

The 20th ifva Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Lo Che-ying (Lo), Justin Wong (Wong), Yung Kwok-yin (Yung), Dennis Yeung (Yeung), Tamas Waliczky (Waliczky)

ifva representative: Kattie Fan (Fan)

Fan: Welcome to the Animation Category jury meeting, and thanks for being juror this year. Before we begin, I'd like to say that this year, we received 33 entries in the Animation Category. In the first round jury meeting, Tamas, Yung Kwok-yin and Justin did the first round selection. You had just seen the 10 finalist works. Today, our mission is to select the awards, Gold, Silver and Special Mention, and hopefully we can finish within two hours. Let's take a look at the awards list. We are going to select one Gold Award, one Silver Award and one Special Mention. If you guys don't have any questions, then we can begin by discussing the finalist works one by one.

Lo: We can go through the works briefly and then make a selection.

Fan: We will begin with the first animation short, *Disposition*.

Lo: I think this is quite an outstanding work in many ways — the art direction and execution is very unique and professional. It's an 18 minute work without dialogue, using just action and sound effects to tell a story, and it works quite well. You can see the ambition of the director, and there is only one animator and director for the whole work. I appreciate this work.

Wong: I totally agree. The storytelling is very simple, but as an audience I was really drawn into the story. It drags the audience into the world the animator created. Even the drawing is simple, but very powerful.

Waliczky: I also think it's a very professional work. It has a strong atmosphere. The animation is superb, the storytelling is very clear. I was surprised to see such a talent. I didn't know about him. In the first round, there was another animation from him, which was also very good, but we didn't want two works by the same person.

Lo: The other work is good, but this one is more challenging in the action and everything.

Yeung: I think he must be mature, around 30-40 in age.

Lo: He's older.

Yeung: It's very professional and detailed, which you can see from the facial movements. For me it's too perfect, very professional but too commercial.

Waliczky: Is he an independent artist?

Lo: Yes, he never worked in the field.

Yeung: You can predict the scenes he placed in the story. That's why I said it is professional, commercial and too perfect.

- Waliczky: Me too. I'm a foreigner and I don't know the background, so for me the question is whether this guy is a professional person, because it may not be fair to compare with the others. But if you say he is independent, then it's ok.
- Lo: He is very independent. He works hard. He got the funding from ADC and he worked on this film for more than one year, I think. He only wants to make a good film by himself. It doesn't matter about the professionalism, because it's needed in the story. Without all the technique and the action, it can't be so amazing. The design of the scenes and everything is important in making the film. The fact that he can handle it is important, because some people think about it, but can't do it.
- Waliczky: Does he use roto-scoping?
- Lo: It's all hand drawn.
- Waliczky: The movement is very smooth, like with the bear jumping.
- Lo: The movements are to the point.
- Yeung: Surely one of the top three.
- Fan: The next one is *Sparkling Eyes*.
- Lo: It's a story about desire. It's a student work. I like the music, but the problem is that the action can't match with the music. It's not clear why the character is a dog-man, and what's the relationship between the cat and the dog-man? I like the black and white visuals, and the visuals have some impact, but I think the movement can be done better. I like the music, which is danceable, but the visuals could be better.
- Yeung: I agree that the storyline is not clear enough.
- Waliczky: I like the fact that the story is about desire, and it is not usual for people to deal with sexual desire in animation, even though I don't know what the connection is between the cat and desire. It's interesting, but it's really not professional.
- Wong: It could be pushed further and become more crazy. I see some nice transformations in the first few shots, which is good. But the middle and end are not consistent. Sometimes it's too slow and stops altogether.
- Lo: There is not much movement towards the end.
- Fan: Anything else? If not, we could move to *Aquarium*.
- Lo: Nice song. I prefer the song to the visuals. It's like an MV. It's sort of old school style and graphic. The song is really good. It's nice to look at.
- Yeung: For me, it is something like the visual impacts, such as the 70s, 80s retro and RGB, etc.
- Wong: The song dominates too much. Most of the power of the work is from the song. I expect the artist to play more with space, since he uses a square frame. I expected more transformation of space, but in the end he does it just a little bit, and it's just a visual effect. The story is abstract, and I like it as an abstract piece, but could be more playful

in terms of the space and playing with transformation. It tries to play with space at some point, from 2D to 3D, but he stops.

Lo: Even though it's a 3 minute work, he could have done more. I really don't like that he put the lyrics on screen. It doesn't help.

Yeung: I expect more to come after the RGB, that there would be more impacts.

Waliczky: I like this kind of thing because it's very simple and minimal, and it works together with the song, and the song is good.

Fan: Let's move on to *Speechless*.

Lo: I don't know why this work is here. Everything goes wrong with the script.

Yeung: There's too much dialogue.

Lo: There's something wrong with the story and the two storylines. They are incomparable. There are many questions there. Did the father really cook the dog? It does matter, I think.

Waliczky: It's very interesting.

Lo: How can you compare the dog and the cricket? At the end, the letter is addressed to Jason, so how come the mother opens the letter? And then she tears it up, but the letter is not meant for her.

Yeung: The story is too long, and the storylines don't come together.

Lo: The style is ok, but the problem is the story.

Wong: My feelings are similar.

Yeung: It's funny. It's not meant for kids or for adults. I don't know who the target audience is.

Waliczky: The story is very strange for me, but as a foreigner, it's shocking that he cooked the dog. In Europe, maybe the child would have a favorite chicken, and the father cooks the chicken.

Lo: I think chicken is better. Why doesn't the director use the dog again in the next part? Because the boy already had the dog. Why doesn't the director do something with the dog? Instead, he uses the crickets. And I don't understand why the cricket is so terrifying to the mother—it's a nice creature. It's in the son's drawer, so she must know about it. And that creature is not that terrible, it's cute! So the whole thing doesn't work.

Fan: Anything to add? If not, *My Hidden Watcher*.

Lo: This is nice. I like the atmosphere.

Yeung: I like the color tone.

Lo: For a 3D animation, the modeling, color and even the movement is good.

Waliczky: Can somebody explain to me, does it have some local significance?

Lo: It's not just local. In Japan they call this creature...

Wong: House geckos?

Lo: In Japanese they are called "yamori", the guardians of home. For Chinese people it is the same, they won't kill them. They will let them stay at home. That's why he puts the creature into this ecology to fight with the bad guys.

Waliczky: I understand that.

Lo: And everyday they have a mission or something like that. I like the atmosphere but I expect more. It's a little bit too short, and it suddenly stops at the end. But the execution is very nice.

Wong: The film changes our impression of this animal. The only thing I'm not sure about is the design of the spirits. They are too different and too cute. They don't match with the style of the film.

Waliczky: The animation is very realistic, like the lighting and the atmosphere, but the ghosts are very childish. They are of a different style.

Yeung: The storyline and technique are very nice.

Fan: The next one is *TreeMan*.

Lo: It's a nice piece. The drawing is good, but I don't quite understand the story. The texture is very good, and it's moody.

Wong: I can't get the message. I like the mood. The drawing and texture is nice.

Waliczky: I don't know the artist's intentions, but I think it has to do with somebody who's alone versus the community. Somebody who still can move, but the others are already changed to trees. He or she doesn't want to be part of the community. It has to do with personality and community.

Lo: The music and sound is nice.

Fan: The next one is *Saveur Térébenthine*.

Lo: I think the story is too heavy and the director can't properly handle to the weight of the story. It talks about art, art education, friendship and the triangular relationship and politics. There is a lot of dialogue. It can be a good comic book but not a good animation. There is not much movement. If you just look at the still pictures, the coloring and style is very nice, but when you put it together, it's like a comic book with dialogue. The sound artist is not very good, he sounds very flat, with the same style throughout. It's not like real life talking.

Yeung: That's the way students talk.

Lo: Maybe that's true, but I can't go into the story more deeply.

- Yeung: I agree that he's too greedy by putting too much into the story
- Lo: And the timeline goes for more than 10 years, from the 1990s to 2000s.
- Waliczky: It's an interesting thing that somebody wants to tell such a serious story. In Japan you can see such animation that deals with serious subjects like crime or pornography in documentary style. This documentary tries to deal with a serious topic—sometimes not well. I don't know if the guys who did it are students, but it seems they are dealing with problems that are direct for them, like art students discussing about art in Hong Kong. I always like when people react to the local situation, so that is interesting.
- Yeung: To be fair, if we stand in their point of view, that's their style and their way of thinking. We have to view it from their angle to understand what they are thinking.
- Lo: The theme is good, but it is a little wasted. It can be better. The tempo of the story can be better.
- Wong: Is it because the technique they are using?
- Lo: They use Flash, so the movement does not have dimension or character. When they are moving, you don't feel it's an animation, it's more like a moving comic book or something.
- Wong: I'm just curious why the story has to be told as an animation rather than a comic book.
- Lo: It could be a perfect comic book. As an animation, it should do something more.
- Fan: The next one is *Swamp*.
- Lo: For stop motion animation, character design is very important. The main character for this film, the dog, it seems that it doesn't have a strong character. It's too mild and toy-like. And I really don't understand the story.
- Waliczky: I know this guy, he is my ex-student, but I did not help in this animation. I think he is talented. I never asked him what his story is about. I like this piece because of two things. One, he says at the end that the film is in memory of his dog. At the beginning he puts the dog's skull into a hole. I think the whole film is a sort of imagination of what the dead dog does under the ground. I like this idea very much because I think it is very sad. The dead dog is under ground and cannot do too much. It is a film about death, which is quite rare that someone makes an animation about this depressing, dream-like, surrealist subject. So I think in this film, the connection between the artist and this dead animal is deep and sensitive. He is very sad about this dog, and he tries to make a film for it. The other thing I like about this film is that it is beautifully recorded, with the light and the texture. I agree with you that the repetition is sometimes too much, but this is the monotony of death—what do you do under the earth? But this is just my opinion, I'd never asked him about it. He really worked very hard on it, and made a big effort to make this film. He sent another version here, and then he changed it and made it better, so I think he really put a lot of effort into it.
- Wong: I think it makes more sense after your explanation.

Lo: It's very personal, something between the director and the dog. As a work, he could have done more to make the audience become more involved in the whole thing.

Wong: The artist statement should tell more about the idea.

Waliczky: I think he's a very shy person, he doesn't really speak. But I agree that he should have made a clearer statement, which gives more hint on what he thinks about.

Fan: *April 21*.

Lo: It's quite nice. I like the drawing, and execution is good. Some movements are quite interesting, although I don't quite understand the whole thing. It's full of metaphors. It reminds me a bit of Bill Plympton's animation in the character design.

Yeung: I quite like the ending.

Waliczky: I also like the drawing, and the metaphor is quite nice, about different ideas and remembrances.

Fan: The last one is *Before Dying*.

Lo: This is good, I love this one.

Yeung: The pacing is very smooth. It's very easy to get into the story, and the message is very clear: don't be afraid, think positive.

Lo: The storytelling is good for a 15 minute work with no dialogue.

Yeung: The music is very nice, too.

Lo: The drawing is very beautiful.

Yeung: With the editing and pacing, it is very easy for the audiences to get into the story. I love it.

Fan: Nothing to add? Let's move to the exciting part. There are 10 titles. There are a few things we can do. We can directly nominate which work is going to get the Gold Award, or we can do it by elimination to narrow down the list of films. If you are ready we can directly nominate.

Lo: We can nominate 4 or 5 works out of 10.

Yeung: 5 out of 10 is more fair.

Fan: So let's pick 5, and then we will put it on the board.

(Jury members nominate the works using secret ballot. *Disposition* gets 5 votes, *My Hidden Watcher* gets 5 votes, *TreeMan* gets 2 votes, *Saveur Tèrebenthine* gets 1 vote, *Swamp* gets 3 votes, *April 21* gets 4 votes, *Before Dying* gets 5 votes.)

Fan: First of all, do we agree to take out *Sparkling Eyes*, *Aquarium* and *Speechless*?

(Jury members agree)

Fan: Are you ready to nominate the Gold Award?

(Jury members nominate Gold Award winners by secret ballot. *Disposition* gets 4 votes, *Before Dying* gets 1 vote.)

Fan: Do you have anything to say about *Before Dying*?

Yeung: I voted for *Before Dying*. The only thing I don't like about *Disposition* is I know what will happen next. It's too professional. I like the pacing of *Before Dying*. Everything is smooth and the ending is surprising. The overall technique is nice too.

Lo: *Disposition* fits in with the independence of ifva. Although it looks very professional, you can feel it's very independent. The design and the way he tells the story is not commercial. You rarely see this kind of thing in Hong Kong. Of course *Before Dying* is quite nice, but it's some kind of sponsored project, so it has a very strong message. In a way it's easier to work on this topic because you have many references. These are two very different works.

Yeung: For me they are very, very close.

Lo: Both are very nice works. I like both films very much.

Wong: Actually, I liked *Before Dying* when I first saw it, and I was so moved by the story. But when I watched it again, I still find it very nice and professional, but it's too safe, especially the storytelling. Also the song is too sentimental, rather than directing you to think about the story. At the end I'm still moved, but when I compare with *Disposition*, the latter is more adventurous. Of course we still can expect what's going on.

Lo: It's not a very complete work. There is something left behind.

Wong: To me, *Before Dying* is too safe. It could be more adventurous and experimental in terms of the storytelling.

Yeung: That's true. *Before Dying* makes you feel more emotional when you watch it the first time.

Waliczky: I like both films, but I prefer *Disposition* because I believe animation is not just about the story, it's about visuals and technique. If you have a story, there are many different ways to tell it. The story itself is just a story. If you have a beautiful story but you cannot tell it well, then it doesn't reach the audience. Maybe I'm old style, but to me animation is about movement, and *Disposition* is drawing the movement and the action, while *Before Dying* is not so good. It's fine and has nice drawings, but the movement is not so strong, and to me, movement is the essence of animation. In *Disposition*, it is really surprising how strong the atmosphere is. The drawing is very simple because this guy is concentrating on movement, and when you see it move, you go 'wow'. For this reason I choose *Disposition*.

Lo: *Disposition* is quite challenging because the whole story happens in a snowy and stormy atmosphere, and everything moves, so it takes a lot of hard work.

Waliczky: He uses just a few lines, but he's very good. He can be compared with the top Japanese animation.

Fan: Do we all agree? If so, then we go on to the next one, Silver Award.

(Jury members nominate Silver Award winner using secret ballot. *My Hidden Watcher* gets 1 vote, *Before Dying* gets 4 votes.)

Waliczky: I picked *My Hidden Watcher*, but it's a hard decision. I can say either of these two films can be the Silver Award winner. I come to animation from computer, and this is a brilliant work in 3D. It's okay with me if most of you say *Before Dying* should get the Silver, then I agree. If it's possible, I'd like the two guys to share the Silver Award.

Wong: For me the two works are close. If *My Hidden Watcher* is longer and more effort is paid to the story, then I would choose it.

Yeung: The ending suddenly stops.

Waliczky: The difference between the two films is if you are most sensitive to story, then you would vote for *Before Dying*, and if you are more sensitive to visuals, then it's the other one. They are both very good films. It's ok for me if *Before Dying* gets the Silver.

Fan: We now have the Gold and Silver awards, and we move on to Special Mention.

Lo: We only have one Special Mention?

Fan: Yes, with hard disk as the prize.

(Jury members nominate Special Mention winner using secret ballot. *My Hidden Watcher* gets 3 votes, *Swamp* gets 2 votes.)

Yeung: I am the only one who picked *Swamp*, so I'll talk about it. After Tamas explained the storyline, I changed the angle to look at this short film. I can feel the darkness of the director, and he can express what he feels very well.

Waliczky: I am very happy that you chose this, because I like it. I changed my vote when I saw you vote for it. As I explained to you, I really think it's a very nicely made film. *My Hidden Watcher* has this beautiful realistic style and atmosphere at the beginning, and a very interesting story, but then it changes into something very strange and childish, and then ends abruptly. It's not so consistent. *Swamp* lives in its world, if you like that world, it's more consistent. It keeps the same style from beginning to end, and gives a very strong vision of this sadness—that my dog died and is under the earth. That's why I liked it.

Lo: I like the opening scene, and after Tamas' explanation, I can get more from the work. But still, I think he can do better within the subject and material he uses. I dislike the main character the most, but maybe that's what his dog looks like, but I don't have a sentimental feeling with that character. For the director, of course he knows what his dog looks like, but for an audience, I expect something more.

Waliczky: It's an interesting point. Also I don't have the right distance. If you are teaching these young artists, and they make such a surprising, professional work, you are so happy.

- Lo: Maybe the film is too personal, and not easily received by most people. Of course there is nothing wrong with that.
- Wong: What is the meaning of Special Mention? Maybe it's not about being the best work. The reason I chose *My Hidden Watcher* is not just about technique—of course the technique is good, and so is the texture and lighting. Like with how he describes the little dust, that kind of observation is not easy to easy to catch. That kind of effort is really good. So it's not just about how professional the technique is. For *Swamp*, I would say that it's more personal and artistic, it has to be more special to fall into the category of Special Mention. I'm struggling. *My Hidden Watcher* is creating a new world and a new perspective to see the world, which is quite different from what we perceive about this creature. So strange, but in a good way. That's why I like it. The other one is more artistic. It may not be perfect, but...
- Waliczky: How was *My Hidden Watcher* made? Was it sponsored? Is there a big team or just one person?
- Lo: It's an outsource project from RTHK.
- Waliczky: I see several names here. Are they involved in this animation, or is it just one person? For Special Mention, we'd like to help somebody at the start of their careers, rather than a professional. If *My Hidden Watcher* was made in a more professional way, then it would be an argument against it.
- Lo: Three of the finalist works are RTHK outsource programs. It doesn't matter. The budget is low and they have creative freedom.
- Wong: RTHK does not provide extra support? They just give money?
- Lo: Yes, it's all done by the artists from beginning to end. This is made by a small studio, formed by the graduates from PolyU.
- Wong: We can only have one Special Mention?
- Fan: Yes, we cannot cut the hard disk in half.
- Wong: Maybe I'll change my vote. In terms of quality, I think *My Hidden Watcher* is better. But in terms of special, I think *Swamp* is more special.
- Yeung: The director didn't think much. He just did what he wanted to do. For this reason, we should give the award to him.
- Lo: I am okay with this.
- Fan: Is everyone fine with this result? If yes, *Swamp* will be the work of Special Mention.

(Jury members agree)

Animation Category

Gold Award

Disposition

Mak Siu-fung

Silver Award

Before Dying

Montagut Chuen

Special Mention

Swamp

Man Chun-yip