

## re: film

Based on an Akutagawa Prize-winning novel by Takami Ito, the film begins as a dryly funny flight of fancy but takes a dreamily serious, poignant turn as the hero gains in knowledge, but can't give up his ideal of the perfect woman he thinks — or imagines? — he once knew.

which was the one he'd actually proposed to.

An illustrator-turned-director who made her feature debut with 2007's teen drama "Remon no Koro (The Graduates)," Iwata evidences a surreal visual flair in the early scenes especially, as in the dreamy shot of

**Dead ringer: Teruhiko (Takayuki Yamada) awakes after an accident unable to remember to which girl he'd intended to propose.** ©2011 KINO FILMS/KINOSHITA MANAGEMENT CO.,LTD

revolving shadows resolving into spinning ice skaters to injured Teruhiko's woozy eyes.

She also has fun with the oddball characters and their absurd situations without turning them into total jokes.

see, are all winners in their own sweetly flawed ways. But which is The One? How to decide?

Somehow Teruhiko has to, or decisions will be made for him, won't they? Romance is like that, whether you remember it or not.

## Understated movie sets Bruegel's masterpiece in motion

### The Mill and the Cross

Rating: ★★★★★

Director: Lech Majewski

Running time: 92 minutes

Language: English and a little Spanish (subtitled in Japanese)

Reviewed by Kaori Shoji

OPENS DEC. 17

**B**ombarded as our brains are with visual images from digital screens that dominate most aspects of life, an encounter with "The Mill and the Cross" triggers a kind of shock reaction.

A film that feeds on its own absolute quietude, "The Mill and the Cross" exudes a contemplative ambience that explains nothing and expresses volumes. Directed by Poland's Lech Majewski and adapted from a novel (same title) by Michael Francis Gibson, it transports the viewer inside Pieter Bruegel the Elder's famed painting "The Way to Calvary."

The Flemish master lived and worked in the mid-16th century at a time when Flanders was occupied by Spain and his country's Protestants were persecuted by direct orders from the Inquisition. Bruegel never protested outright, but he was said to have been heavily influenced by the dark, demonic Hieronymus Bosch, who weaved

themes of torture and insanity into powerfully detailed paintings featuring hundreds of suffering people.

"The Way to Calvary," too, is densely populated, and the central figure (though seen at a distance) is Christ carrying the cross to Golgotha. Instead of Roman soldiers, however, Jesus is being escorted by the Spanish militia and Mary is wearing the garments of Flemish peasantry.

"The Mill and the Cross" has just three speaking parts: Bruegel (Rutger Hauer); his patron and art collector, Nicolaes Jonghelinck (Michael York); and Mary (Charlotte Rampling), who represents the mother figure of both Bruegel and Christ.

Bruegel's only characteristic in the film is an apparent need to start and complete "The Way to Calvary," while director Majewski turns the lens to his peasant characters — who resemble and represent the original figures in the painting. He deploys some gorgeously rendered digital effects but relies mostly on his actors, careful location work and set productions. The result is a fiendishly excellent work of art in its own right — you actually see the people in the painting come to life, going about their day and being captured in the painting.

There's a breathtaking opening sequence of dawn breaking at a 16th-

century Dutch flour mill; the titular building is seen at the far right of the painting, dominating the top of a hill. Inside, the corpulent miller and his equally broad wife get up from a bed of straw, don their heavy wooden clogs and, without a word, chew on a loaf of bread left on a table. The miller's assistant sleeps on the floor but gets into his clogs and climbs a spiral stairway that's terribly long and terrifyingly steep — up to the top of the mill house to start the windmill. Below, the massive stone wheel begins to turn and grind, and the noise is deafening.

Bruegel likens the mill to the House of God, lording it over the countryside. Without the mill there's no bread, and for the peasants, bread is life itself. There are brief but frequent interludes where people offer up a prayer of thanks before breaking hunks off hard, round loaves. The mill, however, is not some version of the kingdom of heaven, and the miller is certainly no benevolent father figure. He never says a word, doesn't budge from the stone wheel. The common thread among the characters of this painting is this: No one does anything except his or her designated job.

This apathy comes to the fore when a young peasant couple, living in conjugal bliss with their calf in a tiny barn, go into a

**Unstill life: With CG effects animating Pieter Bruegel's famed 1564 painting "The Way to Calvary," the peasant class of mid-16th-century Flanders leap off the canvas in "The Mill and the Cross."**

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field and are suddenly accosted by a band of Spaniards. They yank the man away from the woman, beat him senseless, then tie him to a wheel and hoist the whole contraption on top of a tree (a favored execution method of the Inquisition). There, crows pluck at his eyes while his widow sobs far below and all the other peasants in the area stop what they're doing to gaze at the tragedy.

Majewski makes no distinction between Christ's execution and that of the peasant man, nor the everyday goings-on of the

Flemish countryside and the pained monologue of Mary, who must witness the tortured death of her son without being able to help him. The emotive level of the film is maintained at a discreet low, and the overall impression is that a lot happens, but nothing makes any impact. It's as if Bruegel has trapped the inherent sadness of his subject under the intricate strokes of his brush, and what we see — in the film and in the painting — is a precise and informative chart showing the immense cruelty of man.

feature. And the Iranian drama "A Separation" was picked for Best Foreign Film.

The year's Special Award was given posthumously to the prolific Chilean-born filmmaker Raoul Ruiz, who died in August, shortly after the U.S. release of his acclaimed "Mysteries of Lisbon."

The New York Film Critics Circle, a body of 33 New York-based critics founded in 1935, announced its annual vote on Twitter for the first time. The group describes its awards as "a principled alternative to the Oscars, honoring esthetic merit in a forum that is immune to commercial and political pressures." The group last year chose the Facebook drama "The Social Network" as best picture.

Among the films snubbed by the critics were Alexander Payne's "The Descendants," Martin Scorsese's "Hugo" and Steven Spielberg's "War Horse."

The awards will be handed out at a ceremony Jan. 9.

### Japanese filmmaker honored

KYODO

The Japanese film "Saudade," directed by Katsuya Tomita, won the grand prize Monday at the 33rd Festival of Three Continents in Nantes, France, the film's distributor in Japan said Tuesday.

Movies from Asia, Africa and Latin America are subject to screening at the festival, which awarded in 1998 the same Golden Hot Air Balloon top prize to "After Life," directed by Japan's Hirokazu Koreeda.

Saudade, set in Kofu, Yamanashi Prefecture, illustrates the reality in a local town through the lives of the protagonist, who works at construction sites, and the immigrants surrounding him.

The 39-year-old director's movie also won the critics' award at a film festival in Locarno, Switzerland, in August.