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CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Locations play vital role in film on Monroe

By Jae-Ha Kim
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Dana Carpenter said "Flesh Impact" gave her an idea of what Marilyn Monroe could be like today. JAE-HA KIM

After Marilyn Monroe married Joe DiMaggio in 1954, the couple went on what would become a working honeymoon.

While her husband was busy coaching local baseball teams in Japan, Monroe accepted an invitation to entertain the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea during the Korean War, an experience that she had described as "the best thing that ever happened to me."

More than seven decades later, "Flesh Impact" — filmmaker Maggie Gyllenhaal's homage to the iconic movie star — made its Asian debut in Korea at this year's Busan International Film Festival. The critically acclaimed 17-minute movie already has garnered buzz as an Academy Award contender in the best live-action short film category.

At BIFF, I caught up with Dana Carpenter, the executive vice president of entertainment for Authentic Brands Group, which owns the rights to Monroe's name and likeness. This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: How did "Flesh Impact" come to be?
A: Genesis approached us about this film, and we were very intrigued because we knew they had been in this space for a while. After the first call that we did with them, it really took our breath away about how insightful, creative and forward thinking they were about how they wanted to tell a story about Marilyn as an artist.

Q: Not about Marilyn the blonde bombshell, right?
A: Exactly. That was really exciting for us. Genesis wasn't interested in recreating what moviegoers already knew, like her in the white dress blowing over the subway grating. We could never re-create that. That was her moment. They wanted to do something different with a new story that was boundary breaking and very unexpected that fans hadn't seen before. They asked Maggie to write a script, which turned out phenomenal, and direct the film. Marilyn would've turned 100 this year. Maggie wrote the role of Marilyn as a 100-year-old actor who wanted to be viewed as a serious actor.

Q: Was the film shot in places that would've been meaningful to Marilyn?
A: Yes, the locations were very important to the movie because she had lived in Los Angeles and New York. She was a Hollywood-born woman. And she had famously said that Brooklyn was her favorite place in the world and that she was going to retire there one day. New York played an important role in the film. It was a really beautiful homecoming to film in New York City, a place where she had studied and refined her craft in acting. We filmed on Broadway in the theater district, at the Music Box Theatre. In Los Angeles, we filmed at two different studios. It was incredible to be on a traditional Hollywood film set ... that really spoke to the era of where she came through. It felt surreal to film in the cities that had been so important to Marilyn. It was magical and beautiful.

Q: You're here for BIFF. Is this your first trip to South Korea?
A: No, I've been here many times over the course of my career. I think the first time I came to Korea was in 2006. But I haven't been back for eight years, since pre-Covid, so it's really exciting to be back. The creativity that comes from the people in Korea has been so inspiring, whether it's fashion and technology or the arts. Koreans take craftsmanship to new heights and push the envelope. It's really exciting to see that.

Q: Had there been a discussion about whether Marilyn's time in Korea might make a cameo in "Flesh Impact"?
A: We talked about various scenarios. The fact that Marilyn had spent time in Korea was something that I think was really interesting, because she so enjoyed her time here. She actually made kind of a small pivot to perform for the troops here, possibly to Joe's displeasure.

Q: The last trip you took?
A: (Laughs.) We went to Venice for this film's premiere at the Venice Film Festival (in September).

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