IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE

당신얼굴 앞에서

A film by Hong Sangsoo

85 min/South Korea/Korean with English subtitles/1.85:1/Colour/2021/Cert 12A

World Premiere – Cannes Film Festival 2021 - Official Selection

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Synopsis

After years living abroad, former actress Sangok (Lee Hyeyoung) is back in Seoul, staying with her sister Jeongok (Cho Yunhee) in her high-rise apartment. Whilst Sangok becomes re-accustomed to life in Korea, the sisters have a lie-in, enjoy breakfast in a cafe and visit a restaurant owned by Jeongok's son. But as the detail of Sangok's day accrue (a spill on her blouse, an encounter at her childhood home), it becomes clear that there is much she is not revealing. These mysterious circumstances may have something to do with her decision to meet with film director Jaewon (Kwon Haehyo) to discuss her return to acting.

She meets the director in a bar that's closed, so order in a Chinese meal, plus ample Chinese liquor, where they both flirt and make unfulfillable promises.

Lee Hyeyoung is very well known in Korea, but this was her first role for the prolific Hong Sangsoo.

In Front of Your Face suggest that perhaps the most important things in this life are also the most immediate.

Further information and downloads **here**
Photo set download **here**

Crew

Written, Directed and Produced by	**Hong Sangsoo**
Production Manager, Stills Photographer	**Kim Minhee**
Production Assistant	**Lee Soyoung**
Cinematography, Editing, Music	**Hong Sangsoo**
Sound	**Seo Jihoon**
Production	**Jeonwonsa Film Co.**

Cast

Lee Hyeyoung
Cho Yunhee
Kwon Haehyo
Shin Seokho
Kim Saebyeok
Ha Seungguk
Seo Younghwa
Lee Eunmi
Kang Yiseo
Kim Siha

South Korea 2021 / 85 minutes / 1:1.85 / 2.0

HONG SANGSOO:

Hong Sangsoo was born in Seoul on October 25th, 1960. He studied at Chung-Ang University in South Korea before moving to the U.S., where he graduated from California College of Arts & Crafts with a BA and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with an MA.

He made his first feature film in 1996 and since has made twenty-seven feature films and five short films. In 2004 his fifth film, WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN, featured in Cannes Competition and since then has gathered many awards. In 2010 he received the Un Certain Regard Prize in Cannes for HAHAHA, as well as the Silver Leopard Award in 2013 for Best Director, in the Locarno International Film Festival for OUR SUNHI. In 2015 he won the Golden Leopard in Locarno for RIGHT NOW WRONG THEN. His film THE WOMAN WHO RAN won him the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2020. His latest film THE NOVELIST'S FILM won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize in Berlin.

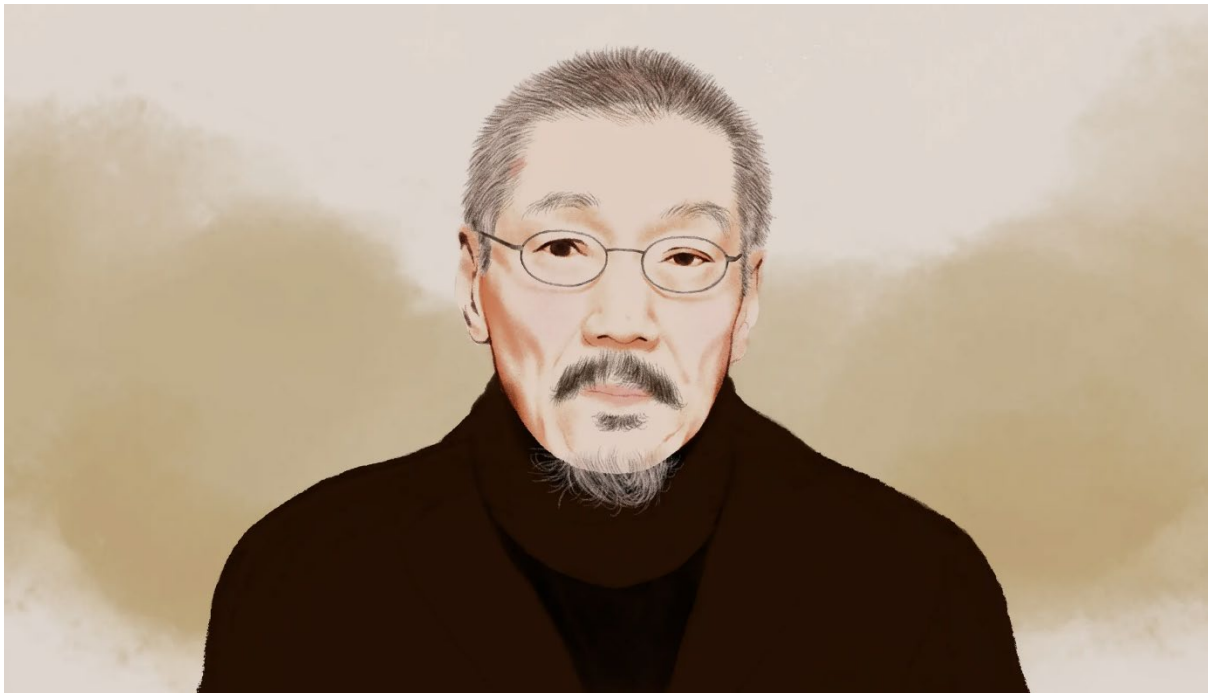
Most recently he has had an extensive retrospective of his films screened at the Lincoln Centre in New York City, programmed by leading film critic and writer Dennis Lim. He is currently teaching at Konkuk University in Seoul.

Filmography:

2022:	THE NOVELIST'S FILM
2021:	IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE
2021:	INTRODUCTION
2020	THE WOMAN WHO RAN
2019	HOTEL BY THE RIVER
2018	GRASS
2018	CLAIRE'S CAMERA
2017	THE DAY AFTER
2017	ON THE BEACH AT NIGHT ALONE
2016	YOURSELF AND YOURS
2015	RIGHT NOW, WRONG THEN
2014	HILL OF FREEDOM
2013	OUR SUNHI
2013	NOBODY'S DAUGHTER HAEWON
2012	IN ANOTHER COUNTRY
2011	THE DAY HE ARRIVES
2010	OKI'S MOVIE
2010	HAHAHA
2009	LIKE YOU KNOW IT ALL
2008	NIGHT AND DAY
2006	WOMAN ON THE BEACH
2005	A TALE OF CINEMA

2004 WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN
2002 TURNING GATE
2000 VIRGIN STRIPPED BARE BY HER BACHELORS
1998 THE POWER OF KANGWON PROVINCE
1996 THE DAY A PIG FELL INTO A WELL

Hong Sangsoo Knows if You're Faking It
The New Yorker Interview, by Dennis Lim
May 15, 2022



You've taught film for many years, and we see filmmakers who are also teachers in your movies. I'm wondering what teaching means to you. Do you enjoy it? How does it relate to your practice as a filmmaker?

I teach for money. [*Audience laughs.*] When I went into the classroom, I used to recite a mantra: they are here to hear something from me, and I have to do my best. From the beginning, I knew that I wouldn't be able to make a film that could support me economically. I needed a second job. It was quite easy and ideal for me to have a teaching position at a university. I also enjoy being with much younger people. In my classroom these days, the students are twenty-one, twenty-five, twenty-eight. The way I teach, I listen to their own stories—that's the good part.

What's the bad part?

You know—life. Life has many different aspects.

How long have you been teaching? Did you take breaks?

I took a long break. I got fed up, so I quit. After four, five years, I needed money. Luckily, somebody offered me a job.

Now you teach at Konkuk, a private university in Seoul. Is it filmmaking classes?

Animation and filmmaking together, in one department.

Could you give us a sense of how a class works? You told me the other night that you never show your students any films.

My films?

No, *any* films. Or do you show them some films?

I just don't like to.

So, they don't watch any films in your class?

I tell them, "I want you to be sincere about making films. And work with true interest. If you find true interest, then you can overcome stupid temptations to copy something or to boast." I let them write something, read it in front of people, comment on what their classmates said, and then I let them finish and shoot it. That's all I do.

Do your students ever emulate your very particular way of working? I was talking to a Columbia student who said that he has changed his way of working now because of your process—he doesn't write scripts until he finds people and places. Are your students encouraged to work this way?

In the classroom, I usually don't like talking about my films. Sometimes it comes out naturally, but I never encourage it. That way of working comes from my temperament. I didn't plan it this way. I just had this strong urge to go in this direction. I don't know if it can be beneficial or right for students. But I'm kind of an old person now. I've made some films—they can look at my films and they can try.

So, your idea is that every student should find their own method, based on—

I don't think we have to worry about things like that. Because, if you are a born artist, you don't have to worry about anything.

How do you know if you're born—

Just by looking at him. He's working on something. He never doubts. Just doing something all the time. He never stops.

Two young actors you've worked with recently, Shin Seokho and Park Miso, are former students. They're the leads in "Introduction." I read an interview where Shin Seo-ho said he thought he was a crew member until you introduced him to the cast as an actor. And he didn't realize until after the shoot ended that he was the lead actor.

That's kind of true. He used to work as a production person. I got to know him a little better and then, one day, I wanted to use him as an actor. Why I choose a certain person is very, very complicated—I can never generalize. I don't want to work with someone who has qualities I cannot bear. In the beginning of my filmmaking, I was trying to put up with certain . . .

Actors, you mean? Like, egos?

There are just certain things that I don't want to see. At that time, I thought I had to endure and find the good things, and that's what I did. As time passed, more and more I wanted to work with people who have good qualities from my point of view, even if they don't really understand what they're doing in the film. When I look at them later, in a different setting, their interviews, I don't want to feel like I shouldn't have worked with them.

How was it that Shin Seokho didn't realize that he was the lead actor until after the film ended?

Because of the way I work. I finish a day of shooting, and then I think about the next day based on what I shot. With "Introduction," even more so.

Because it was a three-part film.

Usually, when I cast, I know who the main character will be. In this case, I didn't know. I was just working on the first part, which, luckily, ends with the snow falling. I thought it could be just a short film and left it there. When I went to the Berlin Film Festival, the thought came up, Maybe I can bring him there and shoot something. They said O.K., and we shot for three days. After that, I knew I had to enlarge it into a feature-length film.

Shin Seokho also said that, in class, you would reprimand the students who would try to "fake movies." What does it mean to fake a movie, and how do you know when an impulse is sincere or fake?

It's very easy. You just keep asking two or three questions. Eventually, they admit that it's fake. Everyone can get to the conclusion by asking about it seriously. Then they know they're faking it. They're not working with what I call true interest.

When did you find your true interest?

Adolescence. I said to myself, I would rather die.

Then what?

Then doing something fake.

Do you remember what you were like as a student?

I don't know. I never really think about my past very seriously. But some people from my college years—they said I was crazy. Then they gave me some examples that I don't remember. They said I shaved my head one day, all of a sudden. I don't remember that.

Your parents had a film-production company. I'm wondering if getting into film was something that you thought about at an early age. You didn't study film to begin with.

I think it's what they call accidents. I didn't take my entrance exam when I was nineteen, twenty. I was just goofing around. One day, this guy, who is quite a famous theatre-play director, came to our place because of my mother. He got drunk; I had to clean up the mess. I kind of liked him because he was a crazy guy. I was sitting beside him, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am doing nothing." He said, "I think you would be good for theatre." He left and I thought about it and it sounded very interesting. I felt maybe I could do it.
So I went into the theatre department. Then I had a fight with a senior student. The atmosphere there then was like the military, especially that department. It was very strict. You could never disobey orders. Their justification was always: you have to unite, you have to get rid of the ego. So they did all kinds of strange things. One day, this student asked me to do something, and I said no in front of everyone. He got so pissed off, and we had a really terrible scene. So I knew I had to quit the school.
And then I thought I could go into filmmaking because it was the same department. I had this feeling that maybe filmmaking was deeper. What I mean is that, even though you keep digging and digging, you will never see the bottom. That's how I started filmmaking. So it's an accident—maybe an accident caused by providence.

After studying film in Korea, you decided to study in the U.S.—at the California College of Arts and Crafts and then at the Art Institute of Chicago, which are both art schools that have film departments and are interdisciplinary in their approach. How did you end up in the Bay Area and then in Chicago?

Another accident, but a lucky one, looking back. I didn't know I wanted to get out of that country at that time. Then I saw this very small article that said, "Even though you didn't finish military service, you can still go abroad to study and come back and do it later." There was a change of the law.

That same day, I went to this company that helps with college applications. I went there without telling my mother or anyone and asked them to help me get admission to any U.S. school around [a specific] area.

You picked California?

Probably, and some other place, too. The important thing was that it was the fastest one. Conditional admission was fine, too; I could do some English work there and start regular classes later. I was very impulsive.

It was in Chicago that you had your encounter with Cézanne and his apple paintings, which you've described as a kind of lightning-bolt moment.

I'm grateful for the place, because that's where I met Cézanne, who, for me, was the greatest. I saw this apple painting ["The Plate of Apples"] for the first time in an art museum. I was a student, so I had a free pass. I was standing there talking to myself, like, "This is enough. I don't need anything more. It still is the greatest." I didn't analyze it, but, naturally, I ask myself: why? Maybe his way of proportionalizing the abstract and the concrete is just right for me. I think that's why, when I see his paintings, I never get bored. I can keep looking at them. They're very fresh all the time. With other artists, I get bored as soon as I can see their point of view, their intention, their style—O.K., it's good, but that's it. But, for me, Cézanne is different—always fresh, always something more.

I like that you identify this as the defining quality, because I find it in your work, this balance between the concrete and the abstract. Are there filmmakers who you feel achieve that?

I don't think I found this similar line of division or proportion. I have a number of directors whom I really love, but they are different.
In a way, Bresson's films also have something quite material and quite intangible.
I could give a long talk about Bresson, Jean Renoir, [Éric] Rohmer, even John Ford. Luis Buñuel, I like him very much. I cannot generalize. There are directors I just love, and that has never changed.

These are directors you discovered in your twenties?

Until I got to the Art Institute, in Chicago, I was not in a normal state. I think I was too emotional; my mind was not clear enough to start so-called studying. When I was in Chicago, I suddenly felt very clear; my mind was clear, and then I saw the Cézanne painting and I also saw Robert Bresson's "Diary of a Country Priest." When I saw it, I was so happy, because it's kind of a narrative film, but it reaches a certain level that I had never experienced. That gave me real encouragement—O.K., maybe I can make a film with a narrative.

And, before that, you were not making narrative films.

I was making very strange short films.

I read that your thesis film was called "Beef." You don't show these films anymore.

I had to shoot something and came to the idea of this woman eating steak in a sunny apartment, which was mine. I asked the school art department if I could hire a nude model, because I want her to eat steak naked. The school gave me a number and I called and made an appointment. She was from Israel. I met her, and we were on the way to my apartment, and I explained, "You are going to eat steak," and she said, "I'm a vegetarian." [*Audience laughs.*] So we stopped by the market and I bought her an apple. I explained, "Tell me about your experience that made you a vegetarian." She was naked and holding

the red apple, kind of smiling, talking about this episode. All the time my camera movement is very close-up, so her body looks like flesh. And then she bites the apple and smiles. The students who saw it didn't like it. Some female students yelled at me.

You kept the title "Beef," even though she was eating an apple.

This is the first time I've thought about that. I never thought about changing the title. Maybe this is the reason some female students didn't like it.

Studying in the U.S. was not that common for Korean filmmakers of your generation. Do you think of this as an important experience? Cross-cultural contact and miscommunication are important in some of your films. I think of "Night and Day" or "In Another Country."

One of the most important elements of my being abroad was that, for the first time, I felt comfortable. Since I was quite young, I didn't feel comfortable with many things. That's why I started drinking heavily and smoking heavily and all kinds of crazy stuff when I was very young. In California, it was green grass all around, very nice weather. It was so nice. I think that's the biggest thing for me—just being away, feeling kind of free, even though inside you're not free, as you know. Only years later, I had a clearer mind and I found Cézanne and Bresson.

In early interviews you said that, for many years, you carried around Bresson's "Notes on the Cinematograph." Is that a book you still think about?

Not really, but, for five years, I actually had that book with me all the time. That book doesn't start from the conventions of cinema. It starts from his own honest look at the medium. His conclusions, sometimes, I don't agree with. But his attitude of asking questions about film is so nice.

Your films are different, but many of his ideas are relevant to your practice. The book is so much about making do with what is available. One of my favourite lines is when he advises filmmakers to avoid big subjects: "Avoid subjects that are too vast or too remote, in which nothing warns you when you are going astray."

I like that sentence. Great book. Also [Luis] Buñuel's autobiography, Jean Renoir's autobiography—great in different ways.

Would you write a book?

No. Not right now, anyway.

Two nights in a row, we had questions from the audience about reality as you see it, as it relates to your films. The first night, you talked about how reality is a concept that covers your eyes. The second night, someone asked about reality again, and you talked about how two people can never agree on what reality is. It made me think of a quote of yours from nearly twenty years ago: "People tell me that I make films about reality. They're

wrong. I make films based on structures that I have thought up." Does that still apply today?

About structures, I would say that differently, but, about reality, yes, still. Should I talk about reality?

By all means.

If two people talk for a hundred years about very small things and can never be sure what is happening inside the other person, that means it's impossible to have a concept such as reality that's a valid one. It's a word we made up out of some necessity; sometimes it's very convenient because we feel we are in community, we are understanding. On a practical level, we need that. But reality is a different thing. Life, phenomena, whatever—it's always a billion times more complex and mysterious than anything we come up with in a logical sentence. It's impossible to capture what is going on. Even if I want to describe what I feel right now, ten seconds of my experience, it will take billions of years. One person can never describe, so-called objectively, one reality. So we just use the word for convenience. But, once you get rid of it, it's very comfortable. Like the word "consistency"—I don't know what it is. I've never been consistent. All my life, people said I should be consistent. Who said that being consistent is good? I don't think it's good, nor is it possible.