
23rd ifva Animation Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members : Lo Che Ying (Lo), Yu Ka Ho (Yu) , Tamas Waliczky (Waliczky).
Absent: Elphonsol Lam (Lam), Wong Ying (Ying)

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

Fan: Thank you for being our jurors this year. There had been a lot of hiccups for this category this year, with jury members changing including Liu Jian's absence due to health issues. Also Wong Ying is on a sudden trip to Beijing and could not make it back to Hong Kong, and he left us comments on each title. Elphonsol Lam is missing today, and he didn't manage to see all films at the theatre. Due to fairness, maybe it's good to just keep it to three jury members for this category this year.

Today, our mission is to select the prizes. Altogether we have 4 prizes this year: the Gold Award, \$50,000 in cash, Silver Award, \$30,000, Special Mention, a certificate. We also have another award, the Excellence Award, with a trophy, which only the six Hong Kong entries are entitled to receive. This is the first year we receive submissions from Asia. If you have no questions we can discuss the works one by one and get some comments. We will begin with *Passing Rain*.

Lo: I love this work, because technically, it looks like a normal 3D CG animation that we are used to seeing from Japan, but the directing is quite nice. There is not much of a story, just a moment between these two students, happening within a very short time. The whole film is without dialogue. The storytelling is based on the facial expressions and movements of the two characters. The treatment of this relationship is well done. I love the subtle way the director places the camera and treats the movements, even though it is a CG animation, which is between animated movement and realistic movement - not very realistic, but also not exaggerated like some Japanese animations. This fits the story-telling well. The tempo and timing are quite nice, too.

Yu: It's the most technically advanced piece among the 3D animations. I also agree that the subtlety of the facial expressions is done really well, and the special effects like water dripping and clothes show that the person involved is very knowledgeable about computer graphics. I like the pacing, but I think what can be improved is the choice of the camera movements. I find there is a lot of over-dramatic use of camera movements, and the emotions don't really support that. It's very awkward when you see very dramatic camera tracking but there is nothing going on. It feels a little bit cheesy and over-

dramatic. The characters are well-designed, but don't have originality. They look kind of similar to a lot of Japanese-style animations.

Waliczky: I agree with both comments. When I saw this animation the first time, I thought it was very well made, the special effects were really professional. But when I saw it again on the large screen, it surprised me that the animation was sometimes not good. For example, as the girl walks, her feet are not really on the floor and the movements are awkward and puppet-like. It's really a charming piece, I like the way he tells this more or less trivial story between a young girl and a young boy. Technically it's very well made, but watching it the second time, I was surprised that the animation is not as good as I thought earlier, and not on the same level as the lighting and special effects.

Fan: Let's move on to the second one, *The Giant with a House*.

Lo: This is quite an ambitious work. The story should be longer. Now it leaves a lot of questions, like what is the relationship between the giant and the little girl, why are they looking like this, etc. The design of the giant's world is not consistent, sometimes it is realistic, but other times it's symbolic. It can be better, at the moment, it looks like a segment of a story.

Yu: I agree that the work is ambitious. The end credits show a lot of still pictures which suggest that there could be something else, that maybe this is just a small part of the story. I think the pacing is a bit unnecessarily slow, and there are a lot of problems with the acting as well. Personally, this is not my favorite. There is a lot of flaws with the rendering, and the environment looks like it's completely white. At the beginning, I thought it was an artistic decision to make everything white, perhaps to emphasize a more emotional moment, but then I realized maybe not, because some scenes are white without any specific reason, so maybe it's just a lack of time.

Waliczky: What I like in this piece is there are some really strong visions. I like the city with a lot of apartments and the people in the windows. These are very strong visions. But the story raises a lot of questions, like why are they walking, who is this old guy, what is the relationship between the young and old ones, and what kind of world it is. With the white backgrounds, I sometimes have the feeling that the work is unfinished. It's a very ambitious work, but it's not finished yet.

Fan: Let's move on to the third work, *Losing Sight of a Longed Place*.

Lo: This is a very nice piece of work. It is a work of responsibility, the topic is good to be raised out in the form of an animated documentary. The whole thing just fits. The use of different styles of animation techniques like collage, different kinds of drawings, color use and the changing size of the frame - everything is just fine. The sound design and narration are good, it is well written in Chinese, although the translation is not so well in English. The narrator's voice and emotion are very good. I love this, it is a very nice work.

Yu: I also like this very much. I agree that the sound design is good, and the whole piece feels like a very well-made music video - I am saying this in a positive way. It is a good use of the visual material and sonic elements, the way the texture and rhythms are mixed up, and they go so well with the sound. There is a sonic element even in the visual parts. I also like how he addressed this issue without being in your face, it's very subtle and gives audience room to think.

Waliczky: I also like it. For me, this is my favorite. Maybe this is the only piece that within its own style, everything is perfect. Everything fits in with the style. He tells this story or situation in a nice personal and original way, and there are no clichés. Very beautiful. The color, animation, composition, how he mixed different techniques...

Lo: The use of color is beautiful.

Waliczky: I really like it. You cannot say it is professionally made, but it is very personal and sensitive.

Fan: The fourth work is *Flotsam*.

Lo: The drawing is nice, as well as the lines. It seems to be some kind of metaphor, but the message is not well-delivered. It's without impact. It didn't really move me. It's about loneliness and people being left behind, waiting for others to come, but I don't know.

Yu: I don't know what he is trying to express. It's a very nicely made piece, technically it's good and I like the style. He seems to be suggesting something with this recursive story structure, but in the end, I still don't know what it's about. I also don't feel a very strong emotional engagement with this piece.

Waliczky: I also thought this is some kind of metaphor for loneliness, perhaps, but as a metaphor, it seems too complicated for me. It doesn't really tell why there

are so many leading characters, and why one is larger than the others. If this island is a metaphor for loneliness, then it's not so original. The graphic and animation is nice, it's well-made visually, but maybe it's a too complicated metaphor, and not so clear.

Fan: The next one is *Cross Blade Kill*.

Lo: The animation is very good, it's well produced. It's a homage to gangster movies, with gun shooting and killers. The story is very simple and didn't have a big impact on me. It's just a simple story about people killing each other. The production and color scheme are good, that's it.

Yu: It's very stylized. It seems like an episode of a longer series. I like it, but at the end of it, I'm not quite sure about the ending. I don't understand what motivates him to kill...

Lo: It's a little bit tricky.

Waliczky: He recognizes the word "kill" is written by the same hand.

Yu: I understand that part, but what motivates him to kill her, I don't see a reason for that. In terms of the style and movement, it's really beautiful.

Waliczky: I've seen his previous works at least two times, and he is a very good character animator. But this time, the work is not really my cup of tea. The previous work about the hunter and the bear was more poetic and brilliantly made. It had more layers, but this one is a simpler story about killing. For me it's not so interesting, although I enjoy the animation. He is a good animator, and the colors are nice, the editing is professional, but there are not too many layers. It's a professional but simple movie.

Fan: The next one is *Wind Fire Lam Chung*.

Lo: It's an adaptation of a very famous work of Chinese literature, *Story of the Water Margin*, but I don't think it's a nice adaptation. It relies too much on the monologue of the main characters. The story is told in the way of a radio drama. The visuals don't match with the audio, and the visuals are not strong enough to tell the story. The animation is quite weak and the characters are inconsistent. The high contrast style...

Yu: Sometimes it's hard to recognize who's who.

Lo: One can say that this work aims high, but accomplished little. It can be better.

Yu: The first time I saw it I was confused. Not all the characters are confusing, but the wealthy guy, his face looks different in some scenes, so I wasn't sure if it's the same character. The scene where he is in the market where someone is selling the sword, I wasn't sure if he is trying to be good by offering money without taking the sword, but then he changes his mind? Also in the fighting scene, sometimes the person would come in from screen left, and then in another shot he would appear on screen right, which left me disoriented. The visuals just seem to be there to illustrate the narration, and don't add another layer of storytelling, which is led by the narration with the visuals being just a supporting act.

Waliczky: I like the visuals, and I agree with Wong Ying's opinion that it has a nice Chinese wood cut style, but I think this aesthetic has limitations because it is difficult to move from one composition to another. That's why the whole thing seems like moving illustration and not really animation. Sometimes when he makes a movement it doesn't look so good. I agree that the characters appearances are changing, for example, the wife looks very different at the beginning and at the end. The other faces also have big changes. The whole thing seems like illustration rather than animation, and without the narration, it would not be understandable.

Fan: Next one is *Museum*.

Lo: I love this one. It's humorous and deals with art and how we look at art. It's a very different point of view, not just because of the innocent way it looks at art, but also its multi-angle perspective. People may have this kind of thinking, but it's good to see it gathered into one work. Using samples of famous masterpieces, the whole thing is executed in a simple and interesting way. Everyone can understand it and think about the topic.

Yu: It is very playful. He's trying to comment on different levels of things.

Lo: Usually we are quiet when we look at drawings in the museum, but that's not the right way to do so. We can discuss and play with art.

Yu: It's also a comment on museums and the art world, and the institutionalized contemporary art. It's also a metaphor for bigger things - the society, political situation. I really like this piece.

Waliczky: I also like it. This work is funny and humorous, and easy to understand. It

speaks about something very important. Some people think when we speak about art, it has to be very serious, but it should be fun and playful. I like that she doesn't use reproductions of the paintings, but redraws everything in a really nice and funny way. It's about the whole education system where the teacher gives an explanation and the kids are supposed to be silent and just listen. In fact, it'd be much better if kids could play with these things. I also told the first-round jurors that the person who did this animation was my student, but I didn't help in this work.

Yu: Why is it called Muteum?

Waliczky: I think she wants to make a play with the word "mute", it's a museum where you have to be silent. You are right that it's not just about art and museum, but about society that expects you to shut up. You should play, speak up and make your own stuff instead.

Fan: Next one is *Watching*.

Lo: The use of animation line is nice. The work talks about communication, but for me, it lacks impact.

Waliczky: It's a nice music video and aesthetically well made. It is a good work that fits the music.

Yu: The music and movement are well-made, I think it's a very interesting animation style. At the end when she is watching TV, I understand that it's meant to express how she feels being detached from the situation, also the way she sits like the Buddha, this all seems to suggest she is going through some sort of Zen Buddhist therapy of something that helps her deal with the situation. But it does not seem like the character is dealing with the problem, but escape from it. At the very end, she is at the waterfront, looking at a very calm scenery, I don't know what to take from it. Maybe it's just a very personal expression of how she feels.

Waliczky: Because the title is "Watching", this moment when she is watching television is somehow very important. I did not think of the religious background, but made a fine art connection with this Nam June Paik piece, *TV Buddha*, with a Buddha who is watching television, which is an endless flow of movements, and Buddha is just watching it with complete placidity. So the work is about this sort of distance of watching things, which contrasts with what we saw before, full of high emotions, like people arguing and shouting at each other. Now she is watching from a distance. It's not absolutely clear to me the true

intentions of the filmmaker, but I thought it is well-made.

Fan: The second last one is *Neon*.

Lo: It talks about modern human relationship between a boy and a girl. The structure is not well constructed, consisting of fragments of their daily lives. Sometimes they are together, sometimes they are split up. You may say it is some kind of MV, because there is no dialogue or sound effect, just music. They have different boyfriends and girlfriends at the end, and it seems like the relationship is over. It could be told in a better way to let the audience focus on the bonding of the relationship, which is not well interpreted.

Yu: The first time I saw it, I thought it was just a mood piece about fragments of daily life, about the romantic moments of couples. Then I watched it again and I saw some story structure. They break up and try to reunite with each other, and the twist at the end is that they do not reunite and go separate paths. If the intention is to tell a story, it doesn't do well because it's too fragmented and loose at the beginning. It doesn't really develop the bonding of the two characters, so we don't have the emotional reaction when we see the result at the end.

Waliczky: I understand the story in a completely different way. My interpretation is that they are in love and they have sex, after that they argue with each other and the girl goes home on a motorbike and the boy goes home on MTR. As they travel they think back on the happy moments they've had, and call each other on mobile phones, they turn back and finally meet in an MTR station.

Yu: That's my first interpretation, too, but at the end there is the split screen...

Waliczky: Maybe you're right, they don't meet.

Yu: It's ambiguous, because after the split, they are together again. Are they on separate paths?

Waliczky: In this animation, the problem for me is the visuals. The characters are drawn in a children's book illustration aesthetic, and this doesn't fit sometimes with the story. For example, when they have sex, this type of visuals is not good for showing naked bodies and sex. With *Losing Sight of a Longed Place*, that type of visuals is very strong and can speak about serious emotional things. My feeling is with *Neon*, the type of visuals is not strong enough to speak about such serious things.

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- Yu: It feels too light to convey such strong emotions.
- Lo: The use of animation is not enough. There are few movements and they are very simple.
- Fan: The last one is *Stories About Him*.
- Lo: This is a well-made animation. It uses family history to refer to the history of the Taiwanese people. It uses different types of animation techniques like stop motion, collage etc. It's well-made, but without surprise. Taiwanese audiences will have a stronger reaction watching this but not Hong Kong people like me. Is this some kind of commission film? It's entertaining, but nothing new to me since I have seen this kind of animation before, like a film from Hong Kong about the filmmaker's grandma. That's more or less done in the same way, although they are technically different.
- Yu: It is similar to *Losing Sight of a Longed Place* in a way. I feel there is a cultural specificity to this work that made me, as a Hong Kong person, difficult to connect with. I don't know why, but I don't feel a very strong connection to this piece.
- Lo: It uses a lot of narration to make it more interesting and more dramatic to watch, in contrast with *Losing Sight of a Longed Place*, which uses minimal narration but strong words with big meaning behind each line. *Stories About Him* has many playful words. They are totally different in their ways of storytelling.
- Waliczky: Perhaps the artist didn't decide clearly what she wants because from one side there is this documentary animation, which I like very much. I like it when someone has a personal connection with the topic, and this kind of historical topic is very interesting. From the other side, she is interested in the fact that different people tell different truths about this or that person. This could have been something unique and strong but she didn't really develop it fully. Someone could have made a whole film about this, about who is telling the truth, and it is interesting about how people remember the same person. This animation can't decide whether it want to speak about this or the history of Taiwan and her family. That's why this piece is not so strong, because the intention of the artist is not clear.
- Lo: I think her intention is to tell the truth, because history is truth, and she gathered some truthful information about her family and the Taiwanese people. One way she wants to present the truth is through storytelling. The

different telling people is an interesting part, but it's just an entertaining part of the whole thing. If there is something essential that she wants to put in the film, it would be more interesting.

Fan: If you have nothing further to add, we can move on to the fun part. Do you have any nominations for the 4 prizes? Maybe you have a shortlist of works that you would like to award prizes, so we can narrow down the discussion.

Waliczky: My 4 favorites in order: the first place for me is *Losing Sight of a Longed Place*, the second is *Muteum*, the third is *Stories About Him*, the fourth is *Watching*.

Yu: Do we have to come up with the order now?

Fan: Not necessarily, your choice.

Yu: I don't have the order yet, I picked *Losing Sight of a Longed Place*, *Muteum*, *Watching* and *Cross Blade Kill*. I think I can give you the order, one is *Losing Sight*, second is *Muteum*, third is *Watching*, fourth is *Cross Blade Kill*.

Lo: For me, Gold Award goes to *Losing Sight*, Silver goes to *Muteum*, Special Mention goes to *Stories About Him*, Excellence Award from Hong Kong goes to *Passing Rain*.

Fan: For Wong Ying's choice, he picked *Stories About Him* for Gold Award, Silver goes to *Wind Fire Lam Chung*, third and fourth places are *Flotsam* and *Cross Blade Kill*. From your votes, it is quite clear that for Gold Award, all of you picked *Losing Sight of a Longed Place* and *Muteum* for Silver Award. Agreed? Now we will discuss the Special Mention and Excellence Award.

Waliczky: Do these prizes have similar weight, or which is higher and which is lower?

Lo: It's my understanding that for Special Mention, we pick from all ten works, and Excellence Award only goes to Hong Kong Works. That's the main difference.

Fan: From the organiser's point of view, Special Mention, is given to works whose overall quality may not be perfect, especially in comparison to the Gold and Silver Awards, but there is something special to mention. We don't have Bronze Award, and instead we have Special Mention. For

Excellence Award, it is more about overall excellence, but only in competition with other Hong Kong works, so the 6 Hong Kong works compete for this award.

Yu: So the Excellence Award can overlap with others.

Fan: Yes, for example, if the Gold and Silver Awards are from the Hong Kong division, and you find that the Gold Award winner is also entitled to get the Excellence Award, that's alright.

Lo: For me, why I choose *Stories About Him* for Special Mention is that it's the first time we have works from Taiwan and China, and so if all four awards go to Hong Kong works, it's a bit odd. *Stories About Him* has good overall effort in many ways. In terms of creativity it's not on Gold or Silver level, so I give it Special Mention. I like it better than *Watching*.

Waliczky: I also choose this for Special Mention.

Fan: Including Wong Ying, that will be 3 votes for this work. Wong Ying picked it as Gold Award.

Yu: I am okay. I was debating between *Stories About Him* and *Watching*. They are both on the same rank for me.

Lo: For Excellence Award, my choices are *Passing Rain* and *Cross Blade Kill*. You talk about the technical problems of *Passing Rain*. Technically, it may not be a very high-level 3D CG animation, but I like the subtle directing, which attracts me to watch the whole thing. Even though I have seen it several times, I am still amazed by the eye movements. This kind of Japanese style 3D CG is seldom seen. *Cross Blade Kill* is good too.

Yu: For the Excellence Award I picked *Cross Blade Kill*. Among the Hong Kong works, *Passing Rain* and *Cross Blade Kill* are highly competitive. From an audience's perspective, I enjoyed watching *Cross Blade Kill* more than *Passing Rain*, but in terms of production, *Passing Rain* is really excellent. Although there are flaws in the animation, the treatment of all these details - a lot of work went behind it, like the rigging of the characters, treatment of the facial expressions, drops of water, the wet cloth and wet piece of paper, the thin layer of water on the floor, these details involve a lot of work. From a production perspective this is an excellent work. From an audience's perspective it is not engaging.

Waliczky: If I have to choose between the two, I prefer love to killing, so I go for *Passing Rain*. Also, I like 3D animation very much, and this is the only high level example out of the ten.

Animation Category Award Winners

Gold Award

Losing Sight of a Longed Place

Wong Tsz-ying, Shek Ka-chun, Wong Chun-long / Hong Kong

Silver Award

Museum

Lee Pak-yee Aggie / Hong Kong

Special Mention

Stories About Him

Yang Yung-shiuan / Taiwan

Excellence Award

Passing Rain

Yeung Hey-chiu / Hong Kong