

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2019

HE SHUMING

He Shuming (b.1985) is a screenwriter and director. A recognised member of the film community, he graduated from The Puttnam School of Film and Animation, LASALLE College of The Arts, Singapore (2010).

Awarded the Media Education Scheme (Film) Scholarship by the then Media Development Authority, Shuming furthered his craft at the prestigious American Film Institute Conservatory in Los Angeles in California, USA, where he completed his Master in Fine Arts in Directing (2015). His thesis short film, 'And the Wind Falls' (2014), premiered at the 25th Singapore International Film Festival and enjoyed a successful run in the North American film festival circuit.

Upon his return, Shuming directed a documentary commissioned by the National Heritage Board about the residents of Pulau Ubin, titled 'Homecoming' (2016). His next film, 'Letter from the Motherland' (2017), is a deeply personal one. As part of the omnibus, '667', the film sees Shuming travelling to his ancestral hometown in Hainan, China, and learning more about his roots through an intimate collaboration with his father. '667' had its international premiere at the 22nd Busan International Film Festival in 2017. He has also completed two shorts, namely 'Boon Lay Place' (2017), and 'Rehearsal' (2018), which was a collaboration with the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore.

Shuming is also a film educator. He is an adjunct lecturer at LASALLE College of The Arts and a visiting instructor at Objectifs - Centre for Photography and Film. He has also mentored young students at Maris Stella High School as a way of giving back to his alma mater.

His upcoming debut feature film, 'Ajoomma', is inspired by his mother's obsession with Korean soap operas. Co-produced by Anthony Chen of Giraffe Pictures, it is a road movie about a Korean drama-obsessed Singaporean auntie who travels out of the country for the first time to Seoul and promptly gets lost in the snow. The script won Most Promising Project at the 25th Singapore International Film Festival's Film Lab in 2015; the top prize at the Southeast Asia Fiction Film Lab (SEAFIC) held in Thailand in 2018; and the Best Co-Production Award at the 3rd International Film Festival and Awards Macau's Project Market in the same year.

Shuming is gearing up for principal photography in Singapore and Korea this coming winter.



With participants at the National Youth Film Awards Conference's Storyboarding class at *SCAPE, 2019.

Photo courtesy of Cassandra Lim





A CONVERSATION WITH HE SHUMING

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

When I was 15, I had to repeat a year in school. There were three moments I remembered very vividly that year. I remember lessons with my art teacher, Ms Charlotte Tan. We had to bring in bell peppers into class for an entire semester, and perfected drawing them using different media. It was the one class I looked forward to every week. In the same year, everyone in class was passing around a pirated VCD of a short film called '15' by Royston Tan. Finally, introduced to the music of Björk, I convinced my classmates to watch Lars Von Trier's 'Dancer In The Dark' in the cinema with me after school.

Looking back now, it was a year of learning what life could be for me: cinema, and what film is: living.

“My philosophy in life is to value and practise empathy. Telling a story means transporting an audience to another life. In order to be authentic about the stories I choose to tell, I strive to be as present as I can.”



With Executive Producer Royston Tan and fellow filmmakers at the premiere of '667', 2017.
Photo courtesy of He Shuming



With poet Marc Nair and moderator Olivia Tay at New Waves as part of Singapore International Film Festival (SGIFF), 2016.
Photo courtesy of Singapore International Film Festival

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works? What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

As an independent filmmaker, financing your own films is a key struggle. There is also a need to make a living, while making time for your own screenplays. It was and still is, a constant juggling act of giving my time and energy to everything that I do. But I always remind myself that to be a filmmaker is a privilege. It helps me realign myself to move forward in my craft.

Then there is the self-doubt. For me, when that happens in the creative process – such as when I'm building a character or a scene – I find that magic can happen in the most mysterious of ways. Often it is because I am trying to be open, honest and truthful, and that moment is often one when I learn something new.

What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your artistic practice?

My philosophy in life is to value and practise empathy. Telling a story means transporting an audience to another life. In order to be authentic about the stories I choose to tell, I strive to be as present as I can.

As filmmaking is a collaborative art form, empathy allows me to be open to the storytelling process. It helps me look from the different perspectives of my collaborators and give life to the characters whose stories I am telling.

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

I hope my audience can experience the humanity of the characters in my films by living their lives, if only for a moment. The transformative power of cinema can connect and inspire us as human beings.

What is the most rewarding aspect of what you do?

As a filmmaker, the most rewarding aspect is watching a completed film in the cinema with your audience. So much goes into the making of a film, but an audience should be in along the ride with the characters and not think about the blood and sweat behind it. Well, that can come during the Q&A. Going to the cinema is a very communal experience and I have always enjoyed the dialogue that comes after watching a film.

“I hope there are opportunities for an audience to grow and appreciate films made by Singaporeans and about Singaporeans. There are endless, diverse stories waiting to be told.”



With jury members, producer Christine Vachon; Head of Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum, Jacob Wong; Head of ZDF/ARTE in Germany, Meinolf Zerhost; and producer Tan Si En after winning the top Southeast Asia Fiction Film Lab (SEAFIC) Award.

Photo courtesy of Southeast Asia Fiction Film Lab (SEAFIC)

What are your vision and hopes for Singapore cinema?

My vision for Singapore cinema is that it can continue to be a true reflection of the society we live in today. I hope there are opportunities for an audience to grow and appreciate films made by Singaporeans and about Singaporeans. There are endless, diverse stories waiting to be told.

And I hope we can develop a sustainable ecosystem in our film community, helping our film professionals not just with their craft, but also with their livelihood.

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

Go to the theatre. Read. Go to an art gallery. Watch television. Consume films. Open your mind to all art forms, all possibilities of storytelling. Question everything. Laugh. Have your heart broken. Don't be afraid. Live life.

Then tell your stories. Don't forget that the privilege of being a filmmaker comes with long hours of hard work and sacrifice.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award from National Arts Council change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

Receiving the Young Artist Award from the National Arts Council is a tremendous honour. It is a testament to the work I have done and the work I will continue to do. As a filmmaker, I will continue telling stories that are authentic.

As a film educator and a member of the Singapore Association of Motion Picture Professionals, I hope to build a network of support for young filmmakers here and share my love for cinema with future generations of storytellers.



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

My heartfelt thanks to the National Arts Council for this honour, and for the tireless support in my growth as a Singaporean filmmaker; and to LASALLE College of the Arts for the nomination.

Thank you to my parents, who have given me more than I ever need in life.

My family for their support and keeping me rooted.

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