

AN ELEPHANT SITTING STILL

A Film by HU Bo

International Sales

Rediance

LOGLINE:

The story links together the lives of a number of protagonists, narrating the course of one single, tension-filled day from dawn to dusk, and along the way, painting a portrait of a society marked by selfishness.

SYNOPSIS:

Under the gloomy sky of a small town in northern China, different protagonists' lives are intertwined in this lugubrious tale of nihilistic rage.

To protect his friend, 16-year-old WEI Bu pushes the school bully down the staircase and escapes the scene after the bully becomes hospitalized with his life hanging by a thread. WEI's neighbor, the 60-year-old WANG Jin, is estranged from his family and decides to join him. HUANG Ling, WEI's classmate, is bedeviled by an affair with the school official. Together, the desperate three decide to flee as the wounded bully's hooligan brother, the school authorities and the parents all go on a cold-blooded hunt for WEI across town. As WEI treads through the wilderness, he finally confronts his own reality. In the end, he boards a long-distance bus with HUANG and WANG toward Manchuria, where a circus elephant is said to be sitting still.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought that the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower." This quote from Cormac McCarthy is also the subject of this film. In our age, it's increasingly hard for us to have faith even in the tiniest of things, and the frustration from which becomes the hallmark of today's society. The film builds up personal myths in between daily routines. In the end, everyone loses what he or she values the most.

CREW BIOGRAPHY

HU Bo (Writer and Director) Born in 1988 in China, Hu Bo graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 2014 with a B.F.A. degree in directing. His short film *Distant Father* (2014) won Best Director at Golden Koala Chinese Film Festival, and *Night Runner* (2014) was selected by Taipei Golden Horse Film Academy. His debut feature *An Elephant Sitting Still*, which was then still in progress, was selected by the FIRST International Film Festival Financing Forum in 2016. In the following year, Hu Bo participated in FIRST Training Camp under the supervision of Béla Tarr, where he completed the short film *Man in the Well*. He has also written two novels *Huge Crack* and *Bullfrog*, both published in 2017.

Hu Bo took his own life soon after finishing *An Elephant Sitting Still*.

INTERVIEW WITH HU BO

(conducted during the press release of *Huge Crack* on December 28th, 2016)

You graduated from Beijing Film Academy with a degree in directing. Does your film study experience influence your creativity in any way? What roles do writing and filmmaking play in your life?

Hu: I keep film and literature very much apart from each other. I can only manage one of the two during a certain period of time, because they are completely different art forms. In fact, I wish I could separate them even further, but I don't have enough brain for that. Making a film is very difficult. It has a lot of tedious requirements, and usually cannot be done. In that case, I have nothing to do but write. Writing is a very free medium, and requires no preconditions. Nowadays people like to say that films can be shot on mobile phones, but I think that is the same as saying writing can be achieved with just numbers.

Some people claim that your works deliver a lot of negative emotions such as decadence, dejection, and desperation. What do you think of these claims?

Hu: You can ask whoever made these claims to reflect on himself for just a second everyday when he wakes up, before he goes to bed, or when he fetches a cup of water at the water dispenser at work, and he will know he's only looking at his life through

rose-colored glasses. All he's doing is posting Twits, living up to labels, or hoarding hundreds of pictures on his cell phone while waiting for a chance to flaunt them to others. I'm not disproving these behaviors. However, the truly valuable things lie in the cracks of the world, and not pessimistically so. If he can understand this, he may just be awed by the orders of life.

What is an ideal life to you?

Hu: I'm 28 years old now. I used to desire an ideal life when I was a teenager. I don't see it in this way anymore. There is simply no ideal life. It is only about choosing what kind of regrets you are willing to live with.

Do you intend on adapting stories from *Huge Crack* into films? Would you prefer writing and directing by yourself or collaborating with another director?

Hu: I separate film from literature, and I don't plan on adapting my own novels. If someone wants to adapt *Huge Crack*, I hope it won't be turned into a film about youth. Because the book is not about youth, but rather about the majority of junior college students in China. People often talk about the white-collars, the bottom class, the vested interest, the entrepreneurs, among other labeled social groups, and envelop their teenage years under a collective and polished term, youth. Such a definition is wrong. This massive group of Chinese young adults, who do nothing but slump in their dorms all day and play videogames, lead heedless lives and go on pointless dates, don't have youth. Their lives are rather filled with much more complicated things—as complicated as that in Camus's *The Outsider*. For instance, these people do not concern themselves with materialistic matters, and the older ones in the group often like to criticize everything. But can humans live on without worrying about substance? Class distinction did not exist decades ago. However, the youngsters today are burdened with something of enormous weight on their minds the day they step into the college gates. Did the age of bike-riding have that? Hence, I hope the young people of our age will not undermine their own lives, because the emptiness that the flesh-eating savages faced in the woods, or a dying soldier faces on the battlefield, is not so different from the emptiness that they face today.

Which story in the book *Huge Crack* are you most satisfied with? Why?

Hu: *An Elephant Sitting Still*. It is the last story I wrote in September this year. After I finished it, I felt that I have achieved a stage in my creative endeavor. This story has a great significance to me. It has brought me to completely negate myself, and thus extricated me from myself to go on writing other people's stories.

Many stories in the book *Huge Crack* leave people with very realistic impressions. Are any of them real life stories, or part of your own experience?

Hu: Every story has a real origin, and each of those origins follows a real emotional development with real details. You could see them as real stories, and I think they may very well happen in real life, but those that do take place in reality are more powerful than what I've written.

If you organize a book tour, will you “freeze” in front of your readers? Are you an inarticulate person in life? Is it because you are better at expressing yourself in writing that you are less so in communicating in person?

Hu: I don't think many people will come, so I probably won't “freeze.” Though I cannot be sure. I become nervous in front of a crowd, but not when I'm on a film set, since there are clear agendas during shooting. I'm clueless of what to do on occasions such as book tours and film roadshows. I don't think I have communication problems. It is usually the film crew who “freeze” and stare at me after I finish talking to them. So they are the ones with communication problems.

CREDITS

Director: Hu Bo

Screenwriter: Hu Bo

Director of Photography: Fan Chao

Sound: Ren Yiming

Editor: Hu Bo

Composer: Hua Lun

Production Designer: Xie Lijia

Sound Designer: Bai Ruizhou

Starring:

ZHANG Yu	As	YU Cheng
PENG Yuchang	As	WEI Bu
WANG Yuwen	As	HUANG Ling
LIU Congxi	As	WANG Jin

FILM QUALIFICATION

Original Title: Da Xiang Xi Di Er Zuo (大象席地而坐)

English Title: An Elephant Sitting Still

Runtime: 230 Min

Camera: Alexa MINI

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1

Language: Mandarin

Subtitle: English

Country: China

Year: 2018

Screening Format: DCP

Color: Color

Sound: 5.1

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