



YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2023

## SHYAN TAN



Behind the scenes on short film 'Kurang Manis' by Iqbal Ahmad, 2020.

Photo courtesy of Alvin Choon

SHYAN TAN 陈松光 (b. 1988) is a home-grown cinematographer whose deep passion lies in crafting narratives through his lens. Possessing a keen eye for capturing raw emotions and a strong commitment to evoking feelings through visual storytelling, he has the ability to create captivating cinematic experiences that resonate with audiences worldwide.

He obtained his Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) in digital filmmaking from the Nanyang Technological University's School of Art, Design and Media. He is also an alumnus of the esteemed Asian Film Academy in 2014 and the Golden Horse Academy in 2017.

Specialising primarily in narrative films, Shyan excels in working closely with directors from the initial stage of script development. By cultivating a robust partnership and exchanging creative ideas, he contributes to bringing the director's vision to life, adding his unique visual perspective to every frame. Over the span of his decade-long career, he has had the privilege of working with respected local directors such as K. Rajagopal, Royston Tan, Wee Li Lin, Boo Junfeng, and Don Aravind.

Shyan boasts a diverse portfolio spanning ads and narrative films. His works have gained recognition on esteemed platforms. In 2021, his work on 'Strawberry Cheesecake', directed by Siyou Tan, earned a spot at Locarno Film Festival's Pardi di domani (Leopards of Tomorrow) and was featured in Uppsala Short Film Festival and AFI Fest. 'An Island Drifts', directed by Vivian Ip, was another project he was involved in, winning accolades like Best Drama Film at USC First Look 2022 and Gold Award for Cinematography at Telly Awards 2022. It also received acclaim at Urbanworld Film Festival 2021 and was nominated at National Youth Film Awards 2022.

His unique approach to visual storytelling has opened doors for many foreign collaborations. He is currently involved in a project with Anti-Archive, collaborating with Cambodian director Chheangkea Ieng. Additionally, he is scheduled to embark on his first feature-film endeavour with Taiwanese director Lu Po-Shun 吕柏勋, with principal photography set to commence in mid-2024.

Serving as a committee member of the Singapore Society of Cinematographers, Shyan is dedicated to connecting seasoned cinematographers and the emerging generation of filmmakers. Through the establishment of a platform for knowledge and education, he seeks to nurture a strong network which facilitates the sharing of expertise and experiences.



Photo courtesy of Juliana Tan

## A CONVERSATION WITH SHYAN TAN

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

I was a science student till Junior College. The idea of a career in the arts never crossed my mind. Then, one day, my physics teacher assigned me to take photos for a school event. He was a passionate photographer who taught me about the camera's operation, and explained composition and lighting. It was then that my interest in visual storytelling began. I also stumbled upon Wong Kar Wai's "In the Mood for Love", which deeply resonated with me for its exceptional cinematography. I saw that the camera transcended being a mere tool for documentation; it was a portal connecting the characters with the audience.



《暮海行散》by Po-Shun Lu, 2021.

Photo courtesy of Shyan Tan

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

When I'm not out on shoots, my typical morning starts with a cup of hand-drip coffee. I've come to value slow living, taking the time to truly savour each moment. I enjoy dedicating moments to observing the world around me, whether it's the graceful dance of trees in the breeze or the interplay of light and shadow within a room. I also set aside time to watch films with a purpose: dissecting the nuances of lighting and camera lens techniques. This practice aids me in delving deeper into the filmmaker's artistic intentions.

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

The most significant hurdle revolves around achieving an equilibrium between engaging in independent film projects and maintaining a stable income. The film industry in Singapore is relatively youthful and compact, making it exceedingly difficult to solely rely on low-budget passion projects to sustain a livelihood. This has compelled me to engage in commercial and advertising work to make ends meet. Curiously, a demarcation exists between these two realms, and uncovering my sense of self and purpose within each domain presents an ongoing challenge. A skilled cinematographer navigates both realms adeptly, as our fundamental role entails fusing technicalities with the art of storytelling. This pursuit of duality, where we effortlessly straddle these identities, is what I am striving for.

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

In my role as a cinematographer, I don't typically initiate projects; instead, my primary responsibility is to bring the directors' visions to life and assist them in realising the desired audience experience with their films. Through my craft, I aim to enable the audience to become deeply immersed in the universe I perceive and share the emotional resonance I experience. By doing so, I strive to craft a cohesive viewing that allows the audience to become fully invested in the narrative.

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

Stay curious and consistently delve into the "why" behind things rather than getting sidetracked by the "how." Embrace life fully and cherish the moments that evoke laughter, tears, even frustration. Remember that art serves as a mirror to our entire range of emotions, challenges, inquiries, choices, and perspectives – encompassing all that define our humanity.



'Strawberry Cheesecake' by Siyou Tan, 2021.  
Photo courtesy of Shyan Tan

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

I aspire for us to expand beyond customary "HDB stories" and venture into a diverse range of genre films aimed at providing entertainment. There's a prevalent notion among local audiences that Singaporean films are often perceived as abstract, complex and lacking in entertainment value. Consequently, it's essential for us to bridge the divide between those termed as "art films" and those considered as "commercial films." Our goal should be to create films that skilfully blend artistic craftsmanship with commercial viability, and are both creatively profound and captivating for a broader audience.

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

Being granted the Young Artist Award is an immense privilege. It stands as a validation of my endeavours and my impact on the local film landscape. This recognition serves as a motivating force for me to persist in my pursuit, recognising that even though my contributions may seem modest, they have a ripple effect within the film community. This honour reinforces my resolve to remain committed to my craft.

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

As a committee member of the Singapore Society of Cinematographers, I aim to facilitate meaningful connections between experienced cinematographers and the next generation of filmmakers. This involves creating a platform for the exchange of knowledge and insights, fostering a robust network that nurtures the sharing of expertise.



Photo courtesy of Juliana Tan

## WORDS OF APPRECIATION

My heartfelt thanks to the National Arts Council for this award. I would like to thank Chong Junfeng for this nomination; and Don Aravind, Jac Min, Royston Tan, Jolinna Ang and Lu Po-Shun for supporting me on the nomination of this award.

I want to thank my family, Simon Tan, Pang Tsew Leng and Chen Peijun, for always allowing me the freedom to explore my interests in the arts. Another person I am eternally grateful for is my wife, Joy Tan, for being so supportive in my pursuit of the craft, while taking care of the family.

Filmmaking is a team effort, so I owe this honour to my collaborators, particularly Daryl Nah, Hanning Yap, Apple Ong, Justin Ng, Gabriel Yip, Zolynn Phua, Chris Ang, Haikal Ismail, Benjamin Ong, King Li, Karen Khoo, Chris Koh and many more I have the great fortune to work with.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to two individuals that have shaped me and guided me in my journey as a cinematographer: Sincerest thanks to K. Rajagopal for taking the leap of faith on me when I was an emerging cinematographer; and to Alan Yap, for guiding me when I was lost.