

TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

THURSDAY
JUNE 12, 2014
7:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

THREE KINGS

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT
FROM PAUL L. JOSKOW '72



After the success of his second film, *FLIRTING WITH DISASTER*, director David O. Russell was given a look at Warner Bros.' log of unproduced scripts. He jumped at one described as "a Gulf War heist," originally titled *SPOILS OF WAR*, the story of four American Army soldiers who come across Kuwaiti gold plundered by Saddam's army during the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

THE CASTING: Russell's four principal actors are an unorthodox crew. Mark Wahlberg was two years past his star turn in *BOOGIE NIGHTS*, and at the beginning of his move from rapper and underwear model to tentpole action star (see this year's fourth "Transformers" film). Ice Cube was already a star from both *BOYZ N THE HOOD* and his lead role (and writing credit) in *FRIDAY*, but his casting in *THREE KINGS* was an unexpected turn for the man still best known as a member of N.W.A. Spike Jonze, known at the time as a writer and director (his debut *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH* would be released the same month as *THREE KINGS*), appears here in his first and only starring role in a feature film. Finally, George Clooney, just two years removed from donning the cape as Batman, is at the beginning of a career transformation, a three-year period in which he worked with Steven Soderbergh, Terence Malick, and the Coen Brothers, that would turn him into Hollywood's most sought after leading man. Also look for the great Kiwi actor Cliff Curtis as a Shi'ite rebel captured by Saddam's army. Curtis was recently seen in a video making the rounds online showcasing the many ethnicities he has portrayed over the years: Latino, African-American, Indian, Arab, his native Maori, and more.



THE LOOK: The film was made before the widespread use of the Digital Intermediate, the post-processing scanning and color grading technique first used in George Clooney's next film, *O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU*. Now, fifteen years later, perhaps one studio film a year does not use a Digital Intermediate, and the glossy, digitally sharpened look has come to dominate film today. For *THREE KINGS*, though, Russell used an unorthodox film stock and photochemical processing technique to achieve the distinctive look of the film.

DIRECTED BY **DAVID O. RUSSELL** (1999) 114 MIN.
RELEASED BY WARNER BROS.

STARRING **GEORGE CLOONEY, MARK WAHLBERG,
ICE CUBE, AND SPIKE JONZE**

Russell and his Director of Photography, Newton Thomas Sigel, decided to shoot some sequences using Kodak's Ektachrome transparency stock, and, in an effort to imitate the color photos of the war that were a constant in newspapers at the time, they bypassed the bleaching stage of the film process. Without bleach, the silver image is retained, leaving a black and white image over the color image, and increasing contrast and graininess. As Russell said at the time, "This was the first war where we really had color pictures in newspapers, and they had this color Xerox quality to them, which is very contrasty and kind of blows out, and the color is really pumped. So that was what we sought because I think it's a beautiful look and it also seemed to be the look of that war."

On top of the grainy, bleached look, Russell and Sigel added the use of what is known as a 45° shutter, which gives the action sequences a sharper, almost strobe-like look (used to great effect in Spielberg's *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN* a year earlier). A film is typically shot with a 180° shutter, a half-circle that rotates in front of the lens, allowing light to expose an image on a frame of film. When the shutter is in front of the lens, no light enters, and the film advances to a new frame. With a 45° shutter, the frame is open a quarter of the time of a typical 180° shutter, so the image exposed on each frame is sharper, less intermittent, and more distinct, without any blurring.

DID YOU KNOW: THE CAST AND CREW OF *THREE KINGS* HAD MANY MORE STORIES TO TELL. FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER MAKING THE FILM, AT THE 2014 ACADEMY AWARDS, DIRECTOR DAVID O. RUSSELL, NOMINATED FOR BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY FOR *AMERICAN HUSTLE*, LOST TO *THREE KINGS* STAR SPIKE JONZE, WHO WON FOR THE SCREENPLAY FOR *HER*. THE BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY AWARD THAT SAME YEAR WENT TO JOHN RIDLEY FOR *12 YEARS A SLAVE*; RIDLEY WROTE THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY THAT BECAME *THREE KINGS* IN 1995.

NEXT UP: PEDRO ALMODÓVAR'S FUNNY AND HEARTBREAKING 1999 FEATURE *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER / TODO SOBRE MI MADRE*, THURSDAY, 7/17 AT 7:00 PM.