

The 24th ifva Awards
Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Lo Che Ying (Lo), Ulrich Wegenast (Wegenast), Liu Jian (Liu), Peter Ng (Ng), Yu Ka Ho (Yu)

Organizer representative: Kattie Fan (Fan), Samantha Szeto (Szeto)

Fan: Today, our mission is to select the prizes of the Animation Category that we are going to present at the awards ceremony. We have the Gold Award, the winner is entitled to HK\$50,000 in cash and a trophy, Silver Award, the winner is entitled to HK\$30,000 and a trophy, and Special Mention, no cash prize, just a certificate as encouragement. If you have no questions about the films or the assessment criteria, we can discuss the animations you have just watched one by one, and after that we can nominate the prizes. We can begin with *The Lighthouse*. Feel free to express your comments, views and perspectives.

Lo: A nice and heart-warming piece of work. Technically, it's not complicated, it's a very simple work, just a hand-drawn animation with not complicated movements. I like the art direction, illustration, use of color and the texture, the best of all is the story-telling. The dialogue tells a very simple but moving story. The pacing and everything are nice, as is the music and sound effects. I love this work.

Liu: The work is simple and moving, but the emotional expression is too simple and conceptual. It is a mediocre work.

Wegenast: My position is in between. It has originality, maybe it's a story we have seen in animations around the globe, about industrialization, nostalgia, poetry. Maybe it's a bit too naïve. Anyhow, I like the artwork, the very special atmosphere created in the film; I'm not sure if the sound is a bit over-done, it was good but maybe the effect is too much. In general, it creates a unique world and it tells the story of many Asian big towns and leads us to rethink what is happening with cities. It's an issue also discussed in Europe, but in Asia city development is more straight-forward. It's an issue very much discussed in Asia and in China. The topic is very important. I want to keep this work in the final discussion.

Yu: You pointed out the differences between Europe and Asia, about industrialization and demolishing the old houses. It seems like it's more

political here in Asia, and involves more brute force. I also think the piece is nicely done; the topic is very common and often talked about. I also agree with you that the music may be over-dramatic. I wish the music doesn't start at the very beginning. It's nicely done, but it doesn't stay inside me that much, there is not much aftertaste.

Ng: I liked this work initially (in the first-round jury meeting). It's a strange feeling. From the technique to story-telling and how they encounter the lighthouse, the director tells a smooth story that moves the audience. Watching it in a theatre adds to the work's charms. I agree that the music and story-telling need not be so direct. On the whole it is a well-rounded work which leaves a lasting impression on the audience.

Fan: I'd like to add that overall, we received 113 works this year for the Animation Category. The first-round jurors including Yu Ka-ho, Peter Ng and Tsui Ka-hei shortlisted these 10 finalists. Maybe we can move on to the next work, *Automatonomy*.

Lo: This is a stop-motion animation. We see a lot of animation on this theme, about human and robots. For this kind of theme, if you can do something new, like visually or with execution, it can be interesting, but this work does not have that. The art direction is kind of familiar, like using two screws for the eyes. It can be better.

Liu: I don't really like this work. Perhaps the director spent too much time on the production and the storytelling is not good. For me, this is a pass.

Wegenast: I agree, it's like a boy's fantasy, like playing with puppets. They are so into the cinematography that they forget storytelling. The story itself, with the idea of sacrifice, should have many more possibilities. However it is very minimal, so it's "out" for me.

Lo: There is no interaction between the robot and the boy.

Yu: I also think the storytelling is weak. The reason we picked it is that the craftsmanship is quite good. It's not perfect, but for a student film, which I suppose it is, it is technically quite good, but the storytelling is not there yet.

Ng: Among the more than 100 entries, there were some stop motion animations, which we realize how difficult it is to do. This work tries very hard to achieve this format, but the story is not very attractive, and the relationship between the boy and the girl is not well-expressed.

Fan: The next work is *Toxic Relationship*.

Wegenast: I like the work, it's very original, about psychology, the inner world, relations, being split up, etc. Animation is a good medium to show those inner worlds. I really saw some new, original iconography in the film. The animation is quite fluid, sometimes it's even loose and playful, jumping into the imagery. It is also very musical. The part at the end where she is coming together, being not fragmented and divided anymore, maybe it's not necessary to have that kind of blood. The animation is very short, but feels longer because there is so much imagery in it. Even though the technology is not new, I love how it is done.

Lo: It's a good piece of work, unique and original in the design, art direction and movement. The director is female, and explores relationship between male and female from a woman's perspective. The pacing is too fast, the work should be longer. There are too many thoughts and ideas inside, and it is easy to lose something, maybe one needs to watch it several times to understand more what the director wants to say. It is like a dance.

Ng: This film has added charm when seen in a theatre. Compared with *The Lighthouse*, with this film, I don't know what will happen from one frame to the next. The female director shows different scenarios happening in relationships, which fills me with a sense of expectation and novelty. I have seen the film many times, but each time I make new discoveries and appreciate this work more. I agree that the pace can be adjusted or the length increased. Nonetheless, the work's art and color are all very well done.

Yu: I like it too, but also agree with Lo Sir that the rhythm and pacing is too fast, I wish it was much longer, it feels so compressed with so many things in it. I also like the way she uses imageries to represent certain emotions and mental states, but I feel like the story itself may be too typical, it doesn't delve deep enough into the psychology and sophistication of the human psyche. However, I highly consider this work.

Liu: It'd be better if the structure was more rigorous.

Lo: The movements can also be better. Now, some movements are too simple.

Liu: On the big screen you can see some flaws.

Yu: When the man betrays the woman, it happens in a way that is too simple and

superficial to me. In just a split second, you see him looking at another girl, and then they break up. To me that was not very convincing.

Fan: The next work is *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*.

Lo: Technically, the work is quite complicated, the object they use is real, and mochi is very hard to handle. The director makes the movement very complicated and there are many variations with the camera movement. The music is also very good, the song is nice. You watch it and feel happy and want to eat mochi or something. There are not many messages behind it, it's just a playful film.

Liu: I like this work, too. I like simple and pure animations, and such works are increasingly rare.

Lo: Nowadays people use CG instead of real objects.

Wegenast: I also like the simplicity, playfulness and the music, and I also agree that there are fewer and fewer animation nowadays that use real, tactile objects. But for me it's not very original. There is no deeper sense, even though it is not about deeper sense. The artist fulfilled what they aimed at, but the work seems like an experiment, and not a very progressive experiment. It's nice to watch, like listening to a relaxing song, but I would not fight for it in the final discussion.

Yu: In the statement, the artist wrote that the work was done by hacking VR devices and stop-motion software. I didn't know about this until now. This gave me a little different impression. I have watched it more than two times, I enjoyed it. It does not leave a strong aftertaste, not very deep but enjoyable. I really liked the camerawork, I was so overwhelmed by it. It's not the first time I've seen such abstractness, of using shapes and movements. It's like the visual music of the early 20th century. The statement about using VR devices got me thinking.

Wegenast: It looks like a traditional stop-motion work, I didn't see any VR technology used, maybe it's invisible? It looks like an abstract film from the 1920s or 1940s-1960s, and there is this Japanese tradition of abstract films.

Yu: Aesthetically it doesn't break new ground.

Wegenast: I didn't get the idea about the title.

Yu: I think it's a play on words. In Japanese there is no distinction between 'L' and 'R', so 'fly' and 'fry' can sound the same in Japanese, and at one point you can see the freed mochi being fried in the pan, and sometimes they fly.

Ng: In the first round, this work quickly stood out. Although the story is not strong, the technique and imagery leave a strong impression. This is a very pure animation, and showcases the many possibilities of animation. The technique is very solid.

Fan: The next work is *21*³.

Lo: Technically, it's very nice CG. The design of the model and rendering are very nice. One weak point is the story itself, within the 4-minute duration, it does not leave a deep impression about the story but the visual is memorable. I don't know why the artist used line drawing, but the contrast is too big. The real world is so detailed but the flashback is such simple line drawing, it doesn't help a lot.

Liu: This work is like a film trailer or promotion. As a short film, it is not complete. I will not consider this work for awards.

Wegenast: It's like an opening scene for a computer game; I didn't like the story. A film can deal with violence, which is an important topic, but this is just a teenage fantasy or romanticization of violence, showing some weird idea about sexuality; unfortunately, too many games are like this. What could have been interesting is the change of technique from 3D game engine-based animation to drawn animation, but it didn't make any sense why they used it. I normally like hybrid films, but this one doesn't add anything to it.

Yu: To me it's more like an exercise in technique, obviously very good technique of real-time render. Among all the works, this one has the highest level of craftsmanship and is the most high-tech, but it seems like there is a big back-story to this film that has not been successfully conveyed. I'm not sure if there are other short films that are part of this imaginary world, I wish there were.

Wegenast: I'm sure the artist will make it in the animation industry, we don't have to worry about his career!

Ng: I feel the work is like a showreel or a pilot. Many young animators strive for this kind of visual effect. Perhaps 10 or 20 years ago this kind of work was attractive. Nowadays, 3D animation has become very common, and so this

work appears redundant. It reflects that many production teams are still keen on this kind of visual effect, but there are too many of this kind of works around.

Fan: The next work is *Subway Commute*.

Yu: I really like this one. Every time I see it, I see something new, some new way to interpret it. The story about living in the city doing a very boring job is nothing new, it's been talked about quite a lot, but the presentation of the story is amazing to me. I like how he uses the briefcase with the hiring sign popping up to indicate someone has lost their jobs, I also like the spinning camera and you see the mirror reflections of himself, which seems to indicate a timeline of him looking backward and forward about his own life. I also like the acting and the way the artist uses this background infographics to tell stories. To me, every aspect is really well done.

Lo: The artform and design remind me of the old animations from Eastern Europe, with simple graphics and colors conveying a lot of metaphors and messages. I think the work is a little too typical for me, I think I have to watch it a few more times to understand what he wants to express. Visually, it's interesting, but a little hard to digest. It's a nice and unique work.

Liu: I like this work. It talks about the feelings and anxiety between people. The duration could have been shorter so as to express much stronger feelings. The pace is a bit too loose.

Lo: The last scene when he goes up the elevator, it does not have much of an impact.

Liu: There should be a climax.

Ng: Some of the over 100 entries also talk about subways, but this one hits the right note. I got lost for a little bit in the middle, and every time I feel I missed something or did not finish watching it because it is hard to digest. However, the artform and design are attractive.

Wegenast: I also liked it, this Eastern European style, abstract but still figurative type of animation. I watch a lot of films about metros and being alone in the big city. The aspect of manipulation is a bit simplistic with the wires. Still, it is original, I have seen a lot worse films on this topic. I also got lost quite often, which I liked. It's a good film, but it struggles with the timing. Some of the imageries are very original, but in general, it could be more precise and better

executed. We can keep it for discussion, but it's not my number one.

Fan: The next work is *Bye Bye, Comrade*.

Liu: This work can be compared to *Kin's Hair* and learn from it on how to fashion a more powerful story about history and reflecting a historical period. The subject matter is not bad but too superficial with too many formal symbolic elements. The subject matter seems deep but the expression is too simplistic and shallow. It is not a good work.

Lo: The art direction is not that good, even with the use of traditional Communist symbols and setting, but when you look at it, it is quite rough in some ways. The samples that the director uses are not impressive.

Wegenast: There are no subtitles. I think it's a German production, the lady has been living for a while in Germany, and the work is a reflection of that in that it has a lot of nostalgia. For me as a German person, the film is about Communist China and all these signs, about things that are lost and trying to deal with it. But the film struggles a lot with the timing and storytelling. As an exotic perspective it is interesting, the comrade who died must be a famous person.

Lo: He's a fictional character.

Wegenast: It's very convincing. There are some nice moments like when she was changing channels on the TV and all channels (are the same). The film is too long, I like the artwork because it was rough and hand-made, I understand the character's childhood feelings because this propaganda on every channel gets on your nerves, and she resists even though she understands that she has to be sad and has to cry. In general, it's not a good piece; there are nice imageries that are done in a special way, but she doesn't reach her target. Perhaps it's meant for a European audience, or someone from East Germany who knows this world. It's superficial because she could have done much more with the psyche of the girl, and the parents are just standing there with no interaction and it's just about her, and she is like an autistic isolated from the rest of the world, which is a problem with the storytelling rather than her idea.

Yu: I was not quite sure when she climbs up the ladder and there is a pair of feet seen from below, I don't know whose feet they are.

Lo: It's quite confusing.

Yu: I didn't know they were feet until the second or third time I watched the film. After she climbs down, she goes back to the classroom and starts to cry, I was moved by that scene. She is crying with the other girls, but she has a different reason for crying. I think that's interesting. I also like the subtle elements in the story, like the parents listening to the stock market the next day after the funeral, which is subtle and interesting commentary on the situation.

Wegenast: I have a question about the announcement at the end.

Lo: At the end, when the girl goes home after crying, the father turns on the radio and he is not listening to news about the dead comrade but listens to stock market news. That's the punchline, that the mourning is just for one day.

Ng: I think films and animations have a special charm, and sometimes works are more attractive than people. In the first round, this point had already been brought up. Some jury members were touched by this film, and this is one of the inexplicable charms of this film. I quite like the hand-made feel of this film, but on the whole, it is like a school graduation project. Some parts are undeniably detailed and worth appreciation.

Liu: How old is the artist?

Wegenast: It's a German production, so I've seen the film before. Its style looks like a film from Cologne Art Academy, but I don't know her personally.

Liu: In China, many people born in the 1980s are fond of making works about history, but this history is told to them by other people rather than their own personal history. The history depicted in this film certainly does not come from the artist's own childhood, so it is understandable that it is superficial.

Wegenast: In the late 1980s to nowadays, this type of state-driven mourning has existed. If she was born in 1980s, this could have fitted.

Liu: The story in this film takes place in the 1960s.

Fan: The next work is *Infidelity*.

Lo: This is some kind of melodrama, but maybe due to the length, the ending is a bit rushed. It can be longer and more detailed. The art is very unique, and the color and lines are nice.

Wegenast: It's well executed, and the style has a bit of originality, it has a graphics style with minimalist elements, but I think it goes too much in the anime style. I'm not sure if I like the plot; the female wants to get free from the landlord, there is this power relations and her lover is also betraying her, but what is the final meaning of going back to the landlord and staying with him because she's too naïve and realizes she also getting betrayed? It could be some kind of male fantasy. The message is a little strange if the landlord is the good guy. When it comes to the style, there are some nice elements.

Liu: This story can be developed into an animated TV or online drama, but for this competition, it is not artistic enough. It is a commercial film, and I won't recommend it for awards.

Ng: I have paid attention to the works of this director for some time. His team is no large, and I believe that it is very difficult for them to operate. Watching this work on the big screen, the color and details are solid, many things such as the garbage bins are well-designed and very thoughtful. It is very rare nowadays to be able to persevere creating works of a consistent style. The duration of this work is too short. I agree with other judges that this work can be part of a series. The characters are very complicated and not well-developed in the film's 6-minutes running time. The work is very impressive on the big screen.

Wegenast: It's a good idea. It's a commercial work, but I don't have problems with it. If it was a feature film, this style will be very original. This is more like a pilot for a feature film. In the end, the message is the problem for me.

Yu: I can't avoid comparing his other works to this one, which feels like a small part of a longer film. I agree with Ulrich in that I am not sure about the message, it's kind of confusing. We know how the story happens, but the motivations of the characters are a little bit lacking; we're not sure what they actually want. I like the style, there is some humor in the design of the scenes, like the Hong Kong-style garbage bins, the logo of the west gate, which is a swear word in Chinese.

Wegenast: The film itself is very serious, though, so the funny design elements don't really fit.

Yu: His other works are more complete, but in this film, he is trying something new with the humor in the design.

- Fan: The next work is *The Last Day of Summer*.
- Ng: At first, I liked *The Lighthouse* and also *Kin's Hair*. Watching *The Last Day of Summer* on the big screen, I felt the film had a certain power and I was able to identify with the three kids. Even though the craftsmanship and form are not very complete, I liked the work as a whole.
- Lo: The idea is nice, about some trauma from childhood, but I think it's a little bit too short. What happens to the third boy, we want to know more. Was he injured? There is too much space for imagination. It can be a more powerful film if there was more, now it suddenly stops.
- Wegenast: The film has potential, but it should be developed further. You want to know more about the psychology of the three boys. It's a pity it's too short. You want to know why this boy goes to the fireworks, and the conflict is too little. If there was more time, like 10 minutes, it could be developed better.
- Lo: This film reminds me of one of my old films, my story is about a schoolboy on the first day of summer, he meets a dying old man who asks the boy to bring his dead body to the sea. The boy brings the body to the sea in secret over a few nights. That's my story, which is more impressive!
- Liu: I don't know at which festival I have seen this film.
- Lo: I like the film, but it's too short.
- Yu: It's kind of rough and obviously too short. I didn't like it the first time, I thought it was ordinary, but I watched it again and I saw something there.
- Wegenast: Maybe for a Special Mention, because then you can say the work has potential and that it is in the right direction...
- Ng: I want to add that some works improved with repeated viewing, while some lost points. This work had improved with repeated viewing.
- Fan: The last work is *Kin's Hair*.
- Lo: This film is very Hong Kong, from the design, atmosphere, character design, dialogue. In 6 minutes, it talks about the transition of Hong Kong over 20 years. It is very moving, mixing laughter with tears.
- Liu: I like this work the most for its black humor; it is romantic with a faint sense

of sorrow. Because of these feelings, its small production flaws are forgivable.

Wegenast: The film is interesting in that it is also a journey for me, at the beginning I was unsure, I didn't like the style of the characters too much, but the film really develops. It is very rich and a very romantic story when the love of his life comes back, and he realizes we are all human beings and there is nothing we can glorify. Also, the transformation of his body and the transformation of the city, indeed, for me as a westerner these aspects are quite important, like the protests, all these things are implemented in 6 minutes is quite astonishing. It's like a feature film, it's poetic, political, social, romantic, it's very rich. I don't like the style too much, but the complexity is really great.

Yu: I like this film very much. The artists are very young, they just graduated from university, which is a surprise to me, because the film is so rich with Hong Kong history of the 90s.

Lo: They did a lot of research, I think.

Wegenast: There is a lot of wisdom, too. A very mature work, as if made by a 50-year-old!

Yu: It resonated with me a lot, I think it resonates with many Hong Kong people.

Ng: I liked the film a lot when I first saw it. There is a scene that left a strong impression, it's when they meet each other again in a taxi at the end; it's unforgettable. The use of hair to transverse the whole work is a solid technique and I think the work is commendable and the story resonates with Hong Kong people, and the style is also distinctive. Even though the work did not improve with repeated viewing, it is stronger than other works. At first I liked *The Lighthouse* and *Kin's Hair*, but after watching them again carefully, I think that *Kin's Hair* is better.

Fan: Are we ready to nominate the prizes?

Yu: We can have more than one Special Mention?

Liu: Do we write down our choices now or discuss first?

Fan: We can discuss, or you can state your preferences now.

Liu: I choose *Kin's Hair* for Gold Award.

Wegenast: It seems clear what is the main award, right? Everybody likes *Kin's Hair* a lot? It seems very Hong Kong-based but also very universal, a story about a normal guy and lost love. It's the richest and most complex work.

Yu: I am debating between this and *Subway Commute*. Peter mentioned that some films get better the more times you watch it, and there are films that don't give you more with repeated viewing. To me, *Subway Commute* gave me more, whereas *Kin's Hair* is very strong and complete, but I didn't get anything more the next time I watch it. With *Subway Commute*, I keep having some new interpretation.

Lo: I've watched *Kin's Hair* more than 5 times, every time I watch it, I enjoy it and it moves me, I don't know why. I love the narration, you can feel many messages behind it.

Liu: Let's vote for Gold Award now, majority wins.

Ng: I vote for *Kin's Hair*, too.

Liu: For Silver Award, I vote for *Subway Commute*.

Yu: I'll go for *Subway Commute*.

Wegenast: For me, *Subway Commute* has some strong elements but also some very weak ones. The timing is off, but I'll go with it. It's a matter of diplomacy, but personally I like *Toxic Relationship*, even though it also has timing issues. Maybe I can keep it for Special Mention because the artist is really talented and the imagery is more original than *Subway Commute*.

Yu: Everyone should pick the one they like, and then you vote and argue.

Wegenast: So, I choose *Toxic Relationship* for Silver Award.

Lo: My choice is *Toxic Relationship*.

Fan: Let's have some more discussion and see how Peter decides. Now we have two votes each for *Toxic Relationship* and *Subway Commute*.

Ng: Between the two, I pick *Toxic Relationship*. I think it is better.

Wegenast: Maybe *Toxic Relationship* is too simple, but it's important to have the female perspective. Not only because of the female perspective, I'm also

convinced it's a strong work. I'd rather have a work that's too short than too long. *Subway Commute* is for sure one of the strongest works.

Fan: So, *Toxic Relationship* will get the Silver Award. Now for Special Mention.

Lo: *Subway Commute*.

Wegenast: I have three nominations for Special Mention.

Lo: *Subway Commute* and *The Lighthouse*.

Wegenast: I choose *Subway Commute*, *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*, which I think is very special even though it is traditional, and *The Last Day of Summer*.

Yu: I vote for *Subway Commute*.

Fan: It's best to have one Special Mention, but if it is too difficult, we can also talk about having two.

Wegenast: I think it is important to have *Subway Commute* as Special Mention. If there was just one, I would choose it, if there were two, I would include *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*. Now that we have two Hong Kong films winning awards, it would be a good signal to choose a film from Taiwan and one from Japan. Both are very original but lacking a few things.

Lo: My choices are *Subway Commute* and *The Lighthouse*, but I am okay with *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*.

Ng: I choose *The Lighthouse* and *The Last Day of Summer*.

Liu: I also choose *Subway Commute*.

Fan: Shall we confirm that the first Special Mention is *Subway Commute*. How many votes on this film?

(There are 4 votes.)

Fan: Let's decide if we should have a second one.

Wegenast: We should have a variety of styles.

Fan: For the second Special Mention, the nominations are *The Lighthouse*, *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura* and *The Last Day of Summer*.

Wegenast: We have to vote.

Fan: Okay. *The Lighthouse*.

(There are 2 votes. From Lo and Peter)

Fan: *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*.

(There are 2 votes. Form Wegenast and Liu)

Fan: *The Last Day of Summer*.

(There is 1 vote.)

Wegenast: We have to vote between *The Lighthouse* and *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*.

Fan: It's Ka ho's choice. Between the two, what do you say?

Yu: I will pick *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*. As a festival, I think including different genres sends a good signal.

Fan: The second Special Mention is *imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura*.

The 24th ifva Awards - Animation Category Award Winners

Gold Award

Kin's Hair

Chan Kwun-chung, Wong Tsz-yin, Chang See-wan (Hong Kong)

Silver Award

Toxic Relationship

Step Cheung (Hong Kong)

Special Mention

Subway Commute

Redic Hsu (Taiwan)

imai / Fly feat. 79, Kaho Nakamura
Baku Hashimoto (Japan)