

Los Angeles Times

Wednesday, November 1, 2006

COPYRIGHT 2006 96 PAGES DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER 5

It's in L.A., but all the world is this fest's stage

The AFI film festival has a strongly international look, including some movies that are their countries' official Oscar submissions.

By RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ
Times Staff Writer

For the denizens of Hollywood, the term "global film" usually refers to their ability to send "Star Wars," "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "X-Men" to countries as disparate as China, Dubai, Belgium and Nigeria. For the 60,000 movie fans expected to descend on this year's AFI Fest, which kicks off tonight with the premiere of Emilio Estevez's "Bobby," the term will translate into movies from around the globe.

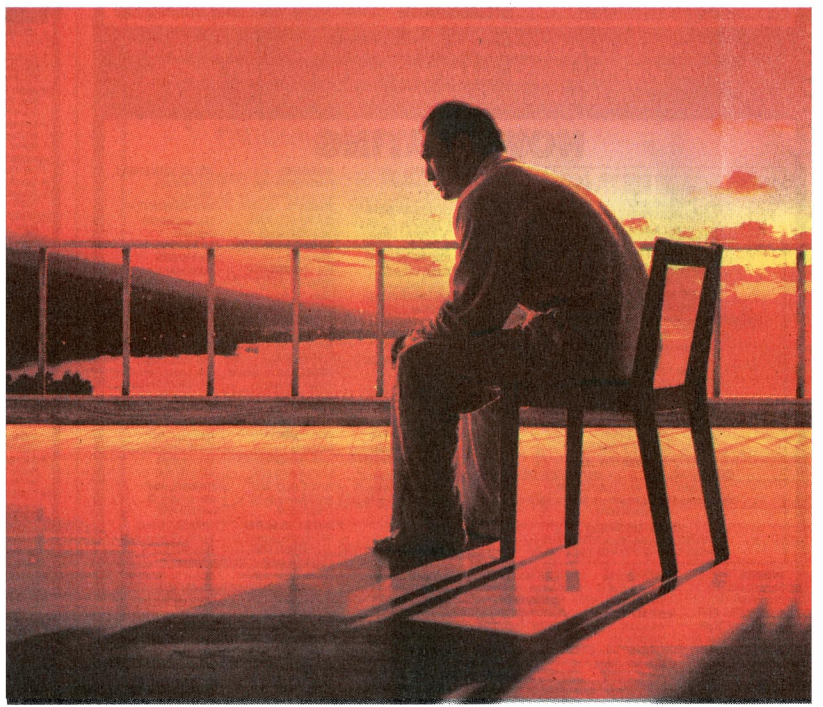
Films featured at the festival, which runs through Nov. 12 at the ArcLight cinema, offer a rare opportunity to see how the rest of the world lives, loves, laughs and dies, in fiction and nonfiction narratives from countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Den-

mark, Hungary, Brazil and most of Southeast Asia.

In its 20th year, AFI Fest, which is organized by the American Film Institute, is unveiling a spate of regional showcases, focusing on filmmakers from Africa, Latin America, Asia and the rest of the world.

Indeed, the festival, which comes just as the Oscar season begins in earnest, includes 11 films that are their countries' official Oscar submissions, including Algeria's "Days of Glory," about North Africans who fought for France during World War II; "Grbavica," from Bosnia and Herzegovina, which tells the story of a woman and her young daughter reeling from the aftermath of the war; and China's official submission, "The Curse of the Golden Flower," about nefarious palace intrigue during the Tang Dynasty. The film, which is having its worldwide premiere at AFI, is a much-anticipated reunion between director Zhang Yimou ("Raise the Red Lantern") and his muse and former lover, the Chinese superstar Gong Li.

"You often see it referred to as the most expensive film ever made, and [See AFI, Page E5]



FROM ASIA: An image from "Memories of Tomorrow," the tale of a businessman suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

AFI Fest

This time the world comes to Hollywood

[AFI, from Page E1]

when you see how astonishing the film is to look at, you can't believe your eyes," says festival director Christian Gaines, giddily describing visual effects involving hundreds of thousands of troops.

"The Curse of the Golden Flower" is just one of several strong Asian entries, which include "Memories of Tomorrow," executive produced by and starring "Last Samurai's" Ken Watanabe as a businessman suffering early-onset Alzheimer's, and the horror film "The Host," currently a sensation in Asia.

Gaines and his team have selected the 147 films screening from more than 3,500 submissions. As he points out, while there has been a general decline in the total number of people going to the movies, "film festivals enhance the communal celebration of going to the movies and allow you to see a great film that you may not have a chance to see at any other time and place, depending on its potential for theatrical distribution."

To lure the uninitiated, AFI has seeded the festival — in which the Los Angeles Times is a presenting media partner — with a handful of high-profile would-be Oscar contenders, including Pedro Almodóvar's "Volver," Peter O'Toole's elegiac swan song "Venus" and Harvey Weinstein's Oscar horse, "Bobby," which tells the story of the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy at L.A.'s Ambassador Hotel in 1968. It also will offer gala presentations for a trio of high-profile graduates of the AFI graduate film program, writer-directors David Lynch and Darren Aronofsky and director Ed Zwick. "I don't think it was that



ULRICH LEBEUF AFI Fest
BUZZ: Emilie Dequenne in "Fissures," in which a woman probes her mother's slaying.

we needed to find more AFI alums," Gaines jokes. "We just saw [Lynch's] 'Inland Empire' and loved it, and we saw [Aronofsky's] 'The Fountain' and loved it."

Zwick is offering a talk about the making of "Blood Diamond," his upcoming film about the illegal African diamond trade. It stars Leonardo DiCaprio.

As in many festivals, there is a competitive arena, and buzzed-about entries include "Fissures," from France, about a sound engineer investigating her mother's murder; Israel's "Frozen Days," about an Internet rendezvous torpedoed by a suicide bombing; and the documentary "Blindsight," about six blind teenagers who climb Mt. Everest.

This year's jury, however, has to be one of the most idiosyncratic panels assembled in recent memory, and it includes critic Jack Anderson, writer-director Don Roos, Daryl Hannah and "That '70s Show" star Wilmer Valderrama.

rachel.abramowitz@latimes.com