

## The 15<sup>th</sup> ifva Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jurors in Attendance: Lam Kee-to (LAM), Neco Lo Che-ying (LO), Felix Ip (IP), Wong Ying (WONG), Tamshui (TAM)

Organizer Representatives: Teresa Kwong(KWONG), Kattie Fan(FAN)

LAM : I think **Red Riding Hood** is very professionally done. In terms of both storytelling and animation effects it is of a higher standard than most student works.

LO: However the story is too simple. It's a little bit like the animation DVD you can buy at a store. The pop-up effect is quite likeable. The director is able to put a new twist into this medium, which requires some effort--it's just that I expect something more. If he could put in a twist at the end it would be better.

WONG : It's quite suitable for children. At the screening just now the film received a good response. The story is familiar to all, so people were more into it.

LAM : But I wouldn't give him high marks because of that. Rather, this competition should encourage works that are not as market-driven. The next work is **Found Me**. I want to ask a technical question. Is its hand-drawn effect really done by hand, or is it colored by computer?

IP: It's colored by computer.

TAM: I heard it takes three or four months to do.

LAM : But at least you don't have to get your hands dirty.

WONG : He probably needs to film some live action as reference.

TAM: It's especially interesting to view this work alongside **Tree**. They both have similar elements like tree, hands and crying, but one is a personal work, while the other is about the Sichuan earthquake.

LO: I don't think the world portrayed in **Found Me** is very special; it's just like a virtual game world. The beginning part is quite interesting, but the later part is like a computer game. In the beginning, when the lead character is running around, it's enjoyable, but it does not go deep enough. Subject matters like this are easy to do. You start with a person's mental world, and anything goes because everything is symbolic. This type of premise can be done well, but could also be quite arbitrary and left up to the viewer's imagination. I don't have a strong impression about this work.

TAM: The beginning and ending parts are too similar in terms of rhythm, and there is not enough contrast between them.

LO: The ending is too abrupt.

LAM : The story and the means of expression are a bit green and rough on the edges. The use of 2D and the grey/brown color palette is quite distinctive, and gives it a more individual style. It reminds me of a black and white entry from past years that was done with pencil drawings. One can easily tell that this is his first work, but one should not judge him according to technical competence. He is very inexperienced and instinctive, but for an independent film we should not focus too much on technique. Yet among the 12 finalists this is not particularly outstanding.

IP: I wasn't too involved when I watched it.

KWONG: The next one is ***Fat Son and the Stone Prince***.

TAM: The audience reacted well to this film.

LAM : It is unintentionally symbolic.

IP: The modeling and design are quite special, and the use of color is also well-done. However the action is a bit hard to watch.

TAM: For example it looks like he is being pushed when he jumps.

LAM : This film expresses a realistic world, and because of this you can spot many technical flaws. For example there are shadows in some scenes but not others, and sometimes the trees have shadows, but not human beings. This affects the overall impression. If this is the world he wants to portray, then its finishing is not up to par. Whereas a film like ***Found Me*** is set in an abstract world, so it doesn't matter if things have shadows.

WONG : I agree. The modeling is clever and interesting. It sets up rules such as gold coins, but what functions do they serve? I don't think it quite makes sense. Some objects are functional and logical, but you can't explain their meaning. He wants to create a game or cycle, but the elements don't hold together.

TAM: Just now at the screening the audience was attracted by the imagery, but their interests gradually faded and they started talking among themselves.

LO: His way of storytelling and application has problems.

KWONG: ***Faces***.

TAM: Is this the version 2.0 one?

LO: I think so. It was entered in the competition last year, and he changed some things and entered it again. It has many typical elements found in independent animations, like an abundance of symbolic things that elements that leaves room for people's imagination. Even though this is a simple work, it is interesting and meaningful. But is that enough? I don't think so. For a two minute work it is quite complete.

WONG : It has a good concept, but no surprises. At the end it lost me when it changed to a real person.

LO: It lacks incidents to substantiate its points. Does changing faces always imply deception? Not necessarily. One could put on another face to please someone. The world is not so simple.

IP: I was a bit surprised at the end when the animated face becomes real. I didn't expect that.

LAM : I thought it was okay when I first saw it, but when I read their description I realized my reading is different from their intention. I didn't think of the Rubic's cube as being fake when I saw it. I simply thought within that world people have to find a suitable face. The work is too short, and this description has done it a disservice. There should be more happening in the middle. For example, which is his real face? You could also say the Rubic's cube face is his real face. I think the visual aspects of this film are good and can

spark people's imagination. But the message doesn't come across strongly enough. There should be more details

WONG : The Rubic's cube is an interesting idea, and viewers can freely apply their interpretations. The Rubic's cube is just two-by-two, so it is not very complex. I want to see different combinations, for example, what would it look like if I match one set of eyebrows with another set of eyes? Perhaps the person would look completely different. But the directors didn't explore or further develop this idea.

TAM: This is one of the few works that has a definite idea about the use of color, and tries to have a minimal color palette.

KWONG: **MK, HK.**

IP: I was bothered by the voiceover, because I kept hearing my name! Its form and visual aspects are quite amusing, but much of the voiceover was not necessary.

LO: It even uses captions to make its point!

TAM: We thought it is like ETV, and we're right!

LO: It is a RTHK commissioned project. This is one thing, but he doesn't use the medium well. A lot of good animation can say a lot with just sound effects, and can be very touching too. This one relies too much on captions. How you communicate your message is really very important. Many directors rely on dialogue to say what they want to say, but they ought to focus more on sound effects, art direction and other elements.

LAM : The voiceover is misleading. It tells you that the protagonist is a documentary filmmaker, and is a professional. He cannot find a good subject, and so has to go out and look for one. This premise puts it at a disadvantage, because later on you see that he leaves his tripod behind. This is not too professional!

IP: He keeps repeating the protagonist's name, Yip Wai, in every line, which is so unnecessary.

LAM : Other than that, I think the modeling is good, and the place he lives in, with the fences, is quite interesting because it expresses his isolation. The use of mainly black and white animation is also well presented, but the story is too neat and tidy. The film is meant for a TV show, which violates the "independent spirit" part of the competition. Having good technique is a good thing, and being an RTHK commissioned project is fine, but he should make some changes before entering into this competition.

KWONG: I'm not sure about animations, but RTHK does not allow commissioned drama programs to have an alternate version. A few years ago there was a case involving Yan Yan Mak in which she edited another version for entry into another film festival, and in the end she had a falling out with the television station. RTHK views all materials, including those that have not been aired, as property belonging to the station.

TAM: But that doesn't mean this competition has to follow RTHK rules.

WONG : If the entry wins, you have to screen it publicly.

LO: Even if the director chooses to use voiceover and captions, there are better and cleverer ways of doing it. At first I thought he was being ironic, but soon realized that's not the case. He could have used voiceover and captions in a smoother way, so that it

sounds better. The captions need not be in white against a red background. These elements could have been more artfully done so that they blend into the whole film.

TAM: Why did they decide to enter this competition?

LO: I guess they didn't want to waste the chance. Besides, there is prize money, and more people could get to see it.

LAM : As an independent film this work is lacking in many respects.

TAM: I asked this question because I want to say that entrants should think about what independent film is.

WONG : That's why I think school projects should not be considered.

LAM : Because the object of school project is to fulfill course requirements. There are also works that are backed by large animation companies as a way to motivate employees, to give them something to do in their off periods.

TAM: I don't think there's a problem with that.

LAM : But these companies have more resources, so could produce better works...

WONG : Well in the past Raman had entered the competition but did not win. We have to send a message to students that if they enter this competition with school projects, their chances of getting awards are low.

TAM: My entry that ended up winning an award was a school project, but I already had the competition in mind when I made it.

WONG : That's the difference. The motivation is very important.

LAM : When I look at animations from other countries like Japan, even though the works are done by large companies, they still display independent spirit, and their concepts are independent too. When I look at Hong Kong works, sometimes they use large companies' resources, but lack independent spirit.

WONG : Not too many companies let their employees do that.

LAM : As far as I know there are four.

LO: Independent animations are not marketable, so people don't know have a concept of what it is. They think that as long as a work is boring, short or obtuse, it is independent. But if we bar student works from entry into the competition, we may be left with only three entries. Whether or not they are student works is not important, but people should take the competition into consideration when planning their school projects.

LAM : Developing a market for independent shorts is very important. ifva has already established some kind of culture in the past few years. However, the quality this year is not very high.

TAM: Other kinds of shorts may be better, but the animation this year is weak.

LAM : In recent years the digital animation industry has been growing strongly, and there had been more and more entries to the ifva. But the concept of independence is being challenged at the same time.

- KWONG: The next work is ***Wu Song Kill Tiger***.
- LAM : Why was this chosen to be among the finalists?
- TAN: At first we had reservations about it too because this is not an original story.
- LAM : ctually I want to ask about the process by which you picked the 12 finalists out of 47 entries.
- LO: We gave points to each film, and each person then recommend a certain number of finalist films. We ended up with a list of 16 to 18. Then we picked from this list works that we think are outstanding or deserve to be publicly screened. The process was not difficult.
- LAM : I feel the quality of entries this year has not been strong. I have seen ***Wu Song Kill Tiger*** before under a different context. This time I look at it from the perspective of independent films, and find that it is inadequate in many respects. I feel the director wants to have this work publicly shown, and it lacks independent spirit.
- LO: You can define independence of a film by its funding, or by the identity of its creator. But a person can have many different identities.
- WONG : The sound effects for ***Wu Song Kill Tiger*** is quite good, and stands above other entries in this respect.
- TAM: The sound in this year's entries is quite weak.
- WONG : Even though there are technical problems with this work, such as the fact that the voiceover is unclear, on the whole the mixing is done well. At least it is layered.
- LO: One cannot deny that this is done by an experienced animator. In this regard he is better than other entrants. This year there are few well-rounded works, works that are up to par in every respect. ***Wu Song Kill Tiger*** is one of them. ***Little Red Riding Hood*** is too short, even though it is well-rounded.
- KWONG: ***A Hair Story***.
- TAM: I think this work cuts corners too much. Basically it is filmed as a live action, and then animated. It does not seem fair to other films that are done frame by frame. If you did a live action short, why turn it into an animation?
- LO: ***Waking Life*** is also a live action film in which animation effects are added in post-production.
- TAM: I don't think he grasped the spirit of this technique, and does not use it well. For example in terms of pictorial composition...
- LO: He does consider things like camera placement, and is not just done randomly. In terms of the connection between shots it is done well.
- LAM : He manages to capture the distinctive nature of animation, especially in the section involving the bus journey, from which you can really see the transformation of the community. Using reflection from the window, he conjures up a kind of mood that you only see in animation. The work is about local culture, even though it is not very complete. The music is not original, but is used quite well. Like ***Donate Blood Instead***

*of Hot Blooded*, this film has a certain unique and well-observed local perspective, like the view from the ground in Kowloon City looking up at a passing plane. *Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded* also has shots like that. This type of view cannot be found anywhere else in the world. It gives a sense of the past as being irretrievably lost, which is also the theme of the film. Among the 12 works this one stands out in this regard.

LO: The length of this work, as well as its beginning and ending, art direction, movements and sound effects are quite good, and it is meaningful. The work is about a person's childhood memories, a theme that is close to the heart of the director. That's why it comes off well, and uses the medium suitably. Even though he cuts corners, the overall effect is good.

TAM: He is one of the few entrants who can explain why he created his work.

KWONG: We mentioned *Tree* before. Do you have any additional comments?

IP: The use of color is well-done. The texture of the trees is quite pleasing, and I also like the film visually.

LAM : Its visual treatment has a theatrical quality, and the visual design is stage-like, and is done quite well. At first I thought the school's instructors gave them a lot of help, but according to the three directors, they did most of the work themselves. I think they deserve extra points for that. You don't see much of Sichuan in this film, but their concern about quake orphans, which are high-lighted here, is commendable. The use of overlapping images is also well-done, and on the whole this work is quite creative.

KWONG: *Isolate*.

LAM : The film uses the story of a chicken and a goose coming to a city to bring out the contrast between rich and poor. He uses different sets of contrast to bring out the theme of the work, but it comes off as a bit simplistic. The scene in which the chicken and goose go into a restaurant in search of food is quite nonsensical, because they are really asking to be killed. The concept is not expressed well, and does not show the nature of chicken and geese. They are simply two characters named chicken and goose, and a lot of details are not well thought out.

WONG : I did not get the theme of rich and poor at all. The chicken and goose go into a city restaurant, but everyone else in the city is human. This is just illogical. One does not know whose point of view to take on.

LAM : This is an immature work, obviously done by students.

LO: The director thinks that in an animation, anything can happen.

IP: At first I liked its use of color, and the stop-motion like technique. Later on I discover that it is not stop-motion at all.

KWONG: *I am I*.

TAM: You cannot make this work without animation technique.

LAM : Is his modeling based on other people or did he create it himself? It is quite uncommon, like the way the eyes are drawn. It's similar to *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and allows people to get into the world of the mentally disabled.

- TAM: This is a meaningful work. The director was a volunteer in a related organization. He wants to use this animation to express some of his feelings about the topic.
- LAM : Even though this work is not too mature, some scenes are quite powerful, like the one in which the lead character complains about taking his medicine. However the story is not properly thought through. The scene at the end when the kid becomes a murderous maniac achieves the opposite of the director's intentions. The director is not mature enough as an artist to come up with a complete story-line. Rather, he uses a direct and simple approach to express what he thinks and knows. The last two letters are probably based on real cases, and on the whole this work is commendable.
- IP: I appreciate the fact that he has a clear aim and a strong message to convey. This deserves extra marks.
- WONG : I can see his enthusiasm despite the fact that his use of animation technique is still not developed. If this was a documentary the impact might have been greater. His depictions of early psychosis manages to express the hallucinations of those afflicted with mental illness, but doesn't let the audience feel his pain, because what you see is imaginary and therefore hard to identify with. I didn't like the two letters, which I think weakens his message because it prevents people from discussing this issue in a substantial way.
- IP: At the end when the protagonist says taking medicine is not good, then the people around him turn into hands and surround him, at first I didn't get the message. The turning point is not smooth enough.
- KWONG: ***Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded.***
- LAM : The name doesn't match the content! The story is humorous, and the filmmaker uses comic strip style to express the dilemma of today's youths who are caught between their dreams and the need to make a living. The title itself is humorous, since the lead character does not give blood at all. On the whole this is a very interesting short, and its concept stands out in an independent film competition like this one.
- WONG : I would compare this with ***A Hair Story***, because both are done by young people, yet their styles are quite different. They are both of the post-1980 generation, but have completely different mindsets. One looks back to the past and focuses on familial relationships, while the other is very down to earth and humorous. I like the style of ***Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded***, and the almost European style characters and modeling. Even though the dialogue recording is sometimes unclear, the visual design is interesting.
- TAM: I think he borrows from the Japanese animation ***Mind Game***, the lines and the rhythm of the story are both similar. That's why I have some reservations about it. The filmmaker cannot separate his own style from his influences.
- KWONG: ***Tancho.***
- TAM: The 3D animation is done well, which is why I picked it to be one of the finalists. It's texture and movements are smooth, and is a cut above other 3D works.
- LAM : Even though this is not a long piece, it is quite complete. What is distinctive about it is that the different worlds have different perspectives, and the filmmaker makes a clear separation between the various points of view. For example, the point of view of the Japanese crane is presented in low resolution video-style, which shows that the filmmaker has thought about the whole world-view from the start. I think it would be

better if the film was longer. Right now the depiction of the sub-conscious world is not sufficient.

KWONG: In the next stage we will consider the awards. One way is to nominate gold and silver award winners. You can also name three films you think deserve awards.

TAN: Or perhaps the other way round, and eliminate some entries first.

(The jury members vote unanimously to eliminate *Isolate, Found Me, Fat Son and the Stone Prince, MK, HK, Faces, Red Riding Hood, A Hair Story, Tree, Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded, I am I, Tancho* and *Wu Song Kill Tiger* remain.)

WONG : Why don't we discuss awards based on the remaining works?

LAM : I nominate *A Hair Story* for Gold Award.

LO: I agree. This film deserves encouragement.

LAM : Even though this film has flaws, it's not unpresentable. Its content reflects a distinctly Hong Kong sensibility. If you take this film abroad, people will not notice the technical flaws, but will appreciate its sense of Hong Kong community spirit. We may be accustomed to that here, but if we step outside of Hong Kong we will see it.

WONG : I don't oppose it getting an award, but it shouldn't be the only winner. I think *Wu Song Kill Tiger* could share a prize with it, because they represent two distinctly different approaches. I also think *Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded* deserves an award.

LO: I don't think it's inappropriate to give the Gold Award to *A Hair Story*. Hong Kong lacks independent creators, and this film has artistry and also uses the animation medium well.

WONG : The delivery of its jokes is precisely timed.

LO: That does not mean it is not independent. This film deserves encouragement, and has its importance. When it was screened just now it was the audience's choice. Why shouldn't independent films be entertaining? It is important to please the audience while satisfying yourself at the same time.

TAM: I want to ask you, does the script have independent spirit?

LO: Even though it is just retelling a story, the artwork and other elements require creative input.

TAM: Part of the reason the audience liked it is because the story is already familiar.

WONG : I thought about not giving a Gold Award this year, because I was already disappointed when I saw the 40 plus works in the first round. But I agree with Lo, that if the money is there we should spend it. Giving encouragement to artists like this has an energizing effect on the whole animation scene.

TAM: Or we could give out two Silver Awards.

KWONG: The total prize money for this category is \$80,000. If you give out two Silver Awards and each get \$30,000, the rest of the money can go to other categories. Last year in the Youth Category they used part of the prize money to buy an extra video camera so that both winners can get the same prize. If you have two Silver Award winners, I suggest

using the remaining \$20,000 to pay for the expenses of a trip to the animation film festival in France so that both can go.

IP: I think it's difficult to find a work that is superior to all the rest. **Wu Song Kill Tiger** is easy on the eyes, but it doesn't embody all the qualities this award represent. So I agree with having two Silver Awards.

TAM: Why hasn't anyone mentioned **Tancho**?

LAM : It is not particularly outstanding. If there was a Gold Award it deserves a Silver. But since there isn't...

LO: Giving two Silver Awards would also send the message that we feel the entries this year has not been up to the standard of previous years.

LAM : Concerning Special Mention, I'd like to nominate **I am I** because of its independent spirit, and the artist's passion and his concern for this social issue ought to be applauded. **Tancho** is technically competent, but from the perspective of independent films, I'd have to let this one go.

WONG : I also think there should be a balance. **I am I** is the film that is the least likely to get my vote, but if you all vote for it I won't disagree. **Tancho** is technically and visually accomplished, and even though its message is weak, it should be recognized. In the commercial world you have to balance both technique and delivery of message, but many independent filmmakers don't care. The design and visual elements of **Tancho** is carefully thought out. Among the 12 finalists it is the most stylistically distinctive, and so it should be awarded.

LO: If we have two Silver Awards and three Special Mentions, then we have to give up **Red Riding Hood**, which I don't mind. After listening to what Tamshui said about **Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded**, I'll go home and watch **Mind Game** again.

LAM : The same animator also did **Kemono Zume**, which has the same kind of style.

(The jury members voted to eliminate **Red Riding Hood**)

IP: If we were to give Special Mention to **Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded**, I can't think of a strong reason why it deserves an award.

WONG : **I am I** is socially conscious, **A Hair Story** is nostalgic, **Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded** is very contemporary and youthful. Even though it may be imitative, it is nonetheless interesting. Giving it an award balances out the list. **I am I** is equally unpolished, and there is nothing outstanding about it.

LO: This arrangement reflects the quality of entries this year. The works are outstanding in certain respects, but on the whole they are not of very high standards. **A Hair Story** and **Wu Song Kill Tiger** represent two different approaches to independent animations at the moment.

LAM : Nowadays even independent animations try to become more marketable.

KWONG: So the final results of the Animation Category is Silver Awards for **A Hair Story** and **Wu Song Kill Tiger**, and four works get Special Mention, including, **Tree**, **I am I**, **Donate Blood instead of Hot Blooded** and **Tancho**.

LO: We should mention the reasons for giving Special Mentions to these works at the

award ceremony.

KWONG: I hope to see you all at the award ceremony. With regards to the declining standards of entries in the Animation Category, I would like you all to give some suggestions. It is the 15th edition of ifva this year, and we want to think about the future direction of the competition. One proposal is to combine the Asian and Hong Kong sections of the festival. We hope by this means to raise the standards of Hong Kong independent animations.

WONG : Half of the entrants are students. You may speak to university instructors and introduce them to this competition, and have them explain this to their students. When they enter this competition with school projects, students ought to think about the meaning of independent filmmaking.

LAM : In addition to learning about animation technique, it is important for students to have a sense of independent spirit.

TAM: In the past few years I have gone to secondary schools to give talks about ifva, but I haven't been to universities and colleges. This year there were a few entrants from secondary schools, although they did not make it to the final round. The new secondary school syllabus gives room to develop student's talents in this area.

LAM : We could also show some ifva award winners at secondary and primary schools.

WONG : Felix is a good role model. He was an ifva entrant and his works have won awards. Now he is an ifva jury member, and he is also working in the industry. This shows that ifva winners are not necessarily all artists, and could survive in the commercial world.

### **Animation Category**

#### **Gold Award**

Nil

#### **Silver Award**

*Wu Song Kill Tiger*

Buck MOK

#### **Silver Award**

*A Hair Story*

Shing-fung MAK

#### **Special Mention**

*Tree*

Kok-ning CHEUNG, Suet-ying SIU, Wing-shan CHENG

#### **Special Mention**

*I am I*

Ying-lee CHAN

#### **Special Mention**

*Donate Blood Instead of Hot Blooded*

Ying-ping MAK

#### **Special Mention**

*Tancho*

Oscar SHEIKH

