

Art films



From the definition provided at Art House (Definition), "Art house is a film genre which encompasses films where the content and style – often artistic or experimental – adhere with as little compromise as possible to the filmmakers' personal artistic vision."

Essentially, in layman's term, an art film is a director's baby with no cuts or forceful inclusions from producers as in most cases; the director himself is the producer. Its content is mostly serious, ideas free and independent and targeted towards a niche audience lacking mass appeal.

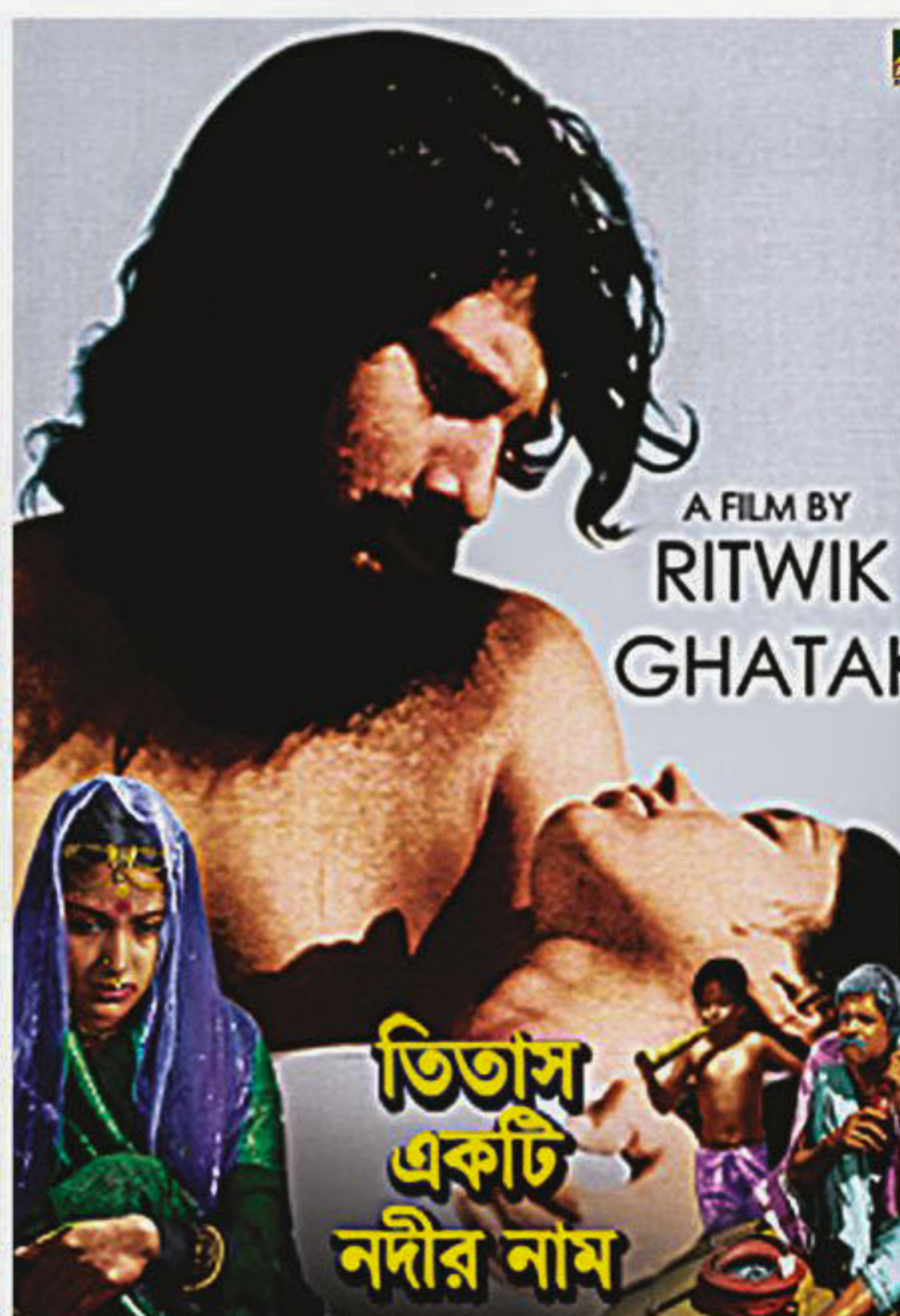
Art films are predominantly aesthetic, with symbolic and unconventional content and are not made with commercial profit in mind. With shoe-string budget and other constraints like lesser known actors, these hardly ever acquire blockbuster status barring a few. But they are an attempt to develop new ideas and to explore different narrative techniques with wide experimentation in cinematography.

These movies are debated time and again over cuppas for days on end and post-mortems and critiques are done to the last bone. And that is how the masses come to know of them.

To promote their masterpieces, art film directors rely heavily on the publicity generated from film reviews; discussion by film columnists, commentators, bloggers; and word-of-mouth comments. By sheer luck, if the film gets mentioned in the acclaimed film festivals, it is altogether different then.

Although, art films at times are considered better than the mainstream or commercial movies, such comparisons are downright naiveté. Sometimes, the fine line between the art and the commercial movies are broken and the two genres merge blurring distinctions.

In today's multiplex culture world, a film can be made artistically to make it commercially viable. However, film scholar, David



Bordwell describes art cinema as "a film genre, with its own distinct conventions".

The term art film was more widely used in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia, whereas in the mainland Europe, terms like auteur films and national cinema (German national cinema) were used instead. Again, in the Indian sub-continent, art films are generally referred to as parallel cinema.

Previously, art films were screened at theatres where the owners took it upon themselves to screen them or in special repertory cinemas in the USA. But with the mushrooming of multiplexes, slowly this has narrowed down. However, one needs a certain degree of knowledge and intellect to fully appreciate these movies and delve into them.

Film critic, Roger Ebert said about Chungking Express, a critically acclaimed 1994 art film, "largely a cerebral experience"

that one enjoys "because of what you know about film" in the Chicago Sun Times.

Europe takes the lead when art film is talked about. Italy with the silent L'Inferno in 1911 etched a mark in the art film firmament. Russia's Sergei Eisenstein, followed suit in inspiring European cinema with his Battleship Potemkin (1925), a revolutionary propaganda film where he experimented with film production to the hilt.

Avant-garde Spanish and French

movies, Hollywood art scene had mostly literary adaptations. But in the late '40s, after the end of World war II, when Europe had surged ahead in the new movement, Hollywood woke up to new ideas finding people more drawn towards the arthouse genre.

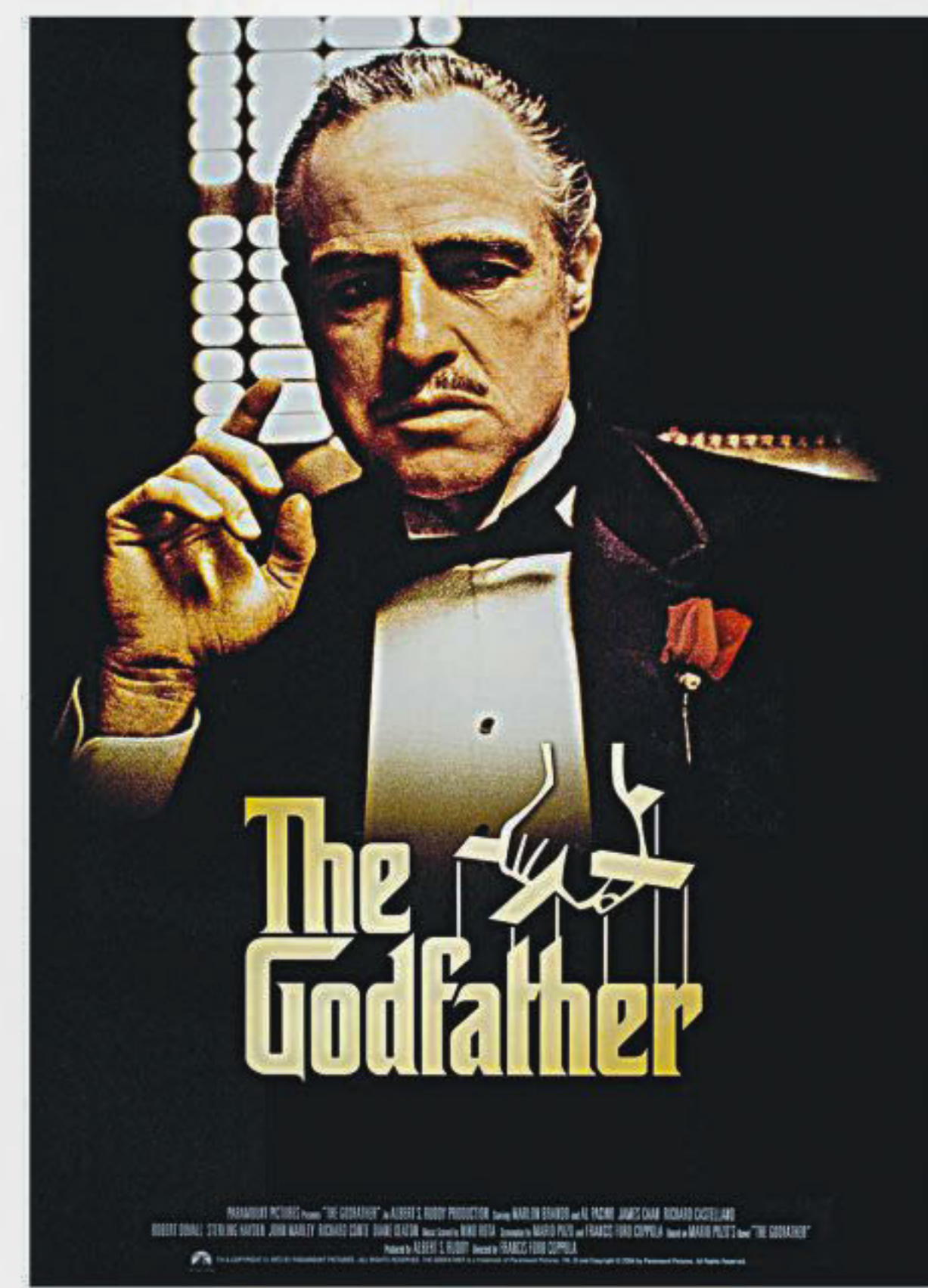
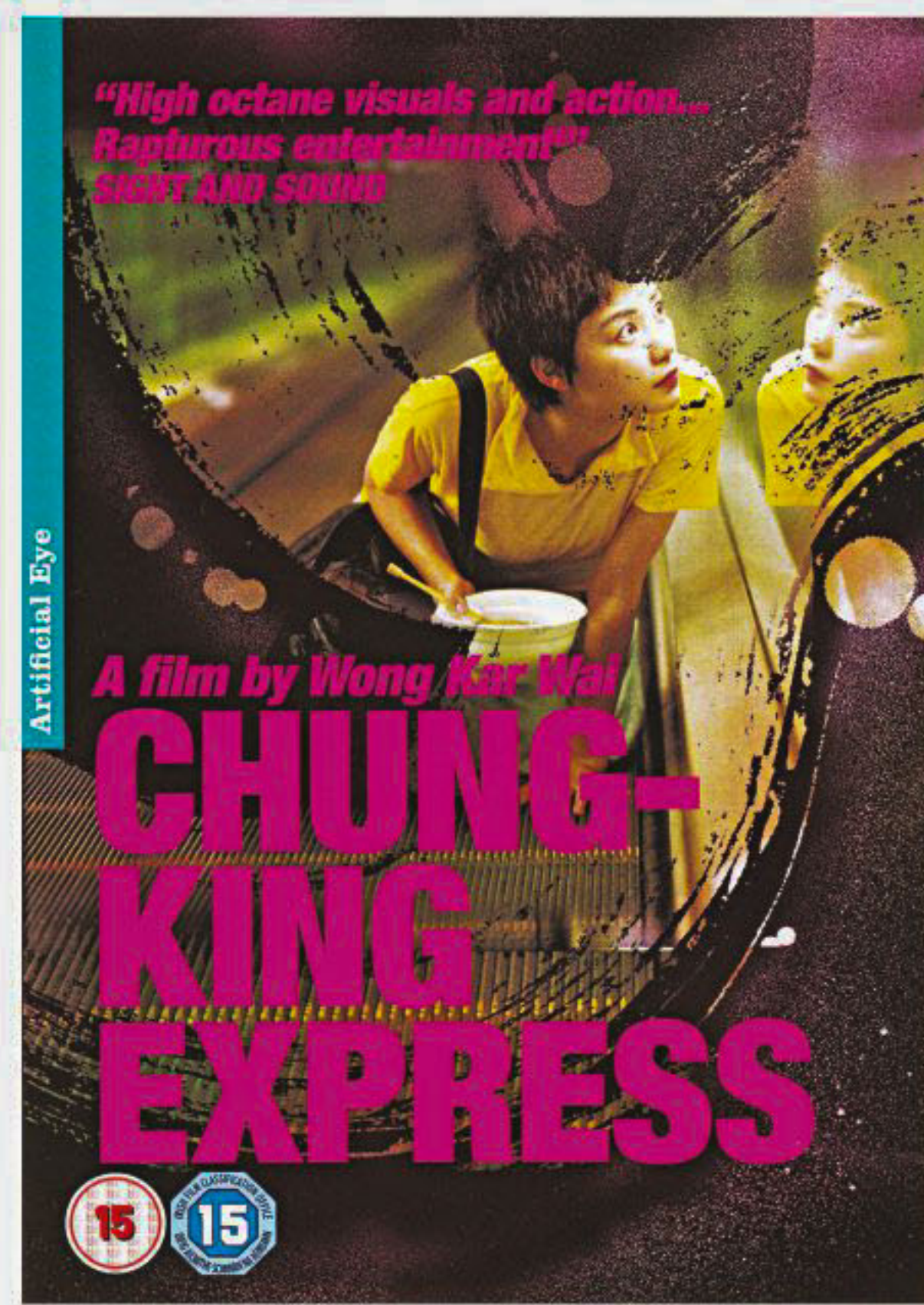
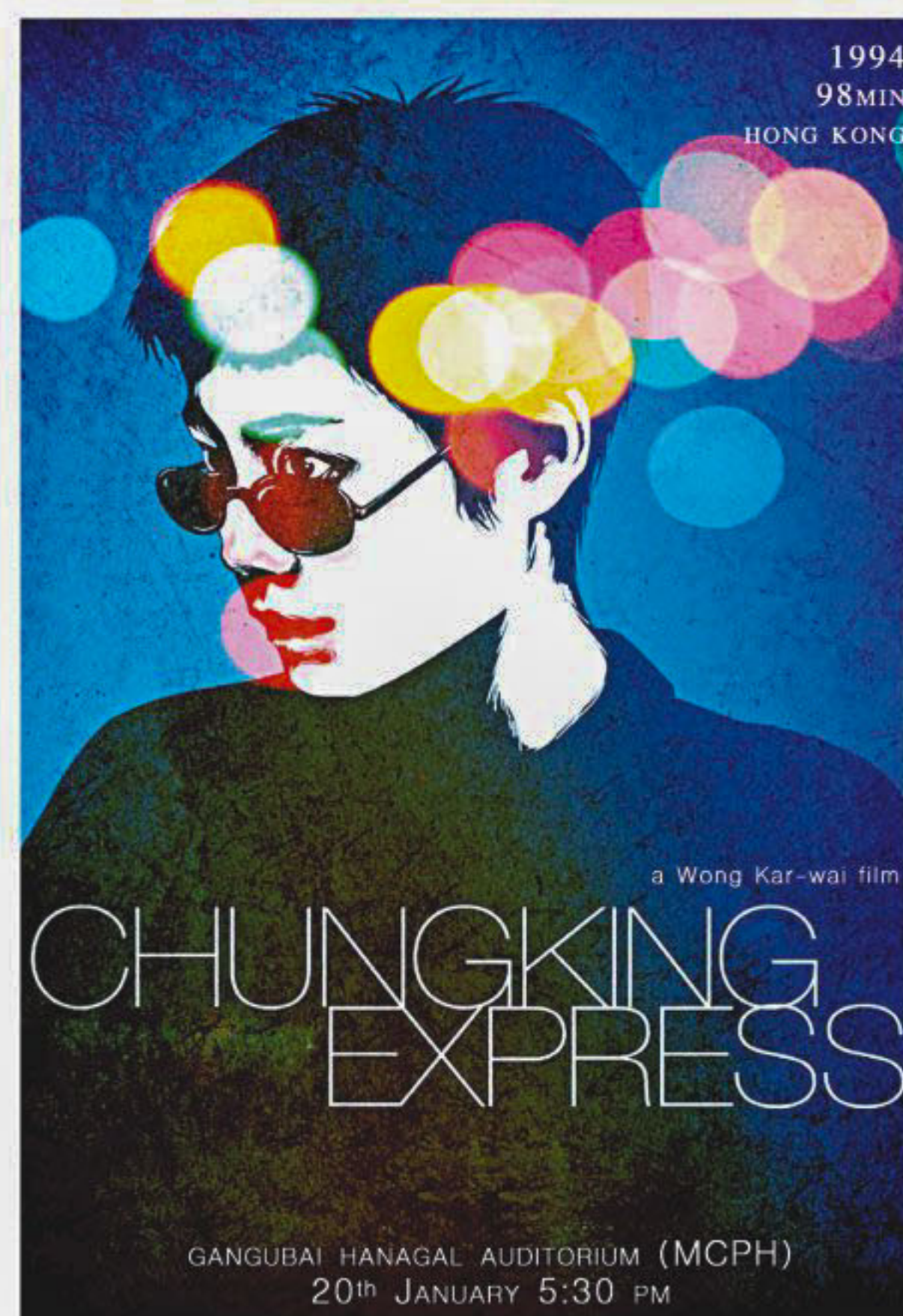
Although Italian Neorealist movement, French New Wave Movement continued into the '60s, the term art movies gained prominence in the USA more than in Europe then.

From the '80s to the beginning of the millennium, art film in the USA meant independent movies which was experimental but raked in moolah with huge funding from the film production houses. In 2007, Professor Camille Paglia argued in her article "Art movies: R.I.P." laments that "[a]side from Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather series, with its deft flashbacks and gritty social realism, [there is not] a single film produced over the past 35 years that is arguably of equal philosophical weight or virtuosity of execution to Bergman's The Seventh Seal or Persona".

THE SCENE IN ASIA

From the mid-1940s, when the Italian neorealist were producing classics like Open City (1945), Paisa (1946), and Bicycle Thief dubbing them as "conscious art film movement", early '50s saw some great filmmaking from Asia.

India then was witnessing an art-film movement in Bengali cinema, labelled as



filmmakers took art film a notch higher. Salvador Dalí and French Jean Cocteau use oneiric images in their experimentation creating amazing silhouettes. 1920s and 1930s saw French Cinéma pur, dominating the scene.

Cinema pur had Dadaists, who excelled in transcending narrative storytelling by creating a flexible montage from bourgeois traditions and Aristotelian notions.

When Europe was busy creating abstract

"Parallel Cinema" or "Indian New Wave". An alternative to crass commercial films, these dealt with serious topics, largely dwelling on realism, surrealism and naturalism, talking about the changing socio-political milieu.

This happened around the same time as French and Japanese New Wave. The most influential filmmakers of these times are Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Tapan Sinha, and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in the Indian subcontinent.