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SEA-Images Catches Up With Singaporean Director/Producer Tania Sng to Share Her Experience at the Creteil International Women Film Festival.

Q: *Hi Tania. It looks like the trip was really eventful and large, bringing together some of the most up-coming women filmmakers from Asia and Europe. Give us an overview of the trip.*

Tania: The Focus on Asia was envisioned by Jackie Buet, Festival Director of the Creteil International Women Film Festival and supported by the Asian-Europe Foundation. The aim was to invite 10 women directors from Asia, to promote their work and meet with professionals in Europe. The directors came from China, Hong Kong, Korea, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand and visited Creteil, Paris, Innsbruck and Berlin for more than 7 weeks.

The tour started off with the Creteil International Film Festival where this year's programme focused on "Difference" - to value what was humane and tolerance, programme consisted of films in competition, a special programme on and the Focus on Asia segment, alongside with several "lessons on cinema" and Forums. Then we went to various cities in Europe to meet with Industry professionals such as women directors, producers, visited film schools to showcase our films and talk to the students, visit production and post-production facilities, met with distributors and funding bodies, and most of all exchanged ideas about filmmaking and got to know another's culture.

Thankfully, places like the Kino Arsenal, even adopted the entire programme and revised their schedules to fit in the entire programming.

Q: *The festival has built a reputation because of its commitment to women filmmakers. Can you tell us more from your experience?*

Tania: The 27th Creteil International Woman Film Festival had a great programme under the sign of "Difference" this year. Unlike previous festival programmes, this year's focus on "Difference" is guided by the urgency to safeguard the values of humanity and tolerance, holding an equilibrium between the two extremes. Among other things, the "difference" intercuts the big question among directors who know and engage themselves in a common world.

This festival attempts to assemble the utopias, the creativities, the innovations, that are full of surprise today, but will become our environment of tomorrow.

There were many other spectacular programmes within the festival. The Juliette Binoche programme featured a wide retrospective of her films. Her generous and brilliant personality was eminent as she insisted on meeting with all the Asian directors in the hopes of knowing our projects and our joys. Juliette Binoche represents the dimension of a time, both unique and trying cinema.

A special dedicated programme was to Alanis Obomsawin who manifested a rebellious nature and attempts to change the world with her films.

Maria Klonaris and Katerina Klonaris are two figures of creative cinema; their original cinematography, novice characterisation makes their films an important part of the history of experimental cinema.

And lastly, there were four different poignant approaches to their treatment of difference in the four Forums. Each is a privilege meeting and a choice of composition and theme. The four forums are: The situation of women in the world, the Asian cinema, the new relationships, and the transmission of feminism.

Q: Sounds amazing. You're no stranger to international film festivals but it seems like this trip has made an impact on you. What is the one thing that left an impression on you?

Tania: Jackie Buet, the festival director, is a sharp, excellent reader of films. I was most surprised that when she met each director, she knew exactly which films they made, and remembered every single film vividly, and could discuss exactly what touched her in each film. She interviewed me in a series called "Lessons on Cinema" where she interviews every single director who has shown a film at her festival. She asked some very poignant questions - about specific reasons behind my choices in a particular scene, asked to explain my relationship with my actors, and the best interview I've ever had. Jackie Buet absolutely loves films, loves filmmakers and really understands film. Her devotion was the most amazing thing about the festival.

Q: Yes, I totally agree that good programmers make all the difference. Such commitment is something to be admired and respected. What was the one thing you learnt about film and filmmaking that was interesting to you on this trip?

Tania: I learnt that no matter what stage of your career you are at - whether you're a first time director, or an experienced/famous director, whether you're in a country where technology was hard to come by, or where filmmaking was a long-established culture in your society, making a film still comes with numerous challenges.

And that the best thing that comes with experience is knowing where to look for help, answers and when to say no.

Q: What were some of the reactions to your short films that were screened there?

Tania: From the feedback I received it seemed that most people liked "no woman no love no one no home". I think it's because visually it's very powerful and transcends languages. "Huo shui" had a similar effect, perhaps because it was silent and a little sad. "Singapore ... dream" on the other hand was said to be the most imaginative. They found this film full of despair and yet hope.

Fellow Singaporean director Lee Wong said that during our Q & A that I was a good dancer - which threw me off (interviewer's note: Tania danced in one of her films). Some feel asleep during my screening. Most people were very surprised that my work was so varied - that I utilised so many different techniques, styles, and "genres" to approach my topics. The best compliment I've received : "All of the world are in your films... Pain, Joy, Hope, Fear... you can feel it all in your films".

Q: Everytime a filmmaker travels to film festivals, it is almost like one represents the country you come from. Was the audience surprised at the films from Singapore?

Tania: I don't think they were surprised in this case. Perhaps because they saw “Lim Poh Huat” by Lee Wong, as well, so they may have figured that our films are so different from each other. Anyway, in this case I felt the audience didn't "generalise".

I think the Focus on Asia was a great platform as the films chosen were so diverse. There were very commercial comedies to poignant documentaries, so there was really time for the audience to "get to know" Asia.

If people were surprised about Singapore, many didn't say it. I think many were surprised more in the variety of styles and topics I dealt with and that mostly, my films were happy unlike most experimental films.

Q: I am sure you saw numerous films as well. What were some of your favourite films?

Tania: “Let's Love Hong Kong” by Yau Ching, a poetic feature film about 3 women whose lives quietly intersect in the tough-as-nails vibrant city of Hong Kong. This film was poetic, smart and very imaginative. I liked it because it was a labour of love and yet still retained its playfulness.

“Rabun” by Yasmin Ahmad, a romantic comedy about a retired well-to-do couple who decides to spend their retirement years back in the country, much to the chagrin of the country folk. “Rabun” is so pure. It's magical to be able to capture the essence of the bliss and romance of a middle-aged couple. And most of all, I'm still in awe that it was shot in 6 days!

“Glenn, the great runner” by Anna Erlandsson, a short film. It's a cartoon about the supportive relationship between Glenn, who is the star - the marathon runner, and his wife, who cheers him on. The funniest part is that she stops to give him a drink and then runs ahead again to find another point to cheer him on. While he comes towards the finishing line proud and panting, his wife has already sprinted ahead of him to wait for him (cooly) beyond the finishing line. Very funny, simple, accessible yet very powerful and empowering message.

I also heard great things about “Keep Not Silent” by Lilil Alexander, but missed the screening. A powerful and inventive documentary about 3 women's battle for their rights to love within the restraints of the orthodox communities of Jerusalem. They try to convince a religious universe, whom they are part of, that they HAVE to be truly themselves.

Q: Makes me wish I was there. I know this trip extended beyond the festival. You also met some people who have helped shaped the film industry in their own way. Can you share with us a little of both?

Tania: In Paris itself, I was very impressed by the number of people who devoted their life and passion to cinema.

passion to cinema.

Natacha Devillers, producer, Petites Lumieres (and founder in 1998 of the Jakarta International Film Festival with Shanty Harmayn) and Elise Jalladeau, producer Artcam and workshop leader of “Produce in the South”/Festival of Three Continents, Nantes.

Sabine Trannin, who works for a NGO with Rithy Panh, she is setting up an audio-visual centre in Cambodia to archive all the national images of Cambodia.

I met with Laurence Brandi who works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fonds Sud who helps finance films in East Asia and Africa, and was especially touched by the whole idea that the French are not only supporting their own film industry, but also nurturing film industries in the world. Singapore and Japan are not eligible but other Asian cities are. It is great to this meeting as many of the information she told us were actually not written down on the application form. This was definitely another highlight in the tour.

We also went to several film schools in Paris. In Le Fresnoy, we Learnt about what some masters programmes offer. They actually provide a fund for you to complete your master project. And it was a very systematic approach. I enjoyed the tour very much.

Visit to a multi-disciplinary arts centre Mains d’Oeuvres was good! Very inspiring to see such a dedicated & well-equipped arts centre. Very impressed with their infrastructure & support. They even had an art department and 22 full time staff!

The TV interview with Bere Bere television was interesting - It was an hour long so they managed to get a bit of content on Singapore and Japan – wish we had the questions prior because it was a surprise to be suddenly asked about my “Minister of Culture” But felt a little bit Lost in translation!

In Berlin, we met with the festival organisers of Transmediale - a diverse multi-disciplinary festival – really great to actually witness the work growing and being experimented “live” “during” the festival itself. The idea of the many different art forms really broke some of my own boundaries!

Also met with Berlinale co-production market Great! Would never have known about this if I didn’t go for this meeting. Opens up a lot of doors now that I know this exists and that many festivals offer this as well. There’s a lot of information out there that many filmmakers don’t know about. Another highlight!

Haus der Kultur der WeltMet with Dr Hulek and her colleague Annette Bhagwati (Deputy of Film and Visual Arts). Was good to learn the Asian Pacific Weeks. I also met Roy from the Berlin Asian Film Festival. Glad to know that he is such a visionary and wants to create a wave for Asian films in Berlin.

At the opening night of the Focus on Asia at the Kino Arsenal. There was a film screening of Riles and meeting with the audience. Was extremely delighted that Stefanie Schulte Strathaus (Programmer at the Friends at the German Archive/Kino Arsenal) from the Kino Arsenal showed “Ah Guai Puo” and “Little Girl Shoes” (Tania’s short films) on opening day before Riles. And I got an opportunity to answer questions. The turnout was alright... typical of a competitive Tuesday 7 pm night, but several audience stayed on during the reception and talked. So that opportunity to interact was great!

Stefanie and I shared a lot of ideas and we both did not believe in segregating a film into a genre or category. In fact, felt that my films were cross-genre.

Q: Sounds like you're taking a lot home with you from this trip. I am sure you will recommend this to any woman filmmaker who talks to you about this.

Tania: Yes, definitely. The best part of my trip is to have met so many women filmmakers from different parts of the world and to make long term stronger relationships with the Asian women filmmakers. It's so funny that we have to go all the way to Europe to meet our own neighbours in Asia. But it's really the start of great friendships and potential collaborations. For the sheer fact that we were given almost one month at least to get to know most of the filmmakers, our relationship and strengths were allowed to show and develop.

Am really very thankful to Jackie who selected my films, Marie Le Sourd and [ASEF](#) who was really instrumental in making this happen, Stephanie who showed 2 of my films on the opening night of the Focus on Asia at the Kino Arsenal - it really made such a difference to my trip in Berlin - to be able to actually speak specifically with the Berlin audience, and also to [Singapore Film Commission](#) for paying for my air ticket. Really, this ability to travel and meet people, share our works, obtain feedback and also look at new works so that our works never get stale is a great way to nurture the film industry in Singapore.

On the whole, I felt very at home in Paris and was very inspired by the Parisian's deep sense of culture and history. It was one of the most important lessons I brought back with me. That culture, history and art can simply be a way of life – for everyone – not just artists. I felt very inspired in Paris and felt very welcome in the city. And I think it was because there was great warmth from the people at the festival and what followed!

In contrast, was really thankful to have to better organizational skills of the Berliners, and their attention to detail and ability to mentally prepare us for what was going to happen at which point. These are VERY important in helping us fully utilize the opportunities we get. Of course the Berlin trip was ever too short and I would just have to come back to Berlin again!

Thanks Tania for taking the time to share with us your experience.

Tania Sng thanks the [Asia Europe Foundation](#) for making this trip possible.

Note: Sachi Hamano and Tania were both interviewed.

Interview by Wahyuni A. Hadi. Wahyuni is an independent film curator with a special interest in short films. She also co-founded of [Fly By Night](#) Video Challenge with film director Tan Pin Pin.

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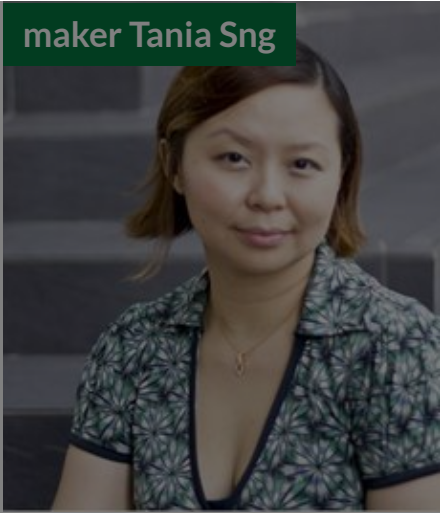
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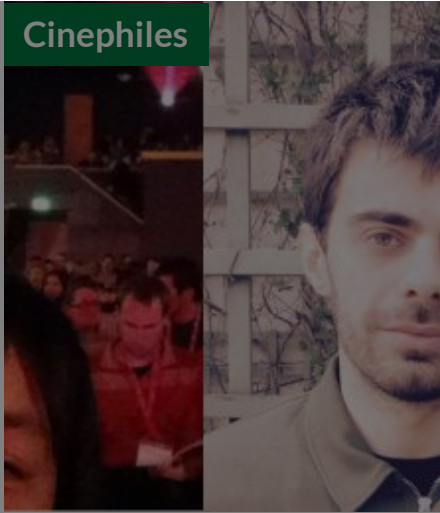
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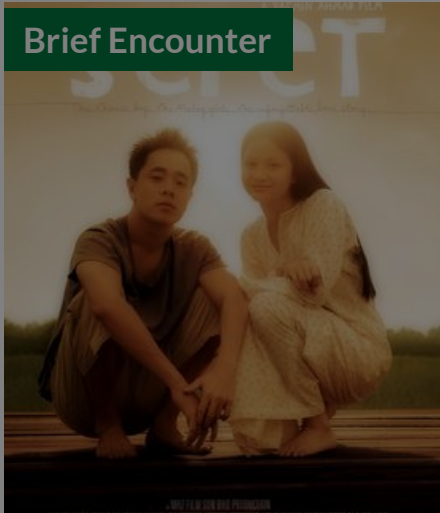
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