

MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL CINEMA TORINO
JIA ZHANG-KE ART CENTER
present



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2026 OFFICIAL SELECTION
SPECIAL SCREENING

影之聖者

Torino Shadow

A short film by
Jia Zhang-Ke

2026 – Italy, China – Drama – Chinese, Italian – 1:1.66 – 32'

mk2
films

SYNOPSIS & DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Synopsis

A woman travels from southern China to Turin, Italy, to see her husband. But an unexpected departure leaves her to find herself again – and to find cinema.

Director's note from Jia Zhang-Ke

Looking back to the time I was growing up, the movie theater was a kind of wonderland.

When I was a child, most movie theaters were free-standing buildings housing a single, huge screen. Screenings in them would often bring together nearly a thousand viewers. All of us there shared the same space, faced the same screen, and laughed together, cried together, held our breath together.

I make films, but first and foremost I am a film lover. I've long wanted to make a film paying tribute to the art of cinema, but I never knew where to start. Looking back, cinema not only opened up the world to me but also helped me to discover hidden parts of myself. So in this short film we will see a woman who, at the beginning, has nothing to do with cinema – even though her life is filled with images. But in the city of Torino, during the days she spends with her husband, she gradually comes to understand – and falls in love with – cinema.

In 2025, Carlo Chatrian reached out to me with the idea of making a short film in tribute to the art of film. It would mark the 25th anniversary of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema, located in the historic Mole Antonelliana.

I immediately accepted his invitation, and I would like to use this short film to confess my love of cinema and the filmmakers I so deeply adore.

Jia Zhang-Ke

PRODUCTION NOTE FROM CARLO CHATRIAN

Carlo Chatrian is the director of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema. He also is one of the executive producers of Torino Shadow.

Last year, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema being situated in the historic Mole Antonelliana, we launched a project that aims to use the museum, its archives, and its collections as material for short films. The project, called Torino Encounters, encourages filmmakers to engage with the city of Torino, Italy - as a subject or setting and experiment with cinema as an art and as a reflection on film history.

Jia Zhang-Ke had visited the museum in the past and enthusiastically welcomed the idea. In October 2025 we spent two days scouting some locations in Torino and exploring the museum in depth. I thought he wanted to shoot one or two sequences inside the museum as a tribute to our shared passion for the history of film, but when he sent me a first draft of the script I was totally surprised.

Reflecting his longstanding passion for the melodrama, *Torino Shadow* is a rich and complex narrative short revolving around geographical distance and elements that connect people, including cinema. With its concept that could be defined "when mobile meets Chinese shadows", it is an ideal way to promote the museum as a place that not only preserves the memory of cinema but also inspires new creations.

Torino Encounters

Jia Zhang-Ke's *Torino Shadow* is the latest instalment of Torino Encounters, an ongoing project of auteur short films initiated and commissioned by the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin, Italy. The first film, Heinz Emigholz's *Ecce Mole*, is a portrait of the building, and premiered at the New York Film Festival in 2025 before going on to screen at festivals worldwide. The next film in Torino Encounters, *Trailer For Dante's "Paradiso"* by Radu Jude, will premiere later in 2026.

Museo Nazionale del Cinema

Unique in Italy and among the most important film museums in the world, the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* is one of the most visited museums in Italy (760,000 visitors in 2025), thanks to its extremely rich heritage (more

than 3,300,000 items) and its astounding layout, articulated on several exhibition levels and developed in an upward spiral, following the building crescendo and overlapping different levels of reading.

Besides its permanent collections and exclusive exhibitions, *The Museo Nazionale del Cinema* has a large archive of films and has a rich program of restorations and editorial initiatives. Located next to the *Mole Antonelliana*, *Cinema Massimo* is a three-screening rooms complex with a rich and diversified programming.

Each year, the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* organizes the *Torino Film Festival*, *Festival CinemAmbiente* and *Lovers Film Festival*, as well as the *TorinoFilmLab*, the laboratory that supports talents from all over the world through training and development programs, supporting production and distribution.

Carlo Chatrian

'NEVER KNOWING WHERE YOU'RE HEADING': INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JIA ZHANG-KE

Interview by Tony Rayns

TR: Did you know before starting the film that Taishan and Turin (Torino) resemble each other visually? You bring out the resemblances by having Ah Zhen (Zhao Tao) encounter parallels between the two cities: shadow puppetry, firemen, moped scooters ...

JZK: I visited Turin for the first time about twenty years ago, to attend the Torino Film Festival. Before arriving, I'd heard that the city was where the legendary "Black Magic Triangle" and "White Magic Triangle" intersected, which added a sense of mystery to it. But when I actually set foot in Turin, the first thing that attracted me was its architectural style: the buildings in the *centro storico* ('historic center') are almost all connected by covered walkways. Moreover, the city has a neat, sequential layout of streets, almost barracks-like, which was quite different from other European cities I'd visited. This architectural style, characterized by the interconnected porticoes, left a deep impression on me.

Years later, when I decided to make this short film, my first idea was to tell the story of a Chinese immigrant living in Italy – her life and her relationship with cinema. I wanted to start the story from her hometown, some city in China. I immediately thought of Taishan in Guangdong province, because Taishan is famously the hometown of many overseas Chinese. Many of the Chinese laborers who went to San Francisco in the 19th century to build the railroads were from Taishan. And many of those who lived and worked abroad eventually returned to Taishan. As a result, the local architecture in Taishan was influenced: many of the houses built by these returning Chinese incorporate western styles. Also, since Guangdong is a rainy area, these buildings almost all feature connected covered walkways, which is very similar to Turin.

While we were exploring the local culture in Taishan, comparing it with what we'd seen in the Torino Film Museum, we came across shadow puppetry, an ancient form of screen performance which is also preserved in the museum. The Guangdong region, where Taishan is located, is well-known for its shadow puppet plays.

The resemblances between the cities go beyond architectural style. When it comes to people's daily lives, after decades of globalization, the forms and patterns of human life these days are almost universally similar. I knew nothing about the world outside China when I began making films nearly thirty years ago. But cinema has given me many opportunities to travel. And the greatest gain from these experiences has been to realize that human beings everywhere live much the same kind of life and share common emotions. That's one of the things I set out to show in the film.

TR: The film is a kind of love-letter to cinema, and you've cunningly drawn a line between cinema's precursors (shadow puppetry) and inheritors (online videogames). Can you say something about your overall sense of cinema's evolution?

JZK: When film was first invented, it was regarded as a novelty or sideshow – much like shadow puppetry in China which, despite its long history, had always been performed at markets and festive occasions. Both are illusions, a form of magic.

A while after cinema was invented, as the novelty of the technological magic wore off, the question came up: Is cinema an art?

Filmmakers responded by continuing to 'invent' the language of cinema. Film language became richer and more mature. When cinema became a way of observing the world, a form of emotional activity and, above all, a mode of philosophical reflection, it morphed from a "sideshow" to an "art".

At various stages of its development – more than once or twice – cinema has been challenged by new media. But I believe that each such challenge has, in fact, compelled us to keep re-examining the uniqueness and singularity of cinema: the very qualities that distinguish it from other media. Cinema is a constant process of reinvention, yet its philosophical and aesthetic values remain unchanged.

Today, with the continuous emergence of new media (such as short videos), we need to ask ourselves whether these new audiovisual forms – born out of cinema – have aesthetic and philosophical value. I try to explore this issue at the end of my short film: the protagonist looks at the world through her mobile phone, shooting fragmentary videos, and she arrives at an understanding of life, a humble philosophy born of looking at the world through a camera lens. And that, for her, is the discovery of cinema.

TR: At the same time, the film echoes some of your earlier films in showing a marriage coming under strain – and not only from external factors like geographical distance and economic circumstances. Why are you drawn to showing relationship difficulties so often?

JZK: Everyone's understanding of life, society and the self is never static. As we grow up, our self-awareness is constantly changing. No matter how close a relationship is, whether with family members or friends, individual differences in thought, perception and feelings are always in flux. And as these changes accumulate, they create increasing divergences in the ways that two people see the world. Such divergences often lead to conflict. I'm always interested in filming people in the midst of change. The conflicts that emerge from changes in emotion and understanding are one of the forms of drama that most fascinate me.

TR: Non-Chinese viewers won't notice, but Zhen and her husband Qiang mostly speak with their daughter in Putonghua (Mandarin) but switch easily between Putonghua and Cantonese when speaking to each other. Is this simply a matter of realism, or are you implying something about language?

JZK: Ah Zhen almost always uses Mandarin when she speaks with her daughter, because the girl is still in primary school. This reflects a common reality in China today: the younger generation tend to use Mandarin both in school and in daily life. This is true even in Guangdong (southern China), one of the regions where local dialects are best preserved. I think this is also why Ah Zhen sends her daughter to an evening class to learn traditional culture, the shadow puppetry.

We are all aware of this issue. The disappearance of local dialects signifies the loss of ways of thinking and expressing emotions, the loss of uniqueness, and the collapse of a linguistic community. When we all speak Mandarin and drop our dialects, it actually represents a uniformity in our spiritual dimension and a convergence in our way of thinking, because language itself is a way of thinking.

Chinese society had not yet opened up when Ah Zhen and Qiang were adolescents, and local dialects across different regions remained relatively intact. So when Ah Zhen is with her husband, even in an Italian-speaking environment, they occasionally use Cantonese. It's a natural expression of their cultural identity.

TR: The two leading men in the film (Qiang in Torino and the chef Ren in Taishan) are the two members of an indie band called Wu Tiao Ren. What led you to cast them? Is it Wu Tiao Ren performing on the soundtrack over the moped montage towards the end of the film?

JZK: The song that plays over that montage is "Jane falls in Love with John", a signature piece by Wu Tiao Ren. The names of the two main characters in the film are taken from the names of the lovers that song is about. I'm a fan of Wu Tiao Ren. They come from Guangdong, and their hometown is Chaozhou city, which is another major hometown for overseas Chinese, much like Taishan. Guangdong used to be known as a "world factory", a manufacturing center which attracted a massive number of migrant workers. The most successful songs by Wu Tiao Ren address the spiritual and emotional states of such ordinary factory workers, small business owners and young people. The band has a very keen eye, capturing the everyday life and emotional conditions of working people. They represent the grassroots. They are neither 'old school' nor fashionable, but they have somehow magically turned grassroots culture into a kind of fashion. Aside from my personal preferences, the main reason for casting them is that their music resonates perfectly with the story, as does their image.

TR: The brief quotations from films at the end understandably lean towards Italian classics, but also include a great Chinese film (Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town*), a great French film (Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*) and a great American film (Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*). Are these films part of a personal pantheon?

JZK: The films quoted at the end are all favorites of mine. To me, they're like lighthouses, one after the other. For an individual creator, making films often feels like sailing across an unknown, dark sea. The joy of it lies in reaching places we never knew we were heading for. In this journey of exploration, the films cited were often my lighthouses, guiding me forward, helping me to avoid losing my way. Taken together, they answer a question once posed by André Bazin: What is cinema?

Interview recorded in April 2026

JIA ZHANG-KE

Biography

Jia Zhang-Ke was born in Fenyang, Shanxi, in 1970 and graduated from Beijing Film Academy. His debut feature *Xiao Wu* won prizes in Berlin, Vancouver and elsewhere. Since then, his films have routinely premiered in the major European festivals. *Still Life* won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2006, and *A Touch of Sin* won the Best Screenplay in Cannes in 2013.

Filmography

Torino Shadow Cannes 2026, Special Screening

Caught by the Tides Cannes 2024, Competition

Swimming Out till the Sea Turns Blue (documentary)
Berlin 2020, Special Screening

Ash Is Purest White Cannes 2018, Competition

Mountains May Depart Cannes 2015, Competition

A Touch of Sin Cannes 2013, Best Screenplay

I Wish I Knew (documentary) Cannes 2010, Un Certain Regard

24 City Cannes 2008, Competition

Useless (documentary)
Venice 2007, Venice Horizons Documentary Award

Still Life Venice 2006, Golden Lion

Dong (documentary) Venice 2006, Horizon

The World Venice 2004, Competition

Unknown Pleasures Cannes 2002, Competition

In Public (documentary) Marseilles 2001, Grand Prix

Platform Venice 2000, Competition

Xiao Wu Berlin 1998, Wolfgang Staudte Award & Netpac Award

CAST

Starring
Zhao Tao

Co-starring
Mao Tao
Lu Xi
Ren Ke

Zhao Tao (as Ah Zhen)

Graduated from the Department of Chinese Folk Dance of Beijing Dance Academy, Zhao Tao has been acting in films since 2000. The film *Still Life*, which she starred in, won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2006. She then won the Best Actress Award at David di Donatello Awards in 2010 for her leading role in the Italian film *Io Sono Li*. She's the first Asian actress awarded this prize. She was later awarded the Grand Jury Prize for Best Performance for *Mountains May Depart* in Miami in 2015, and the Best Actress Award for *Ash is Purest White* in Chicago and at APSA in 2018. She is also one of the producers of Jia Zhang-Ke's documentary *Useless* and *Swimming Out till the Sea Turns Blue*, among which *Useless* won the Venice Horizons Documentary Award.

Selective filmography

Caught by the Tides by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2024
Toronto, TIFF Special Tribute Award

Ash is Purest White by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2018
Chicago, Best Actress
APSA, Best Actress
NSFC 2019, Best Actress (Runners-up)

Mountains May Depart by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2015
Miami, Grand Jury Prize for Best Performance

A Touch of Sin by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2013

Io Sono Li by Andrea Segre, 2012
David di Donatello Awards, Best Actress

I Wish I Knew by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2010

Ten Thousand Waves by Isaac Julien, 2010

24 City by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2008
Still Life by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2006
The World by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2004
Unknown Pleasures by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2002
Platform by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2000

Mao Tao (as Ah Qiang)

Born in Haifeng, Guangdong. In 2008, Mao Tao, as the lead singer and guitarist, founded the renowned Chinese rock band WU TIAO REN with Ren Ke in Guangzhou. As an actor, Mao Tao has appeared in films such as *Land of Broken Hearts*, *Tainted Love*, and *Scholars Under Fire*. In 2024, he starred in the film *Caught by the Tides*, which was selected in the main competition at the 77th Cannes Film Festival.

Appearance in

Caught by the Tides by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2024
Cannes 2024, Competition

Land of Broken Hearts by Wen Shipei, 2024
16th Macau International Film Festival

Moonstruck by Li Weiran, 2024
14th Beijing International Film Festival

100 Yards by Xu Haofeng & Xu Junfeng, 2023
Rotterdam 2024, Competition

Good Autumn, Mommy by Chen Shizhong, 2023
25th Shanghai international Film Festival, Competition

Aphasia by Li Bingyuan, 2024 (Short Film)
Pingyao 2023, Pingyao Corner

Around the World in 80 Days by Samuel Tourneux, 2021

Ren Ke (as Ah Ren)

Born in Haifeng, Guangdong. In 2008, Ren Ke, as the lead singer, accordionist, and guitarist, founded the renowned Chinese rock band WU TIAO REN with Mao Tao in Guangzhou. As an actor, Ren Ke has appeared in many film and television projects. In 2023, two films that he participated in were selected for the 73rd Berlin International Film Festival: the animated feature *Art College 1994* (as a voice actor), and *Absence* in the section of Encounters. In 2024, he starred in the film *Caught by the Tides*, which was selected in the main competition at the 77th Cannes Film Festival.

Appearance in

Caught By the Tides by Jia Zhang-Ke, 2024
Cannes 2024, Competition

Moonstruck by Li Weiran, 2024
14th Beijing International Film Festival

Art College 1994 by Liu Jian, 2023 (Animation)
Berlin 2023, Competition

Absence by Wu Lang, 2023
Berlin 2023, Encounters

100 Yards by Xu Haofeng & Xu Junfeng, 2023
Rotterdam 2024, Competition

Aphasia by Li Bingyuan, 2024 (Short Film)
Pingyao 2023, Pingyao Corner

Around the World in 80 Days by Samuel Tourneux, 2021

CREW

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THOMAS SHAO

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Coproduced by ZHANG DONG
MARK PERANSON
LAWRENCE XIAO

Associate producers JOSIE CHOU
MATTEO TORTONE
WAN JIAHUAN

A film by JIA ZHANG-KE

Written by JIA ZHANG-KE
WAN JIAHUAN

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Sound designer ZHANG YANG

Art directors CASPER LIANG JIAYAN
FAN QINGYI

Original music ZHANG YANG

Editor YANG CHAO

Production MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL CINEMA TORINO
JIA ZHANG-KE ART CENTER

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CLOSING QUOTATIONS

"I don't know what this pebble's purpose is, but it must have one."
La Strada (The Road), Federico Fellini, 1954

"Living in a small town with days that never change."
Spring in a Small Town, Fei Mu, 1948

"You talkin' to me?"
Taxi Driver, Martin Scorsese, 1976

"I don't reject their world, but their world lacks love."
Diary of a Country Priest, Robert Bresson, 1951

"You still don't know the weight of time, everything is in vain."
La Notte (The Night), Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961

"Everything can be solved, except death."
Bicycle Thieves, Vittorio de Sica, 1948

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