

Real and surreal

CINEMA The Korean film "Iodo" explores the disconnect between people and reality

Kim Ki-Young's "Iodo" juxtaposes South Korea's post-War state of flux (caused by modernisation and challenges to cultural identity) and a surreal world with demons, shamans, occult and fantastical islands. The film, which was screened recently at the Inko Centre, is pervaded by a great and grotesque sense of moral ambiguity. There is a certain diffident acceptance in the manner it explores the disconnect between people and reality: It relies heavily on the submission of the intellect to instinct. Parallels between the South Korean situation and urban India can easily be drawn in the prevalent sense of

disconnectedness, which leads to a psychological need for larger, albeit often unattainable fantasies in life, such as the surreal, almost mystical beauty of the film's fantastical elements. Hard though it is to acknowledge such beauty in a stew of nightmarish visions, sexual perversions and moral ambiguity, it points to something we find difficult to acknowledge within ourselves: the need for an ideal state of existence.

Specifically, the theme centres around Iodo, a mystical island inhabited by women, and a businessman's quest to this place to uncover the truth about the murder of a man he was suspected of

killing. The contrast between the moral depravity and the journey to an ideal place is explored in an ironical manner.

Kim Ki-Young became an accomplished pianist, writer, painter, dentist (!) before turning iconoclastic filmmaker. Just as his life was filled with stops and starts, the film seems to suggest that life is as much about the journey as the destination.

Having carved a niche for making provocative films in the Sixties, Kim Ki-Young was 'rediscovered' for his unusual and subversive style in the Nineties. "Iodo" is marked by the psychosexual and fantastical elements that underpinned much of this iconoclastic director's work.

The film was recently presented by the Inko Centre and the Korean Foundation.

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