

19th ifva Awards - Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Yu Ka-ho (Yu), Justin Wong (Wong), Lo Che-ying (Lo), Alice Mak (Mak),
Andrew Chen (Chen)

ifva Representatives: Kattie Fan (Fan)

Fan: First of all thank you for acting as jury members for the 19th **ifva** Animation Category. The purpose of this meeting today is to select the awards. Many of you have served as jury members before, so I don't have to talk much about **ifva's** background. This category has Gold, Silver and Special Mention Awards. The Gold Award winner will receive a \$ 50,000 prize and a trophy, as well as the opportunity to participate in the Annecy International Animation Festival held in France in June this year; the Silver Award winner will receive \$ 30,000 and a trophy, while the Special Mention will get a certificate but no prize money.

Do you have any questions? We can first discuss each of ten works, then nominate award winners.

Yu: I have to declare an interest. I was the advisor to two of the pieces. Will we vote to decide on the awards later?

Fan: In the past we have had similar situations. You advised on the projects in your position as the school's instructor, rather than participate in the work's creation, is that right?

Yu: I did not take part in the creation, but gave advice in the process.

Fan: It's ok as long as you have declared. The works are ***Tale of Rebellious Stone*** and ***The Untold & Unseen?***

Yu: That's right.

Lo: I was a jury member for the Animation Start-ups Support Program (meaning that he had judged the works in other competitions.)

Fan: Are there any other declarations? If not, we can start discussing ***Tale of Rebellious Stone***.

Yu: Last time we did not discuss the works one by one, but rather talked about our favorite works.

Fan: We can do that too. We are video taping this meeting for record. We will publish the transcript to let participants know what the jury panel thinks of their works, so I hope to discuss each of the works so that participants can know your opinions.

Lo: In terms of style and subject matter, ***Tale of Rebellious Stone*** is an ambitious work. This style of animation is less common in Hong Kong than in Japan. The look and performance style are close to Japanese animation. Even though the production scale is much smaller, the result is quite well done. It is a good attempt for a Hong Kong work.

Mak: Is this a student work? It is quite strong, and the drawing is very good. It is hard for a work without dialogue to achieve such high standard. Few works left me feeling so terrified.

Wong: Compared to other works, this one has a much more layered story. It is an ambitious film that talks about faith and desire in a surreal way. I don't understand some of it, but the work does not force the audience to understand everything, yet the story is comprehensible.

Chen: This work left a good impression with me. Even after watching it a few times, I still found elements I was able to appreciate. Even though there are some parts I don't understand, the work offers up many contrasts. On one hand it is holy, while on the other it is profane. It tries to say a lot, and also gives the audience a great deal of room for thought. I highly recommend this work.

Mak: What is the artist doing now?

Yu: He has formed a company with two of his classmates, which is doing MVs mostly. He is not yet in a position to do works in his own style. After all, he has only just graduated, and hasn't found any big clients yet.

Fan: If you don't have anything else to add, let's move on to ***Hong Kong Station***.

Lo: It is rare to see a work involving an ensemble cast. It is an ambitious work that tells the changes in Hong Kong society from the 1970s to the present in under three minutes, with the whole film taking place in an MTR station, which is a difficult feat. Clearly three minutes is not enough, and leaves a great deal to be said. The work's strength lies in the character and action design, which have many worthy details. It is not too memorable, but leaves an impression on the audience. Some parts of the film are unclear, even though the ensemble style is interesting.

Yu: Every time I watch this film, I notice different interesting details, and there are lots of little things happening in the background. The camera takes an objective position and presents the story in a video game style, which is fun.

Chen: Among all the works, this is the most joyful. Using a single shot like this requires very detailed planning. Much of the action is meticulously executed.

Mak: I don't like the fact that it is not precise enough.

Lo: Some parts are incomprehensible.

Wong: If the film is about the 1970s to the present, the contrast is not big enough. Perhaps the film is too brief. I only discovered later that there are screen doors on the platform and realized there are changes, but there is not enough change.

Mak: This would have been good as an MTR ad.

Fan: The next work is *The Untold & Unseen*.

Lo: The mood is good, but the “snowmen” (the lead characters) are a bit shoddy.

Mak: The rest of the film is very good, but the “snowmen” pale in comparison. The character design is a bit old fashioned.

Lo: However the treatment of music, mood and color are very good, and the composition is pretty.

Wong: The work is too long. The part where they emerge into the new world is unconvincing, and the transformation is not radical enough. But I agree that visually it is fine, although the “snowmen” are a problem.

Chen: I agree that the mood is good, and the background is well-constructed. However I am a bit disappointed that it fails to explain what is so good about nature as opposed to the factory, which seems very high tech. What has improved in their lives after returning to nature?

Mak: It seems that the story is unfinished. It needs to be a minute or so longer.

Chen: If only the director could explain that part better, then it'd be perfect.

Mak: If too many of them rushed out, then it would become just another crowded place, a congested city.

Fan: If you have nothing further to add, the next work is *YETI*.

Lo: I like this work a lot. Even though it is short, it is just the right length. The art direction is very good. The character design is simple but distinctive, and the action is nicely done. Even though the theme is direct, on the whole the work is well executed and a joy to watch.

Mak: What is the character?

- Lo: Some kind of bird or animal. The turtle is interesting.
- Yu: When I watched it the first time, I didn't understand the story, perhaps because it is too short. However, I agree that the character modeling and visual design are pretty.
- Wong: I had to read the work description to understand the story. However the film is quite distinctive.
- Chen: I watched it a few times, and felt there is something lacking with the film. The character design and color are pretty, but the story is just so-so, and too brief. It did not leave a deep impression with me.
- Mak: Ah, that thing is actually a dog and snowman. If I didn't know it was a student work, I would have guessed it's a European animation.
- Fan: The next work is ***Somewhere I belong***.
- Lo: Cutout style animation is quite rare, but this work is a bit rough. It is more suited to children.
- Mak: Is cutout the sole technique used?
- Lo: The more complex sections are done in line drawing.
- Mak: It is quite smooth.
- Yu: The work is smooth in terms of story rhythm, editing and music.
- Lo: It tells its story well.
- Wong: The work is quite complete and smooth, and one does not have to make too much effort to understand the story. I agree that parts of it are comparatively crude, but it's acceptable. I don't like the line drawing part. On the whole it's not bad, but not outstanding.
- Mak: Perhaps the character design should be prettier.
- Lo: That definitely has an effect. The characters are not distinctive enough, and there is a lack of consistency in the modeling.
- Chen: I quite like the ending, where they could be found in the North Pole but not the South Pole. That part is the most clear.
- Fan: The next work is ***The Sweet Moment***.

Lo: The artwork is quite good, and so is the action. However there is only one idea, and the work is too simple and direct. As a promotional film it is appealing.

Chen: As a promotional film it is quite successful. However, upon watching it again, I find it too short.

Mak: I don't remember what happens in the middle. What happened to the one who was bullied?

Lo: He changed into a green monster.

Chen: Actually the green monster wants to give them candy, but they misunderstood him.

Lo: He stretches his hand out to give candy, not to hit them.

Yu: The story has problems. The guy with mental problems was angry and hit the table, and the next shot he is not angry anymore as he reaches into the drawer. However the shot where he is not angry is too brief and not obvious enough, and the audience may think that he is still angry. That's why the shot in which he hands them the candy seems unconvincing. If that shot were handled better it would make a difference.

Lo: I agree. I didn't understand it when I saw it the first time.

Chen: I think he deliberately misled the audience into thinking that he became a green monster.

Fan: The next work is ***The Crazy Pandaman***.

Mak: There are a lot of Hong Kong-style pop references.

Lo: The work is very concentrated, with a bit too much dialogue, and there is too much he wants to say. Perhaps because I know Kong Kee, I think of this work as a moving comics rather than an animation. His shots are very beautiful, but in fact there is no need for the characters to move since there is no camera movement, which is a bit strange. The rhythm of movement is a little like animated captions.

Mak: I like his street smart elements.

Lo: His content is ok. Even if you don't look at the pictures and just concentrate on listening to the dialogue, you can still get what he's trying to say.

Chen: Does it mean that he didn't fully express the characteristics of animation with this work?

Lo: I think so. It is hard to describe what he lacks. His previous film was like that too. There

was a lot of action and the composition was rich, but somehow there was something missing. His editing technique also comes from comics.

Wong: This has to do with his style. His line and drawing style are very flat and immobile.

Lo: Even if there is no movement, the composition can still be dramatic. Now the work only has little movement, so that's why it does not fulfill the potential of animation.

Wong: The action could be more attractive.

Lo: It's a matter of the storyboard. Animation has to rely on the camera to tell a story, and not still frames plus dialogue.

Chen: His style has a certain crudeness. That and the lack of substantial motion compromised the film.

Yu: I am trying to look at this from a different perspective. You said that it doesn't fully express the characteristics of animation. But what are the characteristics of animation? Movement is essential in early Disney animations - all 24 frames would be drawn. Whereas Japanese animation has a long history in manga, the movements are less exaggerated. They come from two very different aesthetic traditions.

Lo: I'm not talking about whether this work is similar to other animation or if it is animated enough, but that as animation, it feels inadequate. The inadequacy comes from the treatment of motion and camera angles. We are talking about his story-telling technique. To be more direct, it's whether the work satisfies me. I understand that in addition to the story, there can be other ways of expressing motion and there are different ways of camera expressions. However, the method he chose is inadequate.

Chen: Japanese comics have limited motion, but their posture is very strong. With this work, the camera only pans to the left and right to show characters running. Actually he could have added one or two more frames with the legs moving back and forth or the arms stretching forward. However, the artist did none of these things, but simply presented the action in single frames, which gives this work a feeling of being incomplete.

Yu: It is like moving different layers on After Effects.

Lo: Like the scene where they are flying paper airplanes could have been developed better. Now it does not quite achieve the intended effects. Actually this is a handsome looking work with good use of color.

Wong: The voice recording could be better. I'm not sure if he did it on purpose, but the tone of voice sounds like they are reading from a book, one sentence at a time. Along with the flat treatment, the whole work does not feel very coherent.

- Mak: The work itself is complete. This is Kong Kee's style.
- Wong: So the tone of voice may be deliberate.
- Lo: The tone is similar to his previous work, as well as the rhythm of the story, so I'm sure it's deliberate. This is his style, but as a viewer I would like to see more.
- Chen: I didn't understand it the first time I saw it. It had to be explained to me how he helped the granny, perhaps because the shot was too brief. Other people viewing it the first time may feel the same. Some details whiz by too quickly, like what happened to the cardboard.
- Mak: He explains it in the dialogue in the next scene.
- Lo: But the shot itself goes by in seconds. It's too brief.
- Yu: When I was watching it, I questioned why the granny would use the cardboard she gathered with such effort to make paper airplanes. It is only in the second half is it explained that the cardboard is stolen, which makes the story more believable.
- Fan: The next work is ***Twins***.
- Lo: It is too simple and feels inadequate. It could have been developed further. The action is pretty. Even without using dialogue, the film expresses certain feelings.
- Wong: With this kind of subject matter, I expected the drawing to be more pretty and refined. Now it feels bit crude and inconsistent.
- Yu: I like the mood of the film, but I didn't understand some parts. I don't know whether it is deliberate or the director's fault. The story seems to be about a girl looking for her twin sister, guided by the bear, but in the end their roles switch, which confused me. Perhaps the director was trying to express the complicated web of emotions often associated with twins.-Expressed this way, the story seems to inspire the audience to think, but I'm not sure about what exactly.
- Lo: There are two bears, so it's not a matter of who's guiding whom. The relationship between human and bear can be viewed as one piece, and belongs to the same idea, that of someone looking for another.
- Yu: The bear's growth in size, is perhaps a metaphor of the girl's own growth into maturity. The bear represents childhood. The sisters finally meet as children. But where had the sister gone? What does it mean when she turns and leaves?

- Mak: If you look at the artist statement, you guessed rightly. The bear represents childhood.
- Wong: The artist statement is well-written.
- Lo: However, the work itself is too simple.
- Chen: If the environment can be more pretty and if the story has more imagination, it'd be a better work. It reminds me of *The Snowman*.
- Lo: The girl's movements are good, and the details are not bad, even though the characters are mostly standing around and walking. Overall it's ok, but the background is a bit crude.
- Mak: The girl is not cute enough. Her body is similar to Hayao Miyazaki's Totoro.
- Fan : The next work is *Dap Pang Man*.
- Lo: The story is complete and it is of sufficient length, but what is it trying to say? Why does it mystify the bamboo scaffold worker, only to claim that he is just an ordinary person? What is its message?
- Chen: When I first watched it, I didn't much care for it, and thought it old-fashioned. It brings out the message that every job has dignity. The lead character's mother hopes that he will become a doctor, and asks him what is good about being a bamboo scaffolding worker, which seems discriminatory. Watching a second time, I like its use of color, which has a 1960s or 1970s feel to it. The artist purposely wants to create a retro feel.
- Wong: The part where the worker saves the main character is good. However, I dislike the ending scene. It was ok when I watched it the first time. In that scene, the narrator talks about how he would stare at scaffolding workers when he was young, and then moved on to talk about his daily life and school, which do not seem to have anything to do with the main theme. Overall the story could be better, but I like the worker's character design.
- Yu: Is he trying to say that the main character is not well respected in life? I don't like the voice recording, especially the first scene with the children laughing. In real life there should be more than just the sound of laughter, so the sound treatment seems shoddy.
- Mak: When I was young, I also looked up to bamboo scaffolding workers. However this work treats workers differently than other characters, and the artist never lets you see their faces, which seems awkward.
- Chen: He looks really cool when he's wearing a hat, and when he takes it off, he reveals himself to be just an ordinary person.

Wong: This message is there from the start, and using the images to convey it again seems too deliberate and repetitive.

Fan: The final work is *Blind Vision*.

Lo: Overall this work is fine, even though it is quite brief. Most people are not that familiar with blind people, so this work serves to help people experience what blind people feel. That's why the work should allow some time for people to appreciate its message. The film is easy to understand, but too rushed. The artistic style is quite distinct and the lines are pretty, however, pace could be slower. If it can let people know how blind people feel the world with their hearing, it would be a more memorable work.

Wong: I quite like this film and its story-telling technique, like the black and white background. As the main character sees more, the background becomes enlarged. However, there is too much voice-over and the message is too obvious. It should leave more room for people to fill in the gaps themselves.

Lo: The voice-over keeps explaining things to us, preventing us from getting into the work.

Wong: The artist is afraid that people will not understand. Since the work is so short, the artist has to use a lot of voice-over.

Mak: I think it's just right. The voice-over is the blind person's monologue. If the work is intended for the normal-sighted general public, then the work is just right. The artist uses an ordinary style to express his ideas, which lowers the work's artistic merit, but on the whole, this is a precise and professional film.

Chen: I liked this work a great deal in the first round. Its length of three and a half minutes is just right, otherwise it'd be boring. The lines on his drawings move around a great deal, and his shots change rapidly, which gives a feeling of being fast paced. It is clear that the artist spent a lot of effort in making it. I appreciate the depiction of depth in his drawings, which brings out the sense of space as well as the world of blind people. The drawings often depict only fragmented objects, like legs and wheels of cars, and the people have no faces, which brings out how blind people perceive the world with hearing. I think the work is quite a success. However, it needs to pause for longer in some places to allow the audience to appreciate the composition.

Wong: The part where he falls down should be longer to let the audience to sympathize with the main character.

Lo: I have seen this work many times. Each time I have felt that the pace was too fast

Wong: Is this really a promotional film?

Lo: No. Even though the director is not blind, he must have done a lot of research.

Mak: Like *Dap Pang Man*, this film also feels like a public service announcement.

Fan: Now that we have discussed all ten works, you can now nominate works that you think deserve the Gold, Silver and Special Mention awards. Perhaps we can start with eliminating a few and then discuss.

Lo: Let us each pick a few works, then see if there are any in common.

Mak: How many do we choose?

Lo: It's up to you. There are three awards in total, and the standard this year is quite high.

Chen: There is only one Special Mention, right?

Fan: Yes.

Lo: So let's pick three each?

Yu: I'm not sure what to do, since there are two works I can't choose.

Fan: It's ok. You can choose them.

Yu: Then my choice may be biased. You don't think that could be a problem?

Fan: From the perspective of the competition, we invited you to be part of the jury panel because we trust your professional judgment. Even though you were the supervising instructor on two of the works, you did not actually assist in the production. So you should judge the works on their own merits.

Yu: I have been a jury member on other competitions, and I was not allowed to comment on those works.

Fan: As long as you have declared and that we are aware, it's ok. We can discuss later how to deal with this. If you are ready, let us nominate the works.

Mak: I nominate *Tale of Rebellious Stone*, *Hong Kong Station*, *YETI* and *Blind Vision*.

Lo: Four works.

Mak: Is that possible?

Fan: No problem. At this point, we only need to eliminate a few so that it's easier to discuss.

Lo: I also nominate these four.

Wong: I nominate ***Tale of Rebellious Stone***, ***Blind Vision***, ***Hong Kong Station***, ***Somewhere I belong***, by order of preference.

Chen: After viewing the works again, my choice is the same as the first time. ***Tale of Rebellious Stone***, ***Hong Kong Station***, ***Blind Vision***, ***The Untold & Unseen***.

Yu: 1. ***Tale of Rebellious Stone***, 2. ***Twins***, 3. ***Hong Kong Station***, 4. ***YETI***.

Lo: According to the votes now, ***Tale of Rebellious Stone*** is first place, ***Hong Kong Station*** is second place, and ***Blind Vision*** is third place. Do you have other opinion?

Mak: Can we have two Special Mentions?

Lo: ***YETI*** is fourth place. Can we have another Special Mention? I really like this work, but it depends on what you think.

Fan: If you wish to have two Special Mentions, it is technically possible. Special Mentions are different from Gold or Silver awards. Special Mention recognizes certain aspects of a work that you think deserves recognition. You can even nominate works that you haven't mentioned so far.

Mak: I agree with encouraging more animation works.

Wong: I agree with giving ***YETI*** Special Mention.

Chen: I'm fine with it, even though I didn't nominate ***YETI***.

Yu: I also agree with two Special Mentions.

Fan: So all of you agree with giving two Special Mentions to ***YETI*** and ***Blind Vision***, right? So I'll summarize: the Gold Award goes to ***Tale of Rebellious Stone***, Silver Award goes to ***Hong Kong Station***, while ***YETI*** and ***Blind Vision*** gets Special Mention.

Animation Category Award Winners

Gold Award

Tale of Rebellious Stone / Ng Kai-chung, Ng Tsz-ching

Silver Award

Hong Kong Station / Wong Wai-ho, Oscar Sheikh

Special Mention

YETI / Joe Kwun

Blind Vision / Leecat Ho