



# GOLDEN SLUMBERS

A Film by Davy Chou  
An Icarus Films Release

2012 / 96 minutes / France-Cambodia / An Icarus Films Release

**“An elegantly assembled and deeply moving remembrance of Cambodian cinema. Inventively directed, immaculately lensed and mak[es] excellent use of archival soundtrack songs by legendary performers. The choice of material and manner in which the final images are presented is pure poetry.” –Variety**

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## **FILM SYNOPSIS**

Between the early 1960s and 1975, Cambodia was home to a vibrant film industry that produced more than 400 features. When the Khmer Rouge seized control of the country, they halted production, demolishing the industry along with most of the rest of the country's cultural life. Cinemas were closed, prints destroyed, and the filmmakers, actors, and screenwriters who were not able to flee the country were slaughtered.

Davy Chou's *GOLDEN SLUMBERS* resurrects this cinema's heyday. Though very few of the films from this period have remained intact, Chou uses the soundtracks, advertisements, posters and lobby cards to recreate his subjects' shared memories of a golden era.

The film contains interviews with the era's surviving artists, including directors Ly Bun Yim, Ly You Sreang, and Yvon Hem, and actor Dy Saveth. Two dedicated cinephiles—one of whom says he can remember the faces of film stars better than those of his brothers and sisters—recall plotlines and trade film trivia. Chou also takes us inside Phnom Penh's shuttered movie palaces, now transformed into karaoke bars, restaurants, and squats.

These reminiscences and recreations testify that while the most of the films of this era have vanished, their memory endures for an entire generation of Cambodians, leaving a complex legacy for today's youth to inherit.

## **SELECTED FESTIVALS**

2012 Berlinale International Film Festival

2012 San Francisco International Film Festival

2012 New York Asian Film Festival

2012 Santa Barbara International Film Festival

2012 Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival 2012

2012 Hong Kong International Film Festival

2012 Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival

2012 Milan International Film Festival

2012 Tokyo International Film Festival  
2012 Seattle International Film Festival 2012 Bangkok Film Festival  
2012 Melbourne International Film Festival  
2012 Sydney International Film Festival  
2013 Seoul Independent Documentary Film and Video Festival  
2013 Singapore Southeast Asian Film Festival  
2013 Season of Cambodia Arts Festival at Lincoln Center, New York

## **IN THE PRESS**

"While *Golden Slumbers* spotlights Chou's discovery of his filmmaking lineage, the young filmmaker is clearly looking to the future." —*Film Comment*

"Instructive and poignant viewing...a fragmentary tapestry of memory that says a lot about the traces cinema leaves on our lives, and the energy that keeps stories burning even after the medium that conveyed them has been lost." —*Screen Daily*

"A mournful testament to a vibrant piece of global film history almost entirely wiped out of existence by war, Davy Chou's *Golden Slumbers* finds the few Cambodians who can recall the 1960-75 heyday of that nation's cinema and tenderly listens to their stories"  
—*Hollywood Reporter*

"A séance of sorts, summoning the spirits of films past and finding remnants in the present through the reminiscences of surviving filmmakers and actors and, poignantly, through song." —*Center for Asian American Media*

## DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY



Davy Chou is a French Cambodian filmmaker. He is the grandson of Van Chann, one of the greatest producers in Cambodia during the 1960s and 1970s. In 2007, Chou's short film *Expired*, shot during his first trip to Cambodia in 2008, was selected at Entrevues Belfort International Film Festival 2008. In 2009, Chou created a filmmaking workshop in Phnom Penh with 4 schools and 60 students; the result was a 50-minute collective film, *Twin Diamonds*, which was screened in Cambodia. In October of that year, Chou curated "Golden Reawakening", a film festival and exhibition about the golden age of Cambodian cinema during the 1960s and the 1970s. He is the founder of Kon Khmer Koun Khmer, a group of young Cambodians students and artists. The documentary film *Golden Slumbers* is his first feature film.

## DIRECTOR INTERVIEW

Excerpts from an interview with director Davy Chou by Ella Leudanla in *Tête-à-tête*, Issue 2, "Témoigner," November 2011

Ella Leudanla: *How did you discover the existence of this Cambodian film industry, which is now virtually non-existent?*

Davy Chou: When I was a kid I was told that my grandfather had made movies in Cambodia, without being given any further details. When I began to make movies, I asked my aunt what Cambodian moviemaking was like in the 60s... And that's how I learned that my grandfather, Van Chann, was the most prolific film producer of the time: of the (approximately) 400 films made in Cambodia between 1960 and 1975, he produced around 40 of them. I felt like I had just discovered a mysterious world, not understanding how it could have been hidden from me for such a long time. After this

revelation, it was clear that I had to make a film about it. This desire is probably linked to a biographical quest, but that wasn't the determining factor. Even without my family connection with this cinema, I think I would have made the film. A secret world really did exist, one that had been swallowed up, engulfed and utterly fascinating to explore. I wanted to tell the story of what had been revealed to me; it was something I had to do. There was also a kind of urgency: this story is 40 years old, and those who can tell us about it are now nearly 70. As nothing had been made, written or said about the subject, it was essential to make the film before it was "too late", before memories faded and people died.

*How did you go about finding witnesses and obtaining a better understanding of this history?*

The history of this cinema has passed among different generations of Cambodians. It is a part of folklore as these movies belong to the collective Khmer imagination and are part of our parents' cultural references. Some people my age [in their twenties], the children of Cambodian immigrants of 1970-1980, know about the existence of these films without ever having seen them. In my case, my parents chose not to bring me up with this folklore. My first task then was to make up for lost time. Next I tried to find the material elements connected with this film industry. This was in vain, as I was unable to find any old films (my first port of call were Cambodian DVD shops), posters, photos or books on the subject. My first real discovery was a blog, written by Vathana Huy, a Cambodian living in France and a real film buff. Having fled Cambodia in 1979, he set about reconstructing the filmography of Cambodian filmmakers of this golden age, and his only source was his memory.

*Was it an immediately obvious decision to foreground the witnesses rather than the images from the film?*

My first contact with this history determined the shape of my film. When I first heard about Cambodian movies, I still hadn't seen a single one—the reason being that they have practically all vanished, excepting some poor-quality videos (around 30 which

circulate undercover). We get a glimpse of these at the very end of the film. Generally speaking, nobody outside of Cambodia knows what a Cambodian film is like. I was no exception to this rule... so I understood that what was left of this history was to be found not so much in the images, whatever their nature (photos, film clips), as in the memories of the spectators and artists who had been part of their making. So I had to give this memories voice by turning it into a film. I wanted my film to shuttle between the interviews of survivors and witnesses and its confrontation with places rather than through images.

*There are different levels of testimony in your film: that of the survivors (an actress and some directors), the eyewitnesses (spectators), but also that of the people who heard this story from their parents or their grandparents. Why this approach?*

Initially I had two approaches. What interested me was to see how memory circulates: what is its natural course as it is filtered through reminiscences. I wanted to understand how, despite the absence of material evidence (the films), it manages to be passed on and therefore to live on. Proof of this phenomenon can be seen in the diversity of accounts: there were those who made movies, those who watched them, and even those who hadn't seen the movies but who provided indirect testimonies, such as the boy who lives in an abandoned cinema and who knows the plots of movies his mother told him about by heart. This brings me to my second aim; I wanted to gather as many points of view as possible, so as to be able to describe a situation of which it is very hard to have a global and objective understanding.

*We also meet some young Cambodians in your film. Who are they and what is their relationship with this history?*

They are a group of artists and students that formed through a video workshop that I set up when I got to Phnom Penh. They support each other in various artistic projects, especially film projects. In their scene, they open a breach that allows in a new breath. This was somewhat intentional on my part, as I had asked them as an exercise to recreate a once-famous scene from the lost film by Ly You Sreang, *Sacred Pond*, in

which the actor Kong Sam Oeun appears naked for the only time in his career. Here, once again, is an example of testing the strength of testimony as well as its creative capacity, its autonomy. The group had only the director's storyline to work from since the film no longer exists. Ly You Sreang did not come to the set, nor did they aim to shoot in the original location (which wasn't possible anyway). ...Once the director had spoken, given his spoken testimony, he disappeared, and these young people's strength of characterization, their faces that suddenly and literally "devour" the screen are already a way of breaking new ground. Once again, my method is not a nostalgic one. What interests me is to come upon signs in the present that radiate from the past, and to try to recreate something from those traces.

*Could we say that in your film, testimony is as much, if not more, a support for the imagination (in particular for film buff fantasies about the greatness of films that have disappeared) as for history?*

Yes, but only to a certain extent. The temptation of historical reality obviously exists with this kind of subject. But I realized that was not the right direction to follow, on the one hand because it wasn't possible, and on the other hand because that is not my profession. But obviously when we take an interest in history of which the material records have been lost and for which there exist no large-scale documentation, one feels invested by a responsibility to work in a thorough, accurate way, respecting the memory. But this meticulousness is unattainable and cannot be the object of a film. I don't believe that the purpose of a work is to override historical research. I therefore had to start by asking myself how I could approach the subject through cinema. In other words I had to progress step by step, hopefully attaining a truth of emotion and feeling, of what Cambodian cinema might have been, and of what it represented for those I interviewed. This is where imagination comes into it. Having said that, I must clarify that I didn't want the film to fall into the trap of being totally disconnected from reality or becoming purely an object of fantasy and imagination. When I speak of the "truth of feeling", I do not mean pure fiction but a different truth compared to that contributed by the factual elements—the secret heart of Cambodian cinema.

## PUBLICITY MATERIAL

High-res images, poster and more are available for download  
in the Icarus Films online pressroom:  
<http://icarusfilms.com/pressroom.html>

Credit: Courtesy Icarus Films  
User: icarus / Password: press

*Golden Slumbers* Trailer  
<http://youtu.be/Z0mXCLnxzfk>



## FILM CREDITS

Title: *Golden Slumbers*

French title: *Le sommeil d'or*

Directed by: Davy Chou

Language: In Khmer and French with English subtitles

Country: France/Cambodia

Image: Color and B&W

Running time: 96 minutes

Copyright year: 2011

Cinematography by: Thomas Favel

Sound by: Vincent Villa

Edited by: Laurent Leveneur

Original score by: Jérôme Harré

Produced by: Jacky Goldberg

Co-produced by: Denis Cougnaud, Guillaume Orignac and Rithy Panh

Production Manager: Sylvain Decouvelaere

Production Assistant: Vanessa Labarthe

Production: Vycky Films

Co-produced by Araucania Films, Bophana Production and Studio 37

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<http://icarusfilms.com/new2013/gs.html>