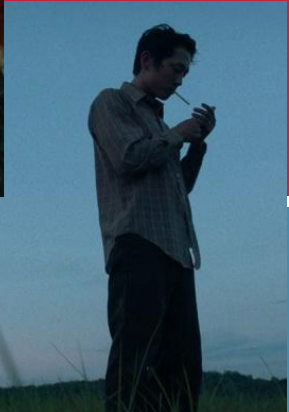


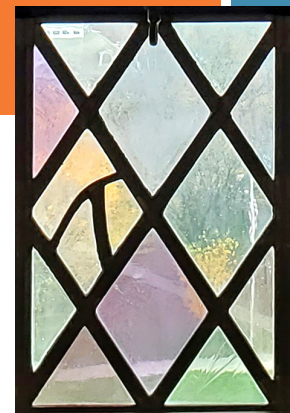
Treasures from the Yale Film Archive



Minari

Friday, November 10, 7 p.m.
Humanities Quadrangle Lecture Hall

Written and Directed by **Lee Isaac Chung**
Cinematography by **Lachlan Milne**
Produced by **A24** (2020), 115 mins.
Starring **Steven Yeun, Yeri Han, Noel Cho, Alan Kim, Youn Yuh-jung,**
and Will Patton



*Presented with support from the Traphagen Alumni Speakers Series,
Yale College Office of Student Affairs*

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A SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

Filmmaker Lee Isaac Chung '01 can trace his career in filmmaking back to his time at Yale, but not the way one might expect: it was in the second semester of his senior year that Chung, at the time an Ecology and Evolutionary Biology major on the pre-med track, took a class that changed the course of his studies – and his life. The course, called “Video as Art,” was taught by the filmmaker Michael Roemer, who taught for 47 years at Yale before his retirement in 2017. Roemer’s faith in Chung, a science major who had to satisfy a distribution requirement but wanted to do it with an advanced art class, stuck with him: in a 2021 interview, Chung recalled “It’s normally a class for upper-level art students, but he just found it interesting that this science guy came and wanted to take his class. And he told me, ‘I’m going to take a chance with you.’ That class did it for me.”

After attending film school, Chung made his debut feature film, *Munyarungabo*, in 2006. The film began as a class project for a course on filmmaking and photography Chung taught with collaborators Samuel Anderson and Jenny Lund at the Youth With a Mission a Christian relief base in Kigali, Rwanda. Fifteen students, including orphans of the genocide, refugees, and other locals, became the cast and crew of *Munyarungabo*, the first feature film made in the Kinyarwanda language. *Variety* critic Robert Koehler called “an astonishing and thoroughly masterful debut... which is – by several light years – the finest and truest film yet on the moral and emotional repercussions of the 15-year-old genocide that wracked Rwanda.”

Chung, who served as director, writer, producer, editor, and cinematographer on the film, said, “Directing in a foreign country and in a language I do not speak was actually an advantage, forcing me to work as an outsider. This guards against the conveyance of any personal ideas and truths that are relatively minor, allowing, instead, for an exploration of more universal matters that can connect a Korean American with a Rwandan.” The same drive to tell a story that is both specific and universal is present in the semi-autobiographical *Minari*, which, while dotted with specific memories of Chung’s own childhood and family story in Arkansas in the 1980s, also tells a broader story of immigration, family, and humanity, with heartfelt

DID YOU KNOW *Minari* made history in March, 2021, when Stephen Yeun became the first Asian American nominee for Best Actor. At the Academy Awards a month later, Youn Yuh-jung was awarded Best Supporting Actress, making her the first Korean to win an Academy Award for acting.

naturalism and a distinct lack of melodrama.

While Chung had made two more features since *Munyarungabo*, they hadn’t necessarily been commercial successes, and he had relocated to South Korea to teach film history. After reconsidering his own personal history from a new perspective as a father, Chung thought back on his childhood in Arkansas, and a story emerged. Once the *Minari* script began to circulate, Steven Yeun, who rose to fame with work on *The Walking Dead* and *Burning*, signed on to play Jacob (as well as produce the film), and A24 greenlit the project. The film also introduced two actors to American audiences: Youn Yuh-jung, star of dozens of Korean films and TV shows since the 1970s, in the role of Soonja, the grandmother who moves from South Korea to be with her daughter’s family; and Alan S. Kim, who was cast at the age of 7, and turned in a breakout performance as David.

Between *Minari*’s rapturously received debut at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 2020 (where it won the Audience and Grand Jury prizes for drama), and its limited release in February, 2021, the world – including the filmgoing landscape – was turned upside down by a global pandemic. While this meant that the film didn’t have the theatrical run it would have received under normal circumstances, *Minari* struck a chord with viewers. It was warmly welcomed in cinemas where they were open, and through streaming, the film connected with audiences who were now becoming accustomed to viewing new releases at home. As the pandemic neared a second year, Glenn Whipp of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote in his review of the film, “*Minari* is the movie we need right now.”

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NEXT UP “Early Sembène” continues to explore the first films of the “Father of African Cinema” with *Xala* (1975) on Sunday, November 12 at 2 p.m. Celebrate Native American Heritage Month with a screening of Chris Eyre’s *Smoke Signals* (1998) on Friday, November 17 at 7 p.m.