



FILM SPECIALIST PANEL CITATION

Alvin Lee Chang Rong has carved out a unique position in Chinese-language cinema, with his lucid, authentic filmmaking voice exemplified by his award-winning short ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’. He is noteworthy for an unmistakable sense of humour which belies the often-complicated subjects explored, gleaning warmth and levity at the core of it.

Alvin is dedicated to creating accessible and culturally significant works attuned to issues of the day and capturing the sensibilities and idiosyncrasies across generations. Beyond filmmaking, Alvin contributes to education and mentorship, guiding aspiring filmmakers and fostering growth within the artistic community.

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2025

ALVIN LEE



Behind-the-scenes photo of ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’, 2021.

Photo courtesy of Axel Toh.

ALVIN LEE (b. 1991) is an award-winning writer-director who graduated from the prestigious Beijing Film Academy with a Bachelor’s degree in Film Directing.

He was a recipient of the Infocomm Media Development Authority’s Media Education Scholarship in Film. His short films were screened and had won awards at international film festivals including the Busan International Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, Hong Kong International Film Festival, Pingyao International Film Festival, and the China Golden Rooster & Hundred Flowers Film Festival.

In his films, Alvin aims to present new perspectives, feelings, and experiences to his audience. He believes art should be intelligible and sincere in communicating thoughts and emotions, serving not only as entertainment but also as a catalyst for introspection and self-reflection on one’s relationships. His visual storytelling often explores human connection, memory, grief, and identity, while weaving in his unique sense of humour to bring warmth and levity to difficult subjects.

Alvin’s journey in film began with him acquiring a Diploma in Digital Media (now known as the Diploma in Media, Arts and Design) at Singapore Polytechnic, before pursuing directing at the Beijing Film Academy under the mentorship of China’s acclaimed Fifth Generation filmmakers Xie Xiaojing and Xia Gang. Since returning to Singapore in 2018, he has collaborated with major organisations and government agencies including the Ministry of Digital Development and Information; Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth; and Beyond The Label Singapore.

He is also deeply committed to educating and mentoring aspiring filmmakers. Alvin serves as a Teaching Associate at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, where he bridges theory and practical experience to nurture students in the craft of filmmaking. Beyond his university role, he has led masterclasses and workshops at Singapore Polytechnic, LASALLE College of the Arts, and ITE College Central.

Alvin’s latest short film, ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’, premiered at the 27th Busan International Film Festival and went on to screen at over 55 major film festivals, winning the Jury Prize at the 47th Hong Kong International Film Festival and Best Singapore Short Film at the 33rd Singapore International Film Festival. In 2024, he was selected for the prestigious Talents Tokyo programme to develop his debut feature film.



A CONVERSATION WITH ALVIN LEE

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences in film?

I remember crying uncontrollably when Mufasa died in ‘The Lion King.’ I can’t recall the story details or whether I watched it in a cinema or on a DVD, but the emotion I felt has stayed with me since I was a kid. It was the first time I realised how deeply film could touch the heart.

My deeper understanding of film began when I read ‘Scorsese by Scorsese,’ a book of conversations with Martin Scorsese. That book opened my eyes, and my appetite for film has only grown since. I admire filmmakers like Akira Kurosawa, Hou Hsiao-hsien and Bong Joon Ho, but my truest influences are the people I meet and their stories I hear along the way.



Walking the red carpet with the cast and co-producers of ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’ at the 33rd Singapore International Film Festival, 2022.

Photo courtesy of Singapore International Film Festival.

Please share what a typical day in your life as a filmmaker is like.

Before I am an artist, I am a martial artist. That taught me the importance of discipline and routine, even in art. My day begins around 8am with a cup of black coffee and some quiet reading, followed by a walk with my dog before lunch.

After lunch, I write and work on my screenplay. By evening, I take another walk with my dog to unwind. After dinner, I work out before ending the night with a film or a book. On weekends, if the weather is good, I bring my camera out for street photography. Each day, I hope to improve a little.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in your artistic journey and what motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

I try not to compare myself with others, but it is difficult. When I see friends living stable lives, owning houses and cars, sometimes it stirs a sense of inferiority in me. I start to wonder if it is worth devoting my life to something as intangible and uncertain as filmmaking, especially as I grow older and my parents age too.

Three years ago, when I was at a low point and wanted to give up, my dad sensed it. He told me I was still young (though I was 31) and that he and my mum were healthy enough to support me. Those words still keep me going.

What keeps me going is love — my love for films, and my family’s love for me.

What do you want the audience to experience through your works?

I hope audiences come to my works with an open mind. I want to entertain, not preach, and let them find their own reflections within my stories. Beneath the surface, there is always something personal from me — a thought, a question, or a feeling.

If it resonates, I hope it leaves a quiet aftertaste, like an exquisite dish that lingers in memory long after the screen goes dark.

What advice would you give the younger generation who would like to pursue a career in the arts?

Hard work outweighs talent. Whatever you choose to do, strive to be the best in your field. Go out, meet people, experience the world. The most valuable lessons cannot be taught, and stay away from screens except those in the cinema.



Behind-the-scenes photo of 'Eat Already?', 2016.

Photo courtesy of Tribal Worldwide Singapore.

What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's film scene?

I hope to see people returning to the cinemas and for more spaces to screen alternative films beyond just blockbusters, so audiences can experience a wider range of voices and stories. I also hope filmmakers in Singapore can build sustainable careers creating narrative films, without having to rely heavily on commercial work to support their passion.

Ultimately, I dream of Singapore becoming not only a financially rich country, but a culturally rich one as well.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you?

It feels both humbling and daunting. It brings pride, but also responsibility, because now I have to keep walking this path as an artist, no matter how hard it gets.

At the same time, it legitimises my journey. It gives me a quiet sense of assurance that the years spent discovering and persevering are seen and recognised. It motivates me to continue telling stories rooted in our lives and reflective of our culture and humanity.

Now, when I am at an airport filling up the immigration form, I can finally and proudly write "Filmmaker / Artist" under "Occupation."

Tell us more about how you would like to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

I hope to continue creating works that I am proud of, works that can represent Singapore on the international stage.

I believe in exposing children to the arts and culture, especially films, from a young age. I hope film can serve not only as entertainment but also as an educational tool in schools — something that relieves stress, supports mental well-being, and opens windows to different cultures and histories.

Most of these children may not grow up to be artists, but early exposure can plant seeds. It can nurture appreciation for the arts and culture around them and build a future audience and support system for the local scene. I hope to contribute to this cause in any way I can.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

My sincere thanks to National Arts Council for this award.

Thank you to Ms Jennifer Ang, my lecturer from Singapore Polytechnic, for this nomination and for supporting my journey since I was a kid who had not learned how to operate a camera.

To my family, Lee Boon Yang, Neo Lay Hwa, Mandy Lee and Ong Ang Choo, this award is for all of you, my first audience in every film and my earliest supporters.

To my girlfriend, Cassandra Koh, thank you for your love, unwavering support and for giving me the space to be the best version of myself.

When I was a kid dreaming of making something for the big screen, I met Mr Royston Tan. He generously showed me the ropes in this craft and industry, and I am immensely grateful.

Chee Seong, Pei Yi, Gwend Lim, Chuck Tham, Javeus Toh, Anthony Chen, Karen Khoo, Jeff Cheong, Michael Tay, Prof Xie Xiao Jing, Prof Xia Gang, Pan Ruo Yao, Ye Nan, Qin Yu, Brylnel Khoo and Melissa Chow, thank you for believing in me more than I believed in myself.

And to my best friend, GK, no matter where you are, I hope I make you proud.