



King Hu

- Kong shan ling yu (Raining in the Mountain)

Film/Video

November 27, 2023
8 PM

PRESENTED BY

REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney
CalArts Theater

CaLARTS
California Institute of the Arts

We gratefully acknowledge that we operate on the traditional lands of the Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash peoples—including the Gabrieleño, Fernandeño, and Ventureño; members of the Takic and Chumashan language families; and other Indigenous peoples who made their homes in and around the area we now call Los Angeles. We honor their ancestors past, present, and future, and recognize their continued existence and contributions to our society.

King Hu

• Kong shan ling yu (Raining in the Mountain)

The legendary King Hu (1932-1997) set a new gold standard for the Chinese martial arts film (*wuxia pian*). REDCAT presents a restored version of one of his most stellar achievements, *Kong shan ling yu* (*Raining in the Mountain*) (1979). Set during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), in a Buddhist monastery experiencing both a power struggle and a struggle for the sacred Mahayana Sutras, Hu has staged precisely choreographed fights that echo figures of Chinese opera — bodies flying in the air become pure light and light itself becomes pure thought: spirited battles of wits, as well as a metaphor for Buddhist metaphysics. At the center of this sumptuous ballet is the amazing and delightfully evil Hsu Feng, described by critics as “the screen’s gravest, most ravishing woman warrior.”

Presented in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) with English subtitles.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

King Hu (Hu Jinquan) (1932-1997) was born in Beijing to a well-to-do family where he learned to master calligraphy at a young age. In 1949, as a student in Hong Kong, he found he could neither return to China nor receive money from his family, so he held a variety of jobs in the film industry. In 1958, he joined the major Shaw Brothers Studio where he worked as a set decorator, actor, scriptwriter, and assistant director. His friendship with another Chinese exile, Li Han-hsiang, led to their collaboration on a “plum opera,” *The Love Eterne* (1963) inspired by a beloved Chinese legend. The film became a huge success in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora.

Working solo, he made *Sons of the Good Earth* in 1965, and then his first martial arts (*wuxia pian*) film, *Come Drink with Me* (1966), which launched the career of Cheng Pei-Pei who, as “Golden Swallow,” is the first woman warrior (*xia nü*) in King Hu’s oeuvre. Hu left the Shaw Brothers in 1966 and moved to Taiwan where, with Li Han-hsiang, he opened an independent studio as well as a training school for young actors. This is how he discovered Hsu Feng and gave her a part in his next project, *Dragon Inn* (1967), which was a phenomenal hit. Hsu Feng made seven films with King Hu, most notably *A Touch of Zen* (1971), which won the Grand Prix de la Commission Supérieure Technique at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival. She also starred in *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973), *The Valiant Ones* (1975), *Raining in the Mountain* (1979), and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979)

King Hu’s focus on the woman warrior subverted the tropes of an often masculinist genre, made possible the careers of female martial artists such as Michelle Yeoh, and opened the way for a gender-based reinterpretation of the *wuxia pian*. In the last years of his life, despite his string of earlier successes, he had trouble finding producers for his films. He moved to Southern California in the 1980s, directed *The Juveniser* (1981), *All the King’s Men* (1981), the first episode of the Taiwanese-produced *The Wheel of Life* (1983), contributed to the Hong Kong film *Swordsman* (1990), and finally, after 40 years of exile, shot a film in the Beijing Film Studio, *The Painted Skin* (1992). He died at 65 in a hospital in Taipei while preparing a film about Chinese immigrant railroad workers. He is buried in California, thinking that he “belonged” neither to China nor to Hong Kong or Taiwan — being between several worlds, like the ghosts and monsters that populate the *wuxia pian*.