienced firsthand as a child on the LVN studio lot—as well as by Hollywood and European cinema, De Leon's own films mix the genres of melodrama, crime, supernatural horror, slapstick comedy, and the musical with blisteringly critical stances toward his country's history of corruption and cronyism, state-sponsored violence, feudalist exploitation, and populist machismo: the festering legacies of the nation's colonial past made even more purulent by the dictatorships of Ferdinand Marcos and Rodrigo Duterte.

MoMA's retrospective includes De Leon's debut feature, *Itim (The Rites of May)* (1976), in a new restoration that premiered at Cannes earlier this year; *Kisapmata* (1981); *AKΩ Batch '81* (1982); *Sister Stella L.* (1984); and *Citizen Jake* (2018); along with *Signos*, the defiantly subversive anti-Marcos short he made in 1981 with an underground collective of filmmakers and activists; and rare behind-the-scenes production footage from *Manila, ITIM*, and *Moments in a Stolen Dream* (1977), shown alongside the features themselves.

Organized by Joshua Siegel, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Mutya ng Pasig (Muse of the Pasig River). 1950. Philippines. Directed by Richard Abelardo. With Jose Padilla Jr., Rebecca Gonzales, Delia Razon. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 90 min.

Muse of the Pasig River is one of the few films to survive intact from the archives of LVN Pictures, the celebrated Filipino studio run by Mike De Leon's grandmother Doña Sisang. Surprised by the film's "uncanny resemblance" to his own debut feature, *Itim*, De Leon writes, "Like *Itim*, *Mutya ng Pasig* is a ghost story set in a provincial milieu; a father commits a horrible crime; a young woman is possessed by the vengeful spirit of her dead mother.... The story of Abelardo's film has other magical elements. For instance, a story about a ghostly woman singing in the dead of night the melancholy strains of 'Mutya ng Pasig' (a *kundiman*, or traditional love song), pining for her lost love, seeking pity and justice, circulates in the town of Matangtubig (Water's Eye—even the town's name is magical). Nicanor Abelardo, the director's cousin and one of our greatest composers, created this sublime *kundiman* while Deogracias Rosario wrote its lyrics."

Tue. Nov. 1, 4:00 T2, Sat. Nov. 12 4:00 T2

MoMA

11 West 53 Street
New York, NY 10019

Itim (The Rites of May). 1976. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., Gil Quito. With Tommy Abuel, Mario Montenegro, Charo Santos. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 107 min.

Though he has self-deprecatingly called it “a ghost story by a first-time and untested director from a wealthy family,” Mike De Leon’s *Itim* is one of the most remarkable debuts in cinema history. A major discovery when it was presented in a new digital restoration at Cannes earlier this year, the film expresses De Leon’s lifelong fears about “the dark side of our culture”: the Spanish colonial legacies of superstition and antiscience in his native Philippines.

De Leon recalls, “*Itim* is about a young man (Tommy Abuel) who visits his hometown during the Holy Week to take photographs for his magazine and visit his paralyzed father. While shooting photos of a *pasyon* (a poetic recitation, in song, of the Passion of Christ), he encounters Teresa, the young girl possessed by her dead sister’s spirit in the seance that opens the film. Although the film’s protagonist is the girl played by newcomer Charo Santos, I became more intrigued with the character of Dr. Torres, played by the late LVN star Mario Montenegro. Dr. Torres is a physical and moral wreck who committed an unspeakable crime. Mario was the first LVN star I worked with as a director, and at the start of principal photography, his presence on my set made me nervous. He was my favorite LVN actor because of the costume movies he made, including *Prinsipe Ten Oso* (Gregorio Fernandez, 1954), one of my favorite films as a young boy.”

Followed by:

Itim: Isang Eksplorasyon sa Pelikula (Itim: An Exploration in Cinema). 1976. Philippines. Directed by Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. In Filipino; English subtitles. 20 min.

Doy del Mundo’s documentary about the making of Mike De Leon’s *Itim* also features the only scenes to survive from De Leon’s now-lost debut film, the 16mm short *Monologo (Monologue)* (1975). De Leon recalls, “*Itim* was filmed in my grandmother’s hometown of San Miguel, in her family’s ancestral house where more than two decades later I would also shoot *Bayaning 3rd World*. Doy and his brother-in-law Gil Quito wrote the screenplay. It was Gil who suggested the use of spiritualism and spirit possession during the holy week.”

Tue. Nov. 1, 6:30 T2, Sat. Nov. 12, 6:30 T2

Malvarosa. 1958. Philippines. Directed by Gregorio Fernandez. Screenplay by Consuelo P. Osorio. With Charito Solis, Leroy Salvador, Rebecca del Rio. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Filipino; English subtitles. 101 min.

Later reunited by Mike De Leon for *Kisapmata*, Vic Silayan and Charito Solis star in this melodrama made at the height of their studio-era careers, with Solis playing the long-suffering daughter of a raging alcoholic (the award-winning Rebecca del Rio), who sacrifices everything for her five brothers. Miraculously, *Malvarosa* has survived all these years, a prestige picture produced by Mike De Leon’s father, Manuel, for LVN and based on a *komiks* serial by Clodualdo del Mundo, the father of screenwriter Doy del Mundo (*Manila, Itim, Bayaning 3rd World*).

Thu. Nov. 3, 4:00 T2, Sat. Nov. 19, 1:00 T2

Kisapmata (In the Blink of an Eye). 1981. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., Raquel N. Villavicencio. With Charito Solis, Vic Silayan, Jay Ilagan. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 90 min.

Shot in the blink of an eye—a mere three months—and featuring some of Filipino cinema’s greatest actors from the studio era, including Charito Solis, *Kisapmata* was inspired by the

real-life crime story “The House on Zapote Street” (1961) by Nick Joaquin, who wrote as Quijano de Manila during his career as a literary journalist. Mike De Leon writes, “*Kisapmata* explores the concept of strongman rule as exemplified by the character of Dadong, *ang Tatang*, the psychotic *padre de familia*, rendered monstrous by the unforgettable performance of Vic Silayan. The father has incestuous relations with his daughter—the ultimate corruption. That the film was interpreted as an allegory of the regime of Ferdinand Marcos was no coincidence, though the crime happened in 1961. Nevertheless, many elements in this allegory were present in the original story. The policeman was an Ilocano, and so was Marcos. He ruled with an iron fist and subjected his family to unmitigated terror, just as Marcos did to the country.”

Thu. Nov. 3, 7:00 T2, Sat. Nov. 19, 4:00 T2

A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino. 1965. Philippines. Directed by Lamberto V. Avellana. Screenplay by Donato Valentin, Trinidad Reyes. With Daisy H. Avellana, Naty Crame-Rogers, Conrad Parham. DCP. In English. 107 min.

Mike De Leon was instrumental in the restoration of this major rediscovery of independent Filipino cinema. *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* marks the transition between studio-produced genre movies of the 1940s and '50s and the more experimental and politically subversive filmmaking of the 1960s. Based on a celebrated stage play by Nick Joaquin, who also wrote the story on which De Leon's radical *Kisapmata* was based, Lamberto Avellana's film centers on the tensions within an artistic bourgeois family living in the prewar Intramuros of Old Manila. Seen today, the film remains a stirring reflection on the culture war between the intellectual class of the Philippines and their Spanish and American colonizers.

Fri. Nov. 4, 4:00 T2, Fri. Nov. 11, 4:00 T2

Bayaning 3rd World (Third World Hero). 1999. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Clodualdo Del Mundo Jr. With Ricky Davao, Joel Torre, Cris Villanueva. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 93 min.

In brilliantly self-reflexive ways, Mike De Leon's *Third World Hero* wrestles with the challenge of making a movie about one of the Philippines' most revered historical figures, Jose Rizal, the 19th-century novelist and revolutionary who fought against Spanish colonial rule. Faced with the unanswerable question of whether or not Rizal recanted his opposition to the Catholic Church before his execution (and whether he was tortured into doing so), De Leon creates a dazzlingly kaleidoscopic meditation on history, invention, mythmaking, and the continued fight for a nation's soul.

Fri. Nov. 4, 7:00 T2, Sun. Nov. 13, 1:30 T2

Anak dalita (The Ruins). 1956. Philippines. Directed by Lamberto V. Avellana. Screenplay by Rolf Bayer. With Rosa Rosal, Tony Santos, Jose (Joseph) de Cordova. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Filipino; English subtitles. 119 min.

“As a young boy of nine in 1956, one of my most vivid memories was the jubilation among the LVN folk when *Anak Dalita* won the Golden Harvest Award at the 3rd Asian Film Festival in Hong Kong. The Philippines had finally beaten Japan, and the euphoria in the studio could hardly be put into words.... The story revolves around Tita (Rosa Rosal), a prostitute with a golden heart, and her relationship with Vic (Tony Santos), a Korean war veteran who comes home in time to say goodbye to his dying mother.... The film is easily distinguishable from the mass-produced output of LVN. There is no singing and dancing, the story ends sadly, and the setting is bleak—the ruins of Intramuros. However, the acting impressed me the most. It seemed authentic and the dialogue was gutsy” (Mike De Leon, *Last Look Back*).

Followed by: ***An Actor Remembers – Joseph de Cordova***. 2006. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. In Filipino; English subtitles. 17 min.

In this loving portrait of Joseph de Cordova, the beloved character actor who memorably appears as a racketeer in *The Ruins* and as a communist guerilla in *Huk in a New Life*, he recalls, “I looked upon [studio head] Doña Sisang like a mother. [When she died] we lost our way. I never made a movie outside LVN. What for? I never went hungry. I was cared for. As long as you do what she wants.”

Sat. Nov. 5, 1:00 T1, Thu. Nov. 17, 4:00 T2

Sangandaan (Crossroads). 2022. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. DCP. 4 min. Borrowing a beloved song from his own 1984 feature *Sister Stella L.*, Mike De Leon made this video in a damning response to the victory election of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. as president of the Philippines. In a prepared statement at the Cannes premiere of his recently restored *Itim*, he wrote, “Horror has now acquired a more sinister meaning. It is no longer about a ghost but about the monsters of Philippine politics, monsters that, after a long wait in the subterranean caverns of hell, have returned to ravage and rape my country all over again. The crazy thing is that we invited them back.”

Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag (Manila, In the Claws of Light). 1975. Philippines. Directed by Lino Brocka. Screenplay by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., based on the novel by Edgardo Reyes. Photographed and produced by Mike De Leon. With Hilda Koronel, Rafael (Bembol) Roco Jr., Lou Salvador Jr. DCP. Courtesy Janus Films In Tagalog; English subtitles. 124 min.

A haunting, beautiful landmark of Filipino cinema, *Manila* launched the international careers of director Lino Brocka, cinematographer and producer Mike De Leon, screenwriter Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., and actors Hilda Koronel and Bembol Roco, and firmly established a bold and often controversial new style of filmmaking in a movie industry primarily known for lavish musicals, prestige melodramas, and other popular fare.

As De Leon reminisces in *Last Look Back*, “I didn’t give serious thought to those anti-Marcos politicians who had been imprisoned. I was ignorant of the military atrocities committed all over the country and the unchecked greed of Marcos and his cronies. I was more enthusiastic about filmmaking and the ‘idea’ of *Maynila* because it promised to become an ‘artistic’ film in the tradition of the social realist *Anak Dalita (The Ruins)* that my father produced with great critical success in 1956. But I hoped *Maynila* would achieve not only critical but some measure of commercial success.....”

Sat. Nov. 5, 4:00 T1, Thu. Nov. 17, 7:30 T2

AKΩ Batch '81 and other shorts

AKΩ Batch '81. 1982. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., Raquel N. Villavicencio. With Mark Gil, Sandy Andolong, Ward Luarca. DCP. Courtesy Atty and Ernesto Macedo of MVP Pictures. In Filipino; English subtitles. 100 min.

An explosive fascist fantasia made in protest against the brutalities of martial law under President Marcos, Mike De Leon’s *AKΩ Batch '81* was inspired by *A Clockwork Orange*, the musicals *Cabaret* and *Evita*, and Stanley Milgram’s infamous experiments in blind obedience to authority. The film centers on the grooming of college fraternity pledges to become sadistic true believers.

Kangkungan (Swamp Cabbage Patch). 2019. Philippines. Written and directed by Mike De Leon. DCP. 5 min. In Filipino; English subtitles.

Mike De Leon describes this as “a short political video about new dictatorship that went viral and angered President Duterte. The title is from the Tagalog expression ‘Tinapon na lang sa Kangkungan’ (Thrown into the swamp cabbage patch, in other words, tossed out like garbage).”

Never Again. 2016. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 2 min.

“A short video about the return of the Marcoses in 2016, when Bongbong ran for Vice-President. This was updated in 2022, when he became President” (Mike De Leon).

Sat. Nov. 5, 7:00 T1, Sat. Nov. 19, 6:00 T2

Kung Mangarap Ka’t Magising (Moments in a Stolen Dream). 1977. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Rey Santayana. With Christopher de Leon, Hilda Koronel, Laurice Guillen. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Filipino; English subtitles. 112 min.

“Rey Santayana and I conceptualized a love story with a lot of music that would pay tribute to the romantic musicals of LVN Pictures [the celebrated movie studio founded by Mike De Leon’s grandmother Doña Sisang]. We imagined a dreamlike love story with good-looking actors, set in a romanticized Baguio [‘a magical place created by the American colonizers for themselves and the Filipino elite’] and an even more romanticized Sagada.... It was a bittersweet romance featuring characters from our social class, lush cinematography, a color-coordinated production design, and original Filipino music.... *Kung Mangarap* was later described as a pioneer Filipino rom-com and continues to enjoy a small cult following” (Mike De Leon, *Last Look Back*).

Followed by:

Si Boyet, Hilda, Atbp. 1977. Philippines. Directed by Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 23 min.

A documentary on the making of *Moments in a Stolen Dream*

Thu. Nov. 10, 4:00 T2, Tue. Nov. 15, 6:30 T2

Pag-asa (Hope). 1951. Philippines. Directed by Lamberto V. Avellana. Screenplay by Daisy H. Avellana, Jose V. Avellana Jr. With Priscilla Cellona, Armando Goyena, Enrique “Ike” Jarlego Jr. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 94 min.

“*Pag-asa* is probably one of the few LVN movies I never grow tired of watching. Some crucial scenes are missing in its surviving version, but I’m still caught up by the precise fusion of excellent camerawork and fine naturalistic performances. I don’t know what Bert [director Lamberto V. Avellana] thought of this film, but I’m convinced that he was inspired in making it, even if it was just a tearjerker. Though set in the slums of Intramuros, a favorite location of Bert’s, it didn’t dwell on abject poverty (that would come later, in *Anak Dalita*). Instead, the narrative focuses on the relationship between a virtuous young woman and her brother and the young man who loves them.... In *Pag-asa*, it seems that Avellana’s camera was always where it was supposed to be, and the actors moved in and out of this cinematic space in perfect harmony with the characters’ relationships to each other” (Mike De Leon, *Last Look Back*).

Mon. Nov. 14, 6:30 T1, Tue. Nov. 15, 4:00 T2

Giliw Ko (My Sweetheart). 1939. Philippines. Written and directed by Carlos Vander Tolosa. With Ely Ramos, Fernando Poe, Mila del Sol. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 90 min.

So new to the movie industry was Mike De Leon's grandmother Doña Sisang, the founder of LVN Pictures, that she used her own mansion on Broadway in New Manila, Quezon City, as the main set for *My Sweetheart*, the studio's first prewar commercial release. That mansion, which would subsequently appear in many other LVN movies, becomes the place where Guia (Mila Del Sol), a girl from the countryside, is "discovered" to have a beautiful singing voice and is pulled out of the peasantry to become a radio star. "Through years of repeat viewings, I've grown fond of this film," Mike De Leon recalls in *Last Look Back*. "Its storytelling is brisk, enhanced by beautiful Tagalog songs, one of which I used to hear played over and over again in my grandmother's house, 'Tunay na Tunay' (Really True) by Juan Silos. Another theme the film tackles is the conflict between popular American and traditional Filipino songs. Though depicted with a light touch, the dark streak of our colonial mentality is integral to the plot and the rigid feudal class structure that defined the characters' situation. The story's lessons are clear—sing in English to be popular and stick to your social class."

Fri. Nov. 18, 4:00 T2, Tue. Nov. 22, 7:30 T2

Hindi Nahahati ang Langit (Heaven Cannot Be Shared). 1985. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Mia A. Concio. With Christopher de Leon, Lorna Tolentino, Edu Manzano. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Filipino; English subtitles. 127 min.

Mike De Leon's most successful commercial film was one he only reluctantly agreed to make after the box office failure of *Sister Stella L.*, yet this adaptation of a serialized *komiks* melodrama, about a pair of spiteful half siblings who ruin their parents' lives and their own subsequent marriages, has all the ridiculous charm and convoluted plotting of a cartoon romance told in brash Pop colors.

Fri. Nov. 18, 6:30 T2, Tue. Nov. 22, 4:00 T2

Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay (Huk in a New Life). 1953. Philippines. Directed by Lamberto V. Avellana. Screenplay by Rolf Bayer. With Jose Padilla Jr., Celia Flor, Joseph de Cordova. DCP. 120 min. In Filipino; English subtitles.

Swept up in the anti-Communist fervor of the 1950s, and in defense of the Philippines—"the bastion of democracy in the Pacific"—LVN Pictures produced three jingoistic films warning of a Fifth Column of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist conspirators bent on Chinese supremacy in the region. "The Cold War between America and the Communist bloc of the Soviet Union and China was becoming a hot war," as Mike De Leon writes in *Last Look Back*, "and the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (People's Army Against the Japanese) or *Hukbalahap*, evolved into the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (People's Liberation Army) after the war. The Huk movement, as it was called, supported the peasants' ardent desire to own their land, and advocated armed struggle.... In 1953, with extensive help from the CIA, soon-to-become President Ramon Magsaysay and the United States Information Service (USIS) launched a nationwide campaign to persuade the Huk rebels to lay down their arms and take advantage of the government's offer of amnesty. Those who surrendered were promised their land, specifically in Kapatagan, Lanao, in Mindanao. *Huk in a New Life* is based on this campaign message, although it transcends propaganda as directed by Avellana. It remains a powerful drama with stirring performances by Padilla, Joseph de Cordova, and Leroy Salvador."

Sun. Nov. 20, 1:00 T2, Wed. Nov. 23, 4:00 T2

Sister Stella L. 1984. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by Jose F. Lacaba, Jose Almojuelam, De Leon. With Vilma Santos, Jay Ilagan, Laurice Guillen. DCP. Courtesy Mike De Leon, Lily Monteverde, Regal Films. In Filipino; English subtitles. 103 min. MoMA presents a work in progress of the ongoing restoration of *Sister Stella L.* Screenwriter Jose “Pete” Lacaba, the author of some of Lino Brocka’s best films, including *Jaguar* (1979), was jailed and tortured by the Marcos regime, a harrowing experience that drives this urgent tale of a nun’s awakening to political corruption and worker exploitation. A commercial failure, *Sister Stella L.* was nonetheless a sincere attempt at political cinema, made in the tumultuous and violent year leading to the overthrow of Marcos; in retrospect, De Leon observes, “The social order hardly changed after the revolt. All we did was get rid of a dictator and his family, and we didn’t even do it properly. The Marcoses should have stood trial and been thrown into jail. This didn’t happen because the revolt turned into a religious fiesta and was hailed as a peaceful revolution—the ultimate oxymoron.” Sun. Nov. 20, 4:00 T2, Wed. Nov. 23, 6:30 T2

Kakabakaba Ka Ba? (Will Your Heart Beat Faster?). 1980. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Doy Del Mundo, Raquel N. Villaviceno. With Christopher de Leon, Charo Santos, Jay Ilagan. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Japanese, Filipino; English subtitles. 104 min. “A gem of social satire.... Generations to come will see it as a charming slapstick farce sitting on top of a volcano” (Agustin Sotto). Mike De Leon, in *Last Look Back*, writes, “Looking back, I think the film is more surreal than satirical, an abnormal combination of very normal elements from everyday life. The premise was: what if fake Catholic priests and nuns (or rogue elements of the Church?) and Japanese technology (the Chinese connection came later) were mixed in some lethal cinematic brew, the point of the story being the spread of drug addiction among Filipino children?” Fri. Nov. 25, 4:00 T2, Sat. Nov. 26, 6:30 T2

A Compilation of Color Scenes from 1950s Filipino Movies

Filmmaker Mike De Leon has created this brief but hypnotic compilation of ANSCO color sequences from now-lost 1950s Filipino musicals and costume dramas produced by LVN Pictures, his grandmother Doña Sisang’s movie studio. 8 min.

Followed by:

Ibong Adarna (Adarna Bird). 1941. Philippines. Written and directed by Vicente Salumbides. With Mila Del Sol, Fred Cortes, Ester Magalona. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. In Filipino; English subtitles. 124 min.

One of the few prewar LVN Pictures movies to survive, *Ibong Adarna* was released in October 1941, just two months before Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and its invasion of the Philippines. A costume drama involving the legend of the magical Adarna bird, whose singing scenes are said to have been hand-tinted in color, this popular genre film was later remade by studio favorite Manuel Conde, whose *Genghis Khan* was featured in an edition of MoMA’s To Save and Project preservation festival.

Fri. Nov. 25, 6:30 T2, Sat. Nov. 26, 4:00 T2

Signos (Omens). 1983. Philippines. Made by Concerned Artists of the Philippines. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 39 min.

On August 21, 1983, Ninoy Aquino, a former Philippine senator and a staunch opponent of President Ferdinand Marcos, was shot in the head on the tarmac of the Manila airport as he returned home from three years of self-imposed exile. In response to his assassination, to a collapsing economy, to acts of vengeance, and the violent suppression of dissent, eight members of a collective known as the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (including Mike De Leon) bravely made this riveting Super 8mm documentary short, drawing on newsreel footage, interviews, and street scenes of anti-Marcos demonstrations.

Followed by:

Aliwan Paradise. 1992. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. With Johnny Delgado, Julio Diaz, Lara Melissa de Leon. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 27 min.

"[*Aliwan Paradise*] imagines a near-future Manila in which the quest for a radically new form of entertainment to keep the masses satisfied is neverending. Two young provincials bruised by their experiences in the big city—they happen to have the same names as the protagonists of Brocka's *Maynila*, also scripted by Clodualdo del Mundo Jr.—are reunited at the auditions. Their acts are rejected by the very establishment jury, but the impresario/director who hosts the auditions is titillated by the thought of the poverty and hard labor in their village backgrounds and hires them to re-enact it. Their performance of the hardscrabble life they once fled proves to be just what the media needed. Like *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?*, which it slightly resembles in style, this dark satire lambasts everything from the fashion for 'poverty porn' to the rampant hypocrisies of Filipino showbiz. It confirms and consolidates De Leon's withdrawal from mainstream Filipino cinema" (Tony Rayns).

Sat. Nov. 26, 2:00 T2, Sun. Nov. 27, 1:30 T2

Mr. Li. 2019. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon, Tom Estrera III, Carlo Fajarda. DCP. 8 min.

"[*Mr. Li*] is about our country's subservience to China. It was inspired by footage I shot of a middle-aged Red Guard singing one of Mao's revolutionary songs all by himself" (Mike De Leon).

Followed by:

Biyaya ng Lupa (Bounty of the Earth). 1959. Philippines. Directed by Manuel Silos. Screenplay by Celso Al. Carunungan, Pablo Naval. With Rosa Rosal, Tony Santos, Leroy Salvador. DCP. Courtesy ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula. 111 min. In Filipino; English subtitles. Mike De Leon considers *Bounty of the Earth* "one of the most outstanding achievements of LVN Pictures. It is truly a timeless film, as moving today as it was in 1959 when it was first released." The studio director Manuel Silos was largely known for his broad romantic comedies and musicals, so few were prepared for the deeply felt social realism of this family drama. "It was a non-commercial movie with no big stars," he writes, "but it dealt with rural life, the earth's bounty, the corrupting influence of the big city—themes close to my grandmother's heart [Doña Sisang, the founder of LVN Pictures]. The film is packed with biblical allusions as it tells the story of a provincial couple, aptly named Jose and Maria (Tony Santos and Rosa Rosal), the children they raise, the challenges and tragedies that shake their family's foundation, and the determination to overcome the misfortunes with their values and faith in Divine Providence intact."

Sun. Nov. 27, 4:00 T2, Tue. Nov. 29, 7:30 T2

Citizen Jake. 2018. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. Screenplay by De Leon, Atom Araullo, Noel Pascual. With Atom Araullo, Cherie Gil, Teroy Guzman. DCP. In Filipino; English subtitles. 137 min.

“*Citizen Jake* is not only a summation of all of [Mike De Leon’s] work to date but also one of the finest East Asian films of the past decade.... The protagonist Jake Herrera (Atom Araullo) is the only ‘good guy’ in De Leon’s cinema who shoots and kills a bad guy, an attack which avenges a dead friend. And in the most startling of the formal innovations, he twice ‘doubles’ himself to break the ‘fourth wall’: while remaining within the fiction (the character is a former investigative journalist returning to his old profession), he simultaneously appears outside it, directly addressing the viewer. In the course of the film, he learns a harsh lesson in *realpolitik* (the political realities of the Philippines, as opposed to idealistic posturing) and writes up his discoveries...in the form of the film we are watching. This audacious and fully achieved film confirms De Leon’s mastery of his medium, expertly combining the story of an investigation into a brutal crime with a portrait of a man coming to understand the limitations of his own position” (Tony Rayns).

Followed by:

A Word from the Director. 2018. Philippines. Directed by Mike De Leon. DCP. 5 min. Mike De Leon imagined *Citizen Jake* “as an indictment of the Duterte regime using its horrific forerunner [the Marcoses] as a template of authoritarian rule,” and he caused a stir, as usual, in posting this promotional short for the film on social media.
Tue. Nov. 29, 4:00 T2, Wed. Nov 30 7:30 T2

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