

A River Changes Course

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Ashley Carter gives his opinion about this powerful documentary from Cambodia...



Kalyanee Mam's new documentary, *A River Changes Course*, has deservedly garnered widespread critical acclaim, picking up several major prizes on the awards circuit, including being named Winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize: Documentary at Sundance.

Her intimate portrait of the changing way of life in Cambodia examines the lives of three families in different parts of the country, each of them struggling to survive against the seemingly unstoppable force of corporate development. Its Spartan style presents an often detached view of what is a deeply human story, but remains effective in not distracting from the true nature of the characters on screen.

Each of the three main stories is ostensibly about one generation currently struggling, whilst the next, currently children watching on, consider how they can possibly etch an existence from what is clearly a life-threatening dilemma.

Of the three stories, it is Khieu Mok's that resonates strongest, as she is forced to relocate to Phnom Penh to help pay off some of her mother's loans. The journey there alone takes up a third of what she'll earn in a month in a garment factory.

What is most clear is director Mam's genuine affinity for her subject matter. As a former lawyer who fled Cambodia in the late 1970's, her obvious vested interest never spills onto the screen with melodrama or a clear political agenda. Her subtle style recognizes the power in the images she has caught, allowing the clearly difficult circumstances tell their own story. The dichotomy between the inherent beauty of the Cambodian countryside and the horror of the surrounding living conditions is jarring, and incredibly effective.

A River Changes Course is a sparse, powerful documentary about three families struggling to exist in a world that doesn't seem to need them. Often difficult to watch, it is nonetheless essential viewing.

A River Changes Course will be shown at Broadway Cinema on Wednesday 4 June 2014 at 6pm as part of the UK Green Film Festival.

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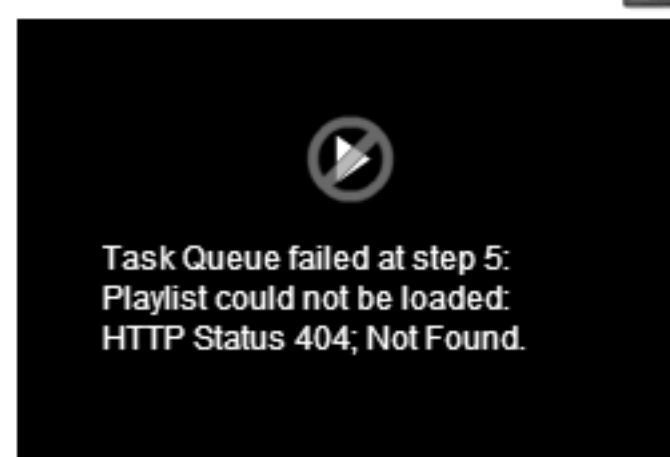
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