

Young Artist Award: The next wave



Weixin Quek Chong ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

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The Young Artist Award, introduced in 1992, is given to young arts talents aged 35 and younger.



The award, which comes with a trophy, a certificate and a \$20,000 grant, is meant to encourage young practitioners to further their work in various fields.

WEIXIN QUEK CHONG, 31, VISUAL ARTIST AND PRINTMAKER

Quek holds a Master of Arts specialising in Fine Art, Printmaking from the Royal College of Art in London and received a National Arts Council Arts Scholarship in 2012. She is also the winner of 2018 President's Young Talents Grand Prize.

She was in London for work when she received an e-mail from the National Arts Council informing her about the award.

"This award is great. I'm already thinking concretely about what project I will use my award for. Artists' schedules can be unpredictable, but the support of the grant will really let me plan in a much more concrete way for a big project."

HE SHUMING, 34, DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER



A graduate from The Puttnam School of Film and Animation, Lasalle College of Arts, he also has an MFA in directing from American Film Institute Conservatory in Los Angeles. He is developing his first feature film, Ajumma, a comedic road trip about a Singaporean auntie obsessed with K-drama who is separated from her tour group in winter, with director/producer Anthony Chen.

"I found out about the award when I was in the toilet. I was scrolling through my social media feed when I got a call from an unknown number. I told my producer and we screamed a bit. Then I told my parents.

"The award is going to help me continue to do all the things I've been doing. Film education is one thing. It's really heartening to work with young film-makers, sharing my experience and helping them develop stories. I also want to develop audiences for Singapore film, not just Singaporean audiences, but showing Singapore films around the world.

"I'm now developing my first feature which is inspired by my mum's obsession with Korean drama. I've shot in winter before and it's horrible. I don't know why I'm planning a winter shoot again.

But I'm working with Anthony and he's a little crazy too."

EMILY KOH, 33, BASSIST AND COMPOSER

Currently based in Georgia, the United States, where she is assistant professor of composition at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music, University of Georgia, Koh graduated from the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and did her postgraduate studies at the Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins University and Brandeis. Her works have been performed by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, the New York Music Ensemble and the Malaysia Philharmonic.

She was shocked when she heard about the award as she "always feels nobody knows or understands" what she does.

"The award is a very humbling experience... it makes me feel like maybe I'm not as alone in my endeavour as I felt. It's very encouraging to be supported. I hope to use the award in a couple of years' time to record an opera in Boston which I'm writing. And I hope L'Arietta in Singapore will perform this opera."



TAN WEI KEONG, 35, ANIMATION ARTIST

He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Nanyang Technological University. His latest film Kingdom was the opening short film at the Singapore International Film Festival 2018 and competed at the Berlin International Film Festival 2019. He is the creator of the interactive art project Foundin where hundreds of handpainted figurines were planted around Singapore for people to adopt and find.

"I'm now living and working in San Francisco with my husband because we wanted to live somewhere which recognised our marriage. The first time the NAC tried to call me was on my Singapore phone number which had expired.

"I'm very excited and happy about the award. I haven't yet decided what I'm going to do with the grant money. Probably I'll use it to nourish myself creatively, go to see shows or work on my next project. It really means a lot to me because it's more than affirmation for my work. It's also elevating the visibility of animation as an art form. People commonly equate animation with children's entertainment, but to me, it's a blending of many art forms, from drawing to illustration to sculpting in a time-based medium."

GABRIEL CHAN, 35, LIGHTING DESIGNER

Chan has been lighting Frontier Danceland's productions since 2012. He has also designed the lighting for a wide range of events, including the National Day Parade in 2017 and last year, and European dance performances at Austria's Festspielhaus St Polten and France's Opera National du Rhin.

"I found out about the award when I was backstage at this year's National Day Parade. I called my girlfriend immediately after the phone call with NAC.

"The award is a bit poignant for me because I'm 35 this year and I've spent 17 years, half my life in this industry. It's one of the biggest accolades I have ever received and it's a nice acknowledgement and a nod to the contributions I have made to the arts scene.

"I think I will use the award to conduct workshops for other lighting designers who want to learn more about drafting lighting designs."

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