



MPA  
ASIA PACIFIC

# THE MPA ASIA-PACIFIC REPORTER

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Promoting and Protecting  
the Screen Community



## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**Above:** Production image from *GARLAND OF A SCARECROW*, a short film by **Rajesh Khatri**, from Nepal. Rajesh competed in our 2018 AFA-MPA Film Workshop in Busan, winning a trip to the Asia Pacific Screen Awards in Australia.

2020 has not provided the ideal conditions for filmmakers to practice their craft and progress their projects. Some, though, are benefiting from the time to focus on script development. With many of our MPA film workshop alumni restricted to working from home, we reached out to say “*hello, how are you?*”, and gain some insights into

what they have been working on since achieving success at any number of our events across the Asia Pacific region over the last few years. The results are often inspiring, at times despairing but all in all, fascinating. Take a look inside to read our feature story. ■

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## WORLD IP DAY GOES VIRTUAL

In previous years, MPA has been delighted to meet up with our friends and partners at U.S. embassies around the region, to co-host special screening events around the region. This year, unfortunately, even the best-laid plans failed to materialise, as the dark cloud of the pandemic made it impossible to convene any events safely.

Instead, we decided to celebrate World IP Day on April 26 by rolling out a digital campaign in Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam – once again with many of our generous partners, U.S. embassies, government agencies and local film industry organisations.

The campaign focused on an important message that encouraged audiences to patronise only legal online video services while at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was distributed via a wide range of partner channels to

whom MPA is indebted, including: Creative Content Australia; Screen Traveller on Weibo and WeChat (China); various industry group channels on Weibo and WeChat (Hong Kong); Creative First (India); APROFI (Indonesia); CODA and US Embassy Tokyo (Japan); KCOPA and KOFIC (South Korea); Kiwi Content Café (New Zealand); Cue Me (Taiwan); DIP, TMPC, MOC and Load Len Len (Thailand); US Embassy Hanoi, DatVietVac; VieON, BHD, KCC, K+, DANET, VFDA and Autumn Meeting (Vietnam). MPA offered the campaign a major boost across its regional Facebook and LinkedIn pages.

MPA was delighted to see so many members engage with the campaign and to contemplate just how important it is for the creative community to be appropriately compensated for their work, especially in these difficult times. ■

*Below:* Campaign visuals focused on encouraging audiences to patronise only legal online video services during the pandemic.



## YET MORE PIRACY WEBSITES BLOCKED ACROSS ASIA PACIFIC



*Above:* A site-blocking remedy is now available in 50 countries round the world.

The numbers tell the story. The adoption of site-blocking in the Asia Pacific region has led to significantly reduced piracy. Not only does the measure significantly reduce piracy visitation to blocked sites it reduces piracy overall in a country (i.e., to sites whether they are blocked or not) and increases traffic to legitimate services. The remedy is now available in eight countries in the APAC region, with MPA focusing its efforts in 2019 in three major markets: Australia, India, and South Korea. While the numbers are increasing week to week, in total, to the end of December 2020, 2,756 sites comprising 8,911 domains have been blocked across eight countries. ■

## MPA SUPPORTS NEW FILM PROJECTS THROUGH MPA APSA ACADEMY FILM FUND

### FUND LAUNCHED DURING BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

When much of the film industry shut down across the Asia Pacific, including many film festival and awards events that help to provide recognition, support and exposure to talented filmmakers making their mark on the industry, the MPA and APSA made the decision to go ahead with the highly successful MPA APSA Academy Film Fund. Now, more than ever, we considered, do filmmakers need our support. The MPA Film Workshop hosted August 24 in Beijing was the perfect platform to launch the 11th funding round for the feature film development fund.

Heading the Film Fund Jury in 2020 was esteemed Australian film distributor, historian and documentary filmmaker Andrew Pike OAM. He was joined by returning panelist Kiki Fung (Hong Kong, PRC) renowned film curator, film critic and current Programmer for Hong Kong International Film Festival, and Meiske Taurisia, and award-winning producer and champion of Indonesian independent cinema. To help promote the fund, APSA produced a video package, featuring remarks from Jury Chair Andrew Pike, Jury member Kiki Fung, and Film Fund recipient, Kazakh auteur writer/director Adilkhan Yerzhanov.

Right: MPA APSA Academy Film Fund Panel



### ASIA PACIFIC FILMMAKERS JOIN MPA'S FILM SCHOOL FRIDAY

On November 20, MPA took Asia Pacific filmmaking global with the first regionally-focused edition of Film School Friday - a

Right: Film School Friday Panellists: From top left to bottom right: Oh Jung-Mi, Robert Connolly, Dechen Roder and Maryam Ebrahimi.



program managed out of our Washington DC headquarters. 'Film School Friday: The Rise of Screen Stories from the Asia Pacific', was co-hosted with APAC regional partners - the Asia Pacific Screen Academy and the Embassy of Australia, focused on how the Asia Pacific region offers a diverse and fascinating depth of stories that are exciting audiences all over the world, and how the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund is contributing to discovering and developing those stories for the screen.

MPA's Film School Friday panel, moderated by Variety Asia's Patrick Frater, featured the following filmmakers: Robert Connolly, Film Director, Producer, Screenwriter (Australia), Maryam Ebrahimi, Director, Documentary Filmmaker (Sweden/Iran), Oh Jung-Mi, Producer, Director, Scriptwriter (South Korea), and Dechen Roder, Filmmaker (Bhutan).

MPA Chairman and CEO Charlie Rivkin opened the event with remarks on behalf of MPA.

MPA was thrilled to receive additional

## MPA SUPPORTS NEW FILM PROJECTS THROUGH MPA APSA ACADEMY FILM FUND (cont'd)

remarks by Arthur Sinodinos, Australia's Ambassador to the United States of America and by Tracey Vieira, Chair of the Asia Pacific Screen Academy.

The event was a celebration of Asia Pacific

filmmaking, representing the perspectives from countries like Bhutan, a country with very little film industry infrastructure, to Australia and South Korea, where much greater levels of support are on offer.



**Above:** Film School Friday: MPA Chairman & CEO **Charles Rivkin** delivers opening remarks for the first APAC-focused Film School Friday.



**Above:** Film proved to be the common language in the discussion involving filmmakers from Australia, Sweden/Iran, South Korea and Bhutan

### 2020 FILM FUND RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

On November 26, MPA partnered with the Asia Pacific Screen Academy to announce four recipients of the 2020 MPA APSA Academy Film Fund at a slimmed-down APSA ceremony on Queensland's Gold Coast.

Announcing the winners via video, Belinda Lui, President & Managing Director Asia Pacific, MPA, remarked that when the MPA first partnered with APSA the hope was that it would reveal fresh and exciting new stories for a global audience. Now, in our eleventh year, she confessed that all of those expectations have been greatly surpassed. Films produced under the fund have resonated with audiences and festival judges alike, highlighting the quality and range of Asia Pacific filmmaking and illustrating the

incredible diversity of filmmakers in this part of the world.

The recipients are:

- Bianca Balbuena, from the Philippines, for VIET AND NAME. Developed with writer/producer Truong Minh Quy, the film is a strong, original drama about two miners caught between their love for each other and their conflicting desires for their futures, as they confront the trauma and the ghosts of Vietnam's past and the uncertainties of the country's present. The film's blend of fiction with fact and the supernatural promises an innovative work of psychological complexity and artistic innovation from a filmmaker who is emerging as an extraordinary figure in Vietnamese cinema.

**Right:** MPA APSA Academy Film Fund Winners



Image sourced from Asia Pacific Screen Awards

## MPA SUPPORTS NEW FILM PROJECTS THROUGH MPA APSA ACADEMY FILM FUND (cont'd)

- ALL BEFORE YOU from Palestinian director Annemarie Jacir. Annemarie is a distinguished Palestinian filmmaker, whose 2017 film WAJIB was recipient of a previous grant from the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund and won 36 international awards. ALL BEFORE YOU tells a story of escalating demands for Palestinian independence in the 1930s when the country was under British control and the world was shifting towards war. Her treatment expresses a powerful narrative and a willingness to break free of conventions in exploring little known aspects of cultural and political history.

- Guillaume De Seille for A KID ON THE BLOCK. A film to be written and directed by Japanese filmmaker, Kyoko Miyake. With a background in award-winning documentaries, Miyake's first feature is an innovative work of magic realism exploring the invisible stigma of isolation and loneliness in the bustling city of Tokyo. A 5-year-old boy moves with his mother into a decrepit apartment block known as 'the den of lonely deaths', a symbol of social crisis in Japan. There the boy encounters both grumpy and despairing residents and humorous and tender ghosts from the past. This modern ghost story is both refreshingly original and psychologically insightful.

- THE SACRIFICE from director Ridham Janve from India. Janve's previous film, THE GOLD-LADEN SHEEP AND THE SACRED MOUNTAIN won the Young Cinema Award at the 2019 APSAs and his new film promises to be brilliantly visualised as it plunges into Indian mythology to tell the story of a lone horseman who survives tribal warfare to seek shelter and safety in a mountainous land of wild forests. Janve's film departs dramatically from conventional historical epics to focus on the universal story of one man's relationship with a harsh wilderness. ■



Above: MPA President and Managing Director, Asia Pacific, **Belinda Lui**, announced the film fund winners via video.

## AUSTRALIA

### AUSTRALIAN SCREEN SECTOR GENERATED \$15.1 BILLION

On February 10, the Australia New Zealand Screen Association (ANZSA) launched a new economic report at Parliament House in Canberra. The new research, by Olsberg SPI, found that the film and television industry in Australia generated a total economic contribution of USD 15.1 billion (AUD\$22.5 billion) in 2017-18, representing a total growth of 15% from a similar report in 2012-13. The report also found that the industry supported a total of 84,982 FTE jobs and a total tax contribution of USD 1.74 billion (AUD\$2.59 billion).

The report described how digital disruption had forced difficult adjustments across the sector, particularly in physical home entertainment, where the mass closure of video rental stores drove a six per cent fall in overall jobs across the sector from 2012-13. But at the same time, the Australian screen industry's agile response to digitisation also delivered new and higher quality jobs, with 'value added' roles in production and video-on-demand (VOD) distribution emerging.

Jonathan Olsberg, Chairman of report author Olsberg SPI, said, "This growth is a strong example of the industry's quick and efficient response to the digital disruption. After a painful period of adjustment, the Australian screen industry is now well-positioned to take advantage of new opportunities on a global stage. It now has a more streamlined distribution model and greater 'value add' - and this has real economic benefits for consumers, who can now access more great Australian and international content for less than ever before."

Overall, the economic contribution of every person employed in the Australian screen sector increased 23 per cent in the five years since 2012-13.

Speakers at the event called on the government to boost the location offset for production, which was effectively answered on July 17, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Minister Paul Fletcher, announced officially that there will be an

## AUSTRALIAN SCREEN SECTOR GENERATED \$15.1 BILLION (cont'd)

AUD 400 million “top-up” increase in funding to the Location Incentive budget. The boost in the Location Incentive budget could not be better timed to help the screen sector’s

recovery from the pandemic. The additional funding is expected to attract a cumulative AUD\$3 billion in foreign screen production investment and create 8,000 jobs each year. ■



Above: From left to right: **Bridget Fair** (CEO Free TV), **Gina Black** (EVP, Screen QLD), **Deb Richards** (APAC Production Policy, Netflix) and **Kylie Munnich** (CEO, Screen QLD).



Above: ANZSA’s **Paul Muller** with **Sophie Kowald** (Advisor to **Michelle Rowland MP**, Shadow Minister for Communications).



Above: From left to right: **Nick Herd** (Head of Policy & Research), **Stephen Arnott** (1st Assistant Secretary, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications), ANZSA’s **Paul Muller** and **Matt Vitins** (COO, Matchbox).



Above: **Caroline Fulton** (Assistant Secretary, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications).

## CHINA

## MPA FORUM BACKS INNOVATION DURING SHANGHAI FILM FESTIVAL

On July 27, the MPA hosted the 7th Global Film Industry Value Chain Development Forum programmed as part of the Shanghai International Film Festival, along with partners Shanghai Jiao Tong University, SIFF and CCTV. The event included discussions on how to develop a robust and sustainable Chinese film industry at this time of great uncertainty. Participants discussed how to build an industrialised film industry that can produce rotating slates of high-quality films.

MPA Chairman and CEO Charles Rivkin gave recorded welcome remarks, alongside Hu Hao, Member of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Committee and Zhang Hong, Executive President of China Film Association. Fu Ruoqing, Vice President and CEO of China Film Company and Chairman of Huaxia Film Distribution Company, delivered keynote remarks. Speakers included: Wang Zhonglei, CEO of Huayi Brothers; Richard Gelfond, CEO, IMAX; Rance Pow, Founder and President of Artisan Gateway; Katherine Winston, Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Winston-Baker; John Penotti, Producer of Crazy Rich Asians; Belle Avery, Producer, THE MEG; and Jerry Ye, Founder & Chairman, Qing Song Films. The event was webcast on CCTV to a large local Chinese

## MPA FORUM BACKS INNOVATION DURING SHANGHAI FILM FESTIVAL (cont'd)



audience. China commentary platform Screen Traveler, which reaches over 1 million users, covered the event.

We'd like to thank all of our local and international speakers for stepping up to ensure our Shanghai event went ahead under difficult conditions. ■

**Right:** CEO of IMAX **Richard Gelfond** joined the forum via video link, expressing that while it'll take some time for the global film market to recover, he has confidence that the cinema experience is irreplaceable.

**Below right:** From left to right: CCTV host **Ji Xiaojun**, MPA China's **William Feng**, **Wang Zhonglei**, CEO of Huayi Brothers and **Yang Xianghua**, President of Membership & Overseas Business Group, iQIYI.

**Below left:** MPA Chairman & CEO **Charles Rivkin** gave a warm welcome to the event attendees through a recorded video message.



## MPA HOSTS FILM WORKSHOP DURING 10TH BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

On August 24, the MPA joined with the Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF) and the Beijing Film Market to host the MPA BJIFF BFM Film Workshop. The masterclass brought together local and international industry

experts to identify and assess how China's film industry continues to mature and evolve. The event was staged as a hybrid affair at the Beijing Yanqi Lake International Convention & Exhibition Centre with international guests joining by video link.

Opening remarks were delivered by Charles H. Rivkin, Chairman & CEO of the MPA and Joe Russo, Director, CAPTAIN AMERICA: WINTER SOLDIER, CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR, AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR, AVENGERS: ENDGAME. [View the message from Joe Russo here.](#)

Keynote remarks were made by the MPA's William Feng alongside Liu Chun, President of China Film Co-production Corporation (CFCC), who commented on the constructive relationship between his organisation, the MPA and its member studios in China. This year's masterclass discussion focused on the continuing expansion and industrialisation of the Chinese film industry. Moderator James Li,



**Above: Joe Russo**, Director, CAPTAIN AMERICA: WINTER SOLDIER, CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR, AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR, AVENGERS: ENDGAME, dialled in to talk about the strong relationship between the China and US film industries and the role MPA plays in helping with that relationship.

## MPA HOSTS FILM WORKSHOP DURING 10TH BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (cont'd)

Co-founder of Fanink, was joined by Jerry Ye, Founder & Chairman of Qing Song Films, and Gillian Zhoa, President of Warner Bros, China. Ellen Eliasoph, President and CEO of Perfect

Village Entertainment Group and André Morgan, Producer, MILLION DOLLAR BABY & WARLORDS, both China film industry stalwarts. ■

## INDIA

## INDUSTRY IN INDIA VALUED AT ALMOST \$50 BILLION

MPA-sponsored FICCI E-Frames was hosted in a virtual format this year between July 7-11.

MPA contributed to the panel 'Ensuring a Fair Marketplace for the Creative Economy in a Digital First Marketplace', where speakers joined in unison to advocate the need for a strong copyright mechanism in India.

The session provided an opportunity to launch the report '2019 Economic Contribution of the Film, Television and VOD Industry in India', presented by a representative of Deloitte. The report found that the creative industries are estimated to generate a direct gross output of INR 115k cr (US\$ 16.5bn) and provide direct employment to 8.5 lakh (848k) people - accounting for indirect and induced effects, the industry is estimated to generate a total gross output of INR 349k cr (US\$ 49.9bn) and a total employment of 26.6 lakh (2.6m).

The MPA also helped to moderate a session, 'The Economic Impact of the Media & Entertainment Sector: A post-COVID-19 Lens & The Way Forward', with Jonathan Olsberg, Chairman, Olsberg - SPI, and Ms TCA Kalyani, Joint Secretary (Films), Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.

We also partnered with our long-time partners, Koan Advisory, to publish commentary on a number of the most engaging FICCI E-Frames sessions on platform Creative First. You can read the session summaries at [creativefirst.film](https://www.creativefirst.film). ■



Above: FICCI E-Frames panel 'Ensuring a Fair Marketplace for the Creative Economy in a Digital First Marketplace.'

## MPA EXPANDS PRESENCE IN INDIA IN RESPONSE TO GROWING MARKET

On October 1, MPA expanded its presence in India, welcoming the leadership of experienced film and television industry veteran and long-time MPA representative and consultant, Uday Singh, who will be Managing Director, reporting to Belinda Lui. Singh has taken up the position with the global advocacy organisation as the film, television and streaming industry in India continued to experience record growth. In 2019, the industry's economic contribution was USD 49.8bn (INR 348,972 Cr) a 61% increase over 2017, according to a new report from Deloitte launched during FICCI's E-Frames virtual event earlier this year. The report also found that the industry supported a total of 2.6 million jobs. ■



Above right: Uday Singh, Managing Director, MPA India.

## MPA SUPPORTS VIRTUAL DIGITAL ECONOMY EVENT IN INDIA

On November 25, MPA supported the FICCI Knowledge Series Fast Track Digital, a one-day virtual event focused on the dynamic, fast-growing VOD industry in India. It was the fifth consecutive year hosting discussions on this theme.

The inaugural sessions talked to how well the digital content economy has captured the imagination of the greater portion of India's audiences.

The welcome address was given by Belinda Lui who spoke about the resilience of the industry, the success of the VOD sector in India, the challenge of piracy and the collaborative work between MPA and other stakeholders in India to finding solutions. The keynote was delivered by Hon Justice Prathiba M. Singh, Judge, Delhi High Court, who pronounced, "If media and content creators have to remain free and fair they ought to involve free and fair adjudicatory mechanisms, which are not coercive in nature."

The first panel discussion, moderated by Trevor Fernandez, and involving Ameet Datta, Partner, Sai Krishna Associates, Anil Lale, General Counsel, Viacom18, Ritesh Khosla, Deputy General Counsel, Sony Pictures Networks India and Uday Singh, Managing Director, MPA India, addressed topics of concern to the industry in light of proposed amendments to the existing Copyright Act. The panel shared a desire to see the law include stronger enforcement measures to combat digital piracy and in particular the strategy to reduce piracy on the Telegram app.

The second session, moderated by Vanita Kohli Khandekar, Contributing Editor, Business Standard, and featuring Ajay Chacko, Co-founder & Chief Executive Officer, Arré, Tarun Katial, Chief Executive Officer, ZEE5 India, and co-chair for Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMA), Karan Bedi, Chief Executive Officer, MX Player, Gourav Rakshit, Chief Operating Officer, VOOT, Sanjeev Lamba, Executive Producer, Hungama Originals, and Vivian Sharan, Partner, Koan Advisory Group, spoke optimistically about the progress the sector has made to defining a workable code for self-regulation, and the steps necessary to building confidence with government and audiences to address all concerns through the process.

The third and final panel, moderated by Prashanth Rao, Partner & Leader, M & E Consulting, and involving industry experts Karthik Nagarajan, Head of Content, Wavemaker, Vinit Mehta, Director-New Business, Brightcove, Saugata Mukherjee, Head of Original Content, SonyLIV, and Kranti Gada, Chief Operating Officer, Shemaroo Entertainment Limited, agreed that improved technology and nuanced business models would contribute to more growth and a sustainable digital ecosystem for VOD services.

The event drew over 500 registered attendees. Commentary website Creative First promoted the sessions on the website [creativefirst.film](http://creativefirst.film). ■

*Below: From left to right:*

**Honourable Justice Prathiba M. Singh**, Judge Delhi High Court; **Belinda Lui**, President & Managing Director - Asia Pacific Motion Picture Association; **Dilip Chenoy**, Secretary General FICCI; **Dr Ashish Kulkarni** Founder Punnaryug Artvision Pvt Ltd.

**FAST TRACK DIGITAL**  
FICCI Knowledge Series

November 25 2020

Presenting Partner: MPA ASIA PACIFIC  
Organizer: FICCI

1030 – 1130 IST  
Inaugural

Hon'ble Mrs Justice Prathiba M. Singh  
Judge  
Delhi High Court

Ms Belinda Lui  
President & MD –  
Asia Pacific  
Motion Picture Association

Mr Dilip Chenoy  
Secretary General  
FICCI

Dr Ashish Kulkarni  
Founder  
Punnaryug Artvision Pvt Ltd

Silver Partner: BRIGHTCOVE  
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REGISTER: [www.ficci-frames.com/FastTrack/](http://www.ficci-frames.com/FastTrack/)

## MPA AND JAPAN'S CODA RENEW PARTNERSHIP

On April 27, MPA renewed its MOU with the Content Overseas Distribution Association (CODA). First implemented in March 2014, the renewed agreement was previously scheduled to be signed at a meeting during CinemaCon, however, with many industry events cancelled this year, the parties chose to put a formal signing ceremony on hold for a later time. The agreement outlines a working partnership on various content protection initiatives in the Asia Pacific. The cooperation has strengthened our joint copyright protection efforts and

allowed the MPA to develop new initiatives to best address the current challenges of online content theft of creative works across the world. CODA has taken a strong position on how online infringement can be best countered in Japan, including support site-blocking. They have similarly joined the MPA in co-hosting high-profile events including the annual MPA Seminar hosted during the Tokyo International Film Festival. ■

## SITE-BLOCKING CONSTITUTIONAL IN JAPAN, DECLARE EXPERTS AT MPA SEMINAR

On November 4, MPA, Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF) and UniJapan hosted the annual MPA-TIFF Seminar. The event seminar addressed the Constitutionality of Site-Blocking in Japan.

Japanese and international experts made the case that site-blocking of illegal online piracy operations is constitutional in Japan as it is in other jurisdictions, such as Germany and across other countries within the European Union.

In the first of two keynotes, 'The Constitutionality and Legality of Piracy Website-blocking in Japan', Nobuharu Obinata, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kumamoto University, was unequivocal in his view that site-blocking is permitted under the Japanese constitution: "Traditionally, Japan has viewed site-blocking with suspicion due to possible interference with the secrecy of communication of the user with the pirate

website; however, nothing in the laws, or in the Japanese Constitution, bars lawmakers from enacting a statute allowing rights holders to protect their rights and ISPs - as keepers of public order on the Internet - are best positioned to automatically implement, in a way that does not interfere with users' otherwise legitimate interests on the Internet, technical measures to disable access to piracy."

Joining the seminar by video was German attorney Jan Nordemann, who specializes in certified copyright and media law and industrial property rights. Nordemann, a partner at the Nordemann law firm and an honorary professor at Humboldt University in Berlin, shared insights into the constitutionality and legality of piracy website-blocking in the EU and Germany. He said, "The EU Charter, the German Constitution and the case law all support the constitutionality of site-blocking to combat the unfair competition



**Above:** From left to right: **Marc Fuoti**, Japan Senior Consultant, Motion Picture Association; **Nobuharu Obinata**, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kumamoto University; **Hiroyasu Ando**, Advisor, The Japan Foundation; **Akira Amari**, Member of the House of Representatives, Chairperson, Research Commission on the Tax System, Liberal Democratic Party; **Shintaro Ito**, Member of the House of Representatives & Secretary General, League of Diet Members for the Promotion of Culture and Arts; **Tomohiro Tohyama**, Attorney-At Law, Partner, TMI Associates; **Steve Lang**, Minister-Counsellor for Economic and Scientific Affairs at US Embassy Tokyo.

## SITE-BLOCKING CONSTITUTIONAL IN JAPAN, DECLARE EXPERTS AT MPA SEMINAR (cont'd)

and online harm caused by pirate operations like The Pirate Bay,” Nordemann offered. “Rights-holders who expend the energies and costs to create, produce, and distribute the world’s great content, should not have to contend with pirates who contribute nothing and feed the slummy side of the Internet. Site-blocking laws, which protect the fundamental rights of authors to reap the benefit from their creations, can be properly balanced with other fundamental rights such as privacy and freedom of expression, such that there is no unmitigable conflict.”

The event was hosted at Roppongi Academy Hills 49 Auditorium in Tokyo, attended by film industry representatives, Japanese Government officials, copyright academics and media. High-profile speakers at the event

included: Hiroyasu Ando, Chairman, Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF); Akira Amari, Member of the House of Representatives, & Chairperson, Research Commission on the Tax System, Liberal Democratic Party; Shigeaki Tanaka, Secretary-General, Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters, Cabinet Office; Shintaro Ito, Member of the House of Representatives & Secretary General, League of Diet Members for the Promotion of Culture and Arts; Steve Lang, Minister-Counsellor for Economic and Scientific Affairs at US Embassy Tokyo and Tomohiro Tohyama, Attorney at Law, Partner, TMI Associates, who moderated a discussion on the topic with professors Obinata and Nordemann.

The event was live-streamed on YouTube to an international audience. ■



**Above:** On Screen: **Jan Bernd Nordemann**, Attorney at Law (Germany), Certified Copyright and Media Lawyer, Certified Industrial Property Rights Lawyer; *From bottom left to right:* **Tomohiro Tohyama**, Attorney at Law, Partner, TMI Associates; Nobuharu Obinata, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kumamoto University; Hiroyasu Ando, Advisor, Japan Foundation.



**Above:** **Tomohiro Tohyama**, Attorney at Law, Partner, TMI Associates; Nobuharu Obinata, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kumamoto University.



**Above:** **Nobuharu Obinata**, Professor, Faculty of Law, Kumamoto University.



**Above:** **Shintaro Ito**, Member of the House of Representatives & Secretary General, League of Diet Members for the Promotion of Culture and Arts.

## MPA PARTNERS WITH TIFFCOM & DHU FOR HYBRID EVENT

On Nov. 6, the MPA partnered with TIFFCOM (the Tokyo Film Market) and Digital Hollywood University (DHU), with support from Screen International, to host the MPA DHU TIFFCOM Film Workshop. The workshop opened with recorded remarks delivered by Belinda Lui, President and Managing Director, Asia Pacific, MPA and by DHU's Professor Sugiyama. Producer and VFX Supervisor, Tom Horton (THE KING'S SPEECH, DA VINCI'S DEMONS, LEMOMY SNICKET: A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS, BRAVE NEW WORLD), presented a recorded masterclass on high-end special effects in film and television,

which was then followed by a live Q&A with Japanese filmmakers.

Five finalist filmmakers pitched their new film projects to Tom Horton and leading Japanese filmmaker judges Takehiko Shinjo, Jun Oshima, Katahara Tomoko and film journalist Nakayama Harumi.

The MPA Special Recognition prize visit to the Asia Pacific Screen Awards went to Shin Akana, for his project SPEAK MY RHYMES FOR ME. The MPA Grand Prize visit of a trip to LA for a 4-day film and television immersion course went to Genki Nakamura for his film CAPTIVE. ■



Above: Behind the scenes tech set-up for the hybrid event.



Above: Front row from left to right: **Shin Akana**, winner of MPA Special Recognition Prize; **Genki Nakamura**, winner of MPA Grand Prize.



Above: Masterclass guest **Tom Horton** speaks to MPA's **Stephen Jenner** on high-end special effects in film and TV.

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

## REGIONAL PRODUCTION COMMUNITY SEES LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL



On July 3, the MPA presented 'Light at the End of the Tunnel: Southeast Asia Best Practice Production' webinar. Produced and hosted by MPA partners, Wildsnapper TV, who hosted the super-fun Script-to-Screen Film Workshop in 2019, the webinar brought together old friends and new from Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines

Left: From left to right: **Zabrina Fernandez**, Wildsnapper TV, Malaysia; **Freddie Yeo**, Infinite Studios, Singapore; **Anucha Boonyawatana**, Thai Directors' Association, Thailand; **Tran Thi Bich Ngoc**, Autumn Meeting, Vietnam; **Edwin Nazir**, APROFI, Indonesia; **Keith Sicat**, KINO ARTS, Philippines.

## REGIONAL PRODUCTION COMMUNITY SEES LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL (cont'd)

and Vietnam to share best practice health and safety protocols, discuss opportunities and challenges for co-production, consider the potential for facilitating offshore production in each country and swap notes

on partnering with local, regional and international companies on new projects. Participants included Edwin Nazir, Chair of the Indonesian Film Producers' Association, Indonesia; Freddie Yeo, Infinite Studios, Singapore; Keith Silat, Director/Producer, Philippines; Anucha Boonyawatana (Nuchy), Director/Thai Directors' Association), Thailand; Ngoc Tran, Producer, Vietnam and Zabrina Fernandez, Filmmaker, Wildsnapper TV, Malaysia, who also moderated the discussion. The 1.5-hour lived-stream of the programme drew 1,700 views and the recording of the event can be found on [MPA's APAC Facebook page](#). ■



**Left:** From top left to bottom right: **Zabrina Fernandez**, Wildsnapper TV, Malaysia; **Freddie Yeo**, Infinite Studios, Singapore; **Tran Thi Bich Ngoc**, Autumn Meeting, Vietnam; **Keith Sicat**, KINO ARTS, Philippines; **Edwin Nazir**, APROFI, Indonesia; **Anucha Boonyawatana**, Thai Directors' Association.

## INDONESIA'S PRODUCTION & STREAMING SECTORS GET MAXIMUM EXPOSURE

On October 12, the MPA partnered with the Indonesia Producers' Association (APROFI) and film financing forum (AKATARA), to host a webinar 'Maximum Exposure: Rebooting Screen Production, Increasing Capacity and Growing the Streaming Sector in Indonesia.'

The event was supported by the Ministry of Culture & Education, the Ministry of Tourism & Creative Economy and BPI.

The webinar involved welcome remarks from Neil El Himam, Director for Application and Digital Economy Governance, Ministry of Tourism & Creative

Economy, Indonesia, Belinda Lui, President & Managing Director, Asia Pacific, MPA and Vivian Idris, Program Director, Akatara.

Norman Lockhart, Director, Production Management, APAC & India and Alexander Siregar, Senior Manager, Content Acquisition, Disney, made presentations describing their organisation's approach to production and their engagement with the Indonesian production community and audience.

They were then joined by moderator, Marissa Anita, writer, actor and content creator at [Greatmind.id](#), and producers

**Right:** Belinda Lui, President and Managing Director of the Motion Picture Association, Asia Pacific.



## INDONESIA'S PRODUCTION & STREAMING SECTORS GET MAXIMUM EXPOSURE (cont'd)

Shanty Harmayn, Chief Executive of Base Entertainment, and Linda Gozali, Producer at MAGMA Entertainment and APROFI executive and Alex Sihar, Head of Policy Advocacy, BPI, for a thoughtful and informative discussion on ramping up production in a safe way, working with

companies such as Netflix and Disney, and assessing the potential for the streaming sector in Indonesia.

The webinar has attracted over 530 views and remains available to view on the [MPA Asia Pacific Facebook page](#). ■



**Right:** From left to right: **Marissa Anita**, Writer, Content Creator; **Norman Lockhart**, Director, Production Management, APAC & India, Netflix; **Alexander Siregar**, Senior Manager, Content Acquisition, Disney; **Shanty Harmayn**, Chief Executive, Base Entertainment; **Linda Gozali**, Producer, APROFI, Magma Entertainment; **Alex Sihar**, Head of Policy Advocacy, BPI.

## VIETNAMESE FILMMAKERS GET TO GRIPS WITH SMARTPHONE FILMMAKING

On April 23, in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of US-Vietnam relations, we partnered with the US Mission to Vietnam,

the Vietnam Film Development Association (VFDA), Autumn Meeting and K+, to host the 'Pocket Filmmaking Masterclass' with Jason

**Right:** Chairman & CEO of MPA **Charles Rivkin** and US Ambassador **Daniel Kritenbrink** recorded welcome remarks.



Chúc các bạn cố gắng những điều may mắn nhất cho các dự án sắp tới của mình.

## VIETNAMESE FILMMAKERS GET TO GRIPS WITH SMARTPHONE FILMMAKING (cont'd)

van Genderen.

MPA greatly appreciated the contribution of welcome remarks provided by US Ambassador Kritenbrink and MPA Chairman & CEO Charlie



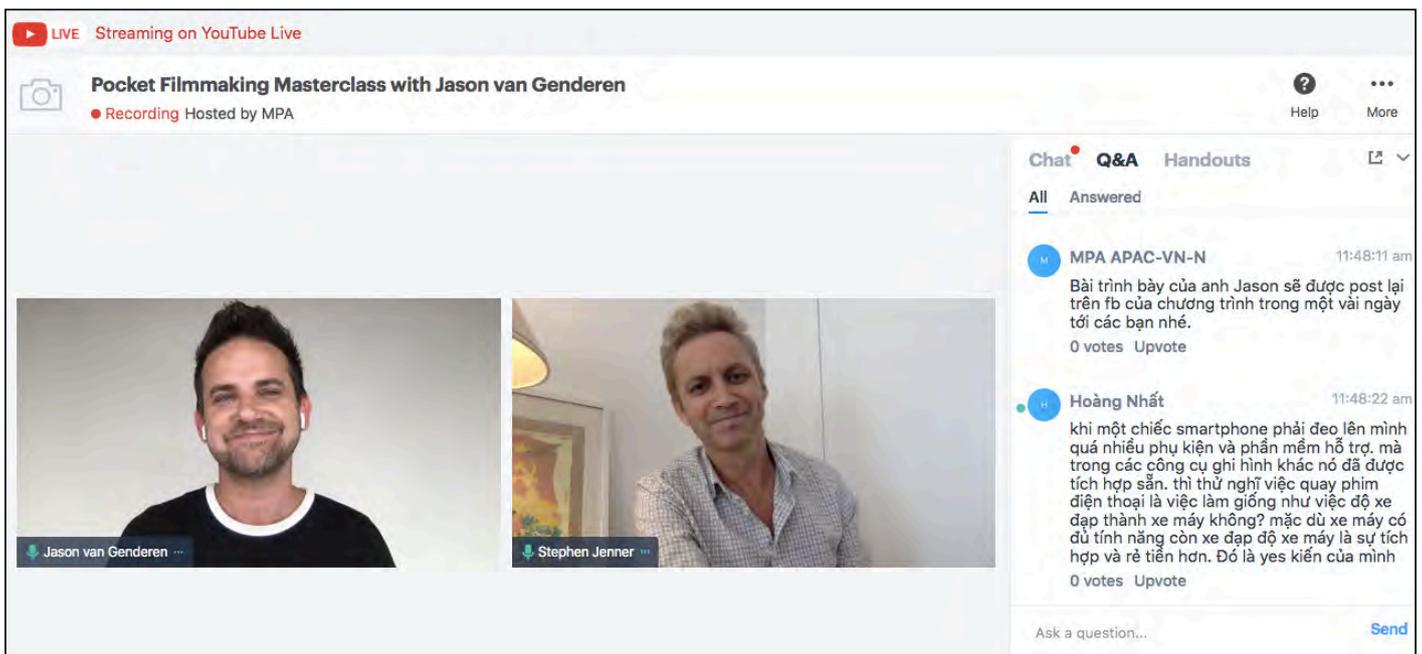
Above: Chairman & CEO of MPA Charles Rivkin and US Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink recorded welcome remarks.

Rivkin. This was followed by a masterclass from Jason van Genderen, which offered a deep dive into turning a smartphone into a powerful tool for creating screen stories on a budget. Jason offered Vietnamese filmmakers an informative lesson in technology, shooting tips and storytelling anecdotes, leaving the audience inspired to create their own content. Jason also touched on his experience with creating and distributing screen content to go viral. While preparing for the masterclass, Jason shot a short video on setting up a supermarket for his mother who suffers from dementia. His distribution strategy resulted in the video being viewed globally more than over 12 million times.

The full video, along with additional Q&A videos with Jason, can be found on the [MPA APAC Facebook page](#). ■



Above: Pocket filmmaker Jason Van Genderen headlines the masterclass.



Above: Jason and MPA's Stephen Jenner link up via video to take questions from the audience.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Until they found themselves isolated at home as the result of the coronavirus pandemic, many past filmmaker participants in MPA supported film workshops, festivals and pitch competitions around the Asia Pacific could be found to be hard at work on a variety of projects, building on their skills and knowledge, and gaining experience from

mentors, larger projects or film workshops, and gaining that hard-to-find foothold in this most challenging of industries. Curious, we reached out to discover how their career has progressed, what opportunities have come their way, and how, of course, the current state of events has affected their creative output.



Above: Julian Lucas and actor Jack White pose with their trophy at Tropfest 2014.

### JULIAN LUCAS, AUSTRALIA

In 2014, Australian director Julian Lucas won top honour at the prestigious Tropfest Film Festival for his short film GRANNY SMITH. Part of the prize was an MPA-sponsored film immersion course in Los Angeles, where Julian was offered time among other filmmakers in the heart of the world's film industry. This presented an opportunity to showcase new ideas in pitch forums and even encouraged him to take the opportunity to shoot a film while on the ground in the US. "You don't often get the chance to play in some of the most amazing landscapes on the planet, so I grabbed a camera and a small team and got shooting a piece about yogis in the American desert in this once-in-a-lifetime setting."

Presently working as a TVC director in Melbourne, the pressures of lockdown under a pandemic might have tightened the faucet on commercial jobs, but it hasn't dampened Julian's enthusiasm or his output. He has worked within social distancing laws to create an intimate, COVID-themed piece titled NOISE which has already begun the rounds of online film festivals. "As filmmakers, we have to respond to what's going on in the here and now. I'd had some knock-backs from broadcast commissioners,

but I still had things to say. We had no money, but creativity has to rise to the surface."

Julian is presently developing his satirical short film FOR YOUR SINS into a limited series for broadcast or streaming and the pilot is ready to go. It is a locally-produced concept but that won't limit his thinking to Australian borders alone.

Harkening back to his time in the US, Julian has some words of wisdom for other filmmakers making the trip. "I'm grateful for my sponsored time in LA, but it's really up to us as individuals to make our mark while there is buzz surrounding us. We have to seize every opportunity that comes our way, but as Australian artists we often have too much humility about what we do. Sometimes we have to leave that at the door, because being confident in these settings is important and we have to ride the wave while it's there."

The link to [FOR YOUR SINS](#) is [here](#). ■

### AW SEE WEE, MALAYSIA

Since his first mind-altering experience seeing James Cameron's TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY in Malaysia as a child, filmmaker Aw See Wee has been obsessed with screen stories. From there he became enamoured with Spielberg's views of the

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

world and these inspirations encouraged See Wee to turn his hand to creating his own stories as a teenager. It was only by following his dream studying film at university in Taiwan that he discovered the world of arthouse cinema. *"It really was a genre of film I'd never come across in Malaysia. And it opened up a whole new world of opportunities for me."*

See Wee is presently developing his feature film project CAUSEWAY. It is a story about migrant workers stuck in a border of no man's

Below: Aw See Wee at the 2017 MPA AFA Film Workshop pitching his feature film project CAUSEWAY.



land. The project was first pitched during the MPA workshop under the Asian Film Academy during the Busan International Film Festival in 2017. *"The pitching workshop gave me a chance to introduce my film while it was at only synopsis stage,"* says See Wee. *"I learned a lot about pitching and received a great many fruitful comments that helped me with the scriptwriting later on."*

Filmmaking is all about collaboration and See Wee is grateful for the MPA opportunity that allowed him to travel to Brisbane for Asia Pacific Screen Awards and begin building a substantial artist network. CAUSEWAY has continued to shine, having been invited to several other labs and workshops as far afield as Portugal and South Korea. See Wee beams with enthusiasm, *"It was great to meet with one of the MPA jury members during my trip to Busan last year, where we were both at the 2019 Asian Film Market with our own projects. Hopefully both of us will get our funding and eventually meet up at other festivals with finished films in the not too distant future!"* ■



Above: Directing on set.



Above: Aw See Wee receives the runner-up prize at the 2017 MPA AFA Film Workshop.

### SUMAN MUKHOPADHYAY, INDIA

A project very close to filmmaker Suman Mukhopadhyay's heart, PARADISE IN FLAMES, is the tale of a trauma that continues to rage in India's conflicted Kashmir region and any telling of this narrative in Mukhopadhyay's Indian homeland was always going to be fraught with socio-political challenges. In 2017, his delivery of a treatment to the APSA screenplay jury via the 'Launch Your Script' initiative co-organised by the Screenwriters Association, MPA and APSA secured him a very special opportunity. The MPA APSA Academy Film Fund was the perfect vehicle to translate his concept into a screenplay. The monetary award offered Mukhopadhyay enough security to focus on the project and shepherd it through a number of drafts.

*"I'd sent in a visual treatment of how I envisioned the film, but I was told there was some tough competition. So, it's certainly a boost to the confidence to be told you've won. 50% of the prize money was advanced at that point and then I had two years to be able to submit a properly formatted screenplay."* The story evolved alongside the volatile political situation in the Kashmir Region. *"The development time really benefited me in developing a holistic reading of the situation. For my research I managed to speak to a broad range of interview subjects, from taxi drivers, journalists, theatre artists, professors, poets, policemen, military personnel, boatmen on Dal Lake, and many others. I appreciate the great support they gave."*

Moving forward, PARADISE IN FLAMES faces a new raft of challenges. *"At this point, I'm*

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

seeking the funds to shoot, but it's a tricky situation," Mukhopadhyay offers. "Politically, it will continue to be a difficult film to shoot on location for some time."

The other advantage to the MPA process is the opportunity of a ready-made network of producers that is open to filmmakers. "It has been enriching to have access to a great pool of international producers via the MPA and APSA prize, but in this present pandemic disruption,

it's very difficult to entuse any international producers about a project, so I must wait and see."

The freedom that the prize has allow is not lost on Mukhopadhyay. "I've been gifted the opportunity to craft a truly objective view into this problem where we can focus on the cinematic quality of the project rather than engaging in any political disagreement. True cinema is about human stories, after all." ■

**Right: Suman Mukhopadhyay**, Indian Film Director at the 11th Asia Pacific Screen Awards.



### JASMINE LOW, MALAYSIA

Health and fitness were powerful inspirations for Australian/Malaysian creative tech consultant Jasmine Low to pick up a camera and begin telling her own stories. KURANG MANIS (SUGAR, LESS) is a 60-minute documentary in development that explores the lives of six ordinary Malaysians who bare all about their hopes and dreams about the New Malaysia and what it means to be among the one in two Malaysians who are obese.

Jasmine offers, "Through the film, we introduce the most allegedly obese population in Southeast

Asia to the world and expose why Malaysians are obsessed with their food".

KURANG MANIS was selected as the 2nd Prize Winner of MPA's International Script to Screen Workshop Malaysia 2019 which was co-organised by MPA, FINAS and Wildsnapper TV. Low is on a quest. "This was a great opportunity as, since 2015, everything has pivoted towards wellness; my life, my career and my focus. We call it Mission 2030, where we're working collectively to halve non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension in Malaysia by the year 2030."

The workshop marked a milestone for Low. "I signed up because I wanted to learn more. Next, I was in an intensive one-day workshop with filmmaker of DaHuang Pictures Tan Chui Mui and seven other very accomplished participants. Chui Mui offered great guidance in script and pitch development. Next, I was attending the Australian International Documentary Festival and basked amongst the best factual makers in the Southern hemisphere, networked, pitched and listened to the industry's voice."

Low is in the pre-production stage of the documentary and is currently raising awareness and funds to make the film a reality. "It'll be a legacy project for all of us involved and we are targeting a year-end release. We hope to unravel some very personal stories through the lens." Shooting began in October, 2020. ■

**Below: Jasmine Low** delivers her winning pitch at the workshop.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)



Above: Jasmine Low and Amina Jindani pose for a winners' shot at the Script to Screen workshop Malaysia edition.



Above: Participants and guest speakers at the Script to Screen Workshop Malaysia 2019.

**INES SOTHEA, CAMBODIA**

Winner of Tropfest South East Asia in 2014, Cambodian filmmaker Ines Sothea was also invited to participate in that year's LA film immersion LATC event sponsored by MPA. *"The workshop was one of the greatest experiences I've had in my journey as a filmmaker. I felt like I was stepping into the film industry. The workshop helped me to see how the industry works and how to raise finance for films."* Since that time Sothea has been a sought-after storyteller within the Cambodian film and television industry, having written, directed and produced a number of works - several shorts, two features, two web series and two TV series. Sothea still harbours the dream of producing the film she pitched in Los Angeles at LATC. *"After all these years, I finally received*

*the funding to make my short film DENEbola. It was selected in a special program funded by iflix - the Asian VOD platform - but COVID-19 put a halt to that as well."*

Dream project aside, there is little to halt this powerhouse storyteller. *"My last feature film VIPLAS/RACHANA won the Best Actor - Female, Best Supporting Actor - Male and Best Cinematography at the Cambodia National Film Awards 2019. It was screened at film festivals in LA, Nanning and Barcelona. Its success was very inspiring and I'm hoping that I will be able to launch my future projects to international funders and showcase them at more international festivals."* Sothea has turned her attention to the past for her new film KHMAO ROUGE. *"It's an experimental film, stylistically inspired by Lars von Triers' DOGVILLE, all happening in a casino at a roulette table, where forty-five years after the Khmer Rouge regime, the lives of a former Khmer Rouge camp commander and a boy in his camp collide once more - this time with the power dynamic flipped."*

Sothea is sanguine about the effects of the pandemic on the industry, but little seems to deter this rising voice of Asian cinema. *"I've also started to write a script for a biopic of Sin Sisamuth, the greatest singing star of Cambodia who was killed by the Khmer Rouge. We are hoping to go into production in 2021."*

[See the teaser for KHMAO ROUGE here.](#) ■



Left: Sothea Ines take top honours at the 2014 Tropfest for her film RICE.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

**CAHYA DAULAY, INDONESIA**

Cahya Daulay is an Indonesian filmmaker with a great passion for animation. At the MPA-sponsored Script to Screen Indonesia Workshop Akatara Pitch Competition in 2019, Daulay and his team from UMN Pictures put forward the impressively scaled EVERWOOD, the tale of a boy named Rafe who is determined to restore a corrupted tree that causes his friends to become deadly ill. The cure itself, though, is the essence of death that brings harm to any who carry it.

The project remains stalled. *"The pandemic is an enormous interruption to many great film projects and we are in a holding pattern as we seek further funding, an incredibly difficult proposition in this present environment."* Daulay found the MPA workshop to be an inspiration. *"It really dawned on me how huge the global film industry really is and stressed the importance of strategy in planning and executing one's project."*

As a lecturer in producing and animation

at the Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, this valuable experience has also continued to trickle down to Daulay's students. *"I'm keen to keep producing, though, so if we can't do a massive project, we'll move onto something contained and achievable."* To that end, Daulay is working on several other projects in pre-production with the team at UMN Pictures. *"We're attending Annecy International Animation Festival in an online capacity with a number of portfolio projects."* One film is the short animation AHASVEROS, a story about the famous Indonesian poet, Chairil Anwar and the other is CANDY MONSTERS, which has been officially selected in the 2020 Zlin Film Festival. *"While I hope there will be a great many more opportunities like the MPA workshop event, our team at UMN Pictures will continue to dedicate itself to producing high quality animations, films, games, and designs which will inspire and echo positive impacts across the world."* ■



**Above:** Cahya Daulay and fellow professionals continue their commitment to supporting the next generation of regional creatives at the 2019 Script to Screen series featuring Jason van Genderen from Treehouse Creative Australia.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### MATTHEW HARDIE, AUSTRALIA

Matthew Hardie was the filmmaker at the helm of 2013's Tropfest Australia winner, BAMBOOZLED. As part of the prize, he was the recipient of the MPA-sponsored film immersion course in LA of that year. *"It was an eye-opening week in Los Angeles. Meetings on the ground showed me the scale of Hollywood, but also inspired me to continue doing projects on my home turf back in Sydney."* Comedy has always been Hardie's forte and since that time he has gone



on to make short films and sketches, one of which - ONE CONNECTION - was aired on ABC iView's FRESH BLOOD and was selected to be shown on THE BEST OF FRESH BLOOD on ABC1. His busy schedule also included the production of a web series HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE. Hardie since went on to study a Graduate Certificate of Screenwriting at the prestigious AFTRS where he wrote his first full length screenplay. *"From there I tried to break into directing TVCs with the help of producer Matt Reeder,"* Hardie enthuses. *"I made a spec TVC called Dad Joke and with the help from Pete Grasse at Mr. Positive+. The TVC went on to be picked up and used by major department store chain Big W for a Father's Day commercial. Pete Grasse entered the TVC into the Ciclope Asia Awards where it went on to win the prize for Best Writing."*

Presently developing scripts and pitches for two different comedy shows, Hardie intends to begin pitching them to networks and streaming services by the end of this year.

[Samples of Matthew Hardie's work can be found here.](#) ■

*Left:* From left to right: **Matt Hardie**, winner of Tropfest 2013, **John Polson**, founder of Tropfest, and **Aaron Tsindos**, actor and co-star of winning film BAMBOOZLED.

### RAJESH KHATRI, NEPAL

Right now, Rajesh Prasad Khatri is ensconced in one of Nepal's most remote villages, a six hour walk to reach a 3G phone signal where he sent the notes for this interview. Stories require telling, though, and to that end he is deep in the research and drafting of his first feature film BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO.

It was only two years ago during 2018's Busan International Film Festival that Khatri premiered his first short film A CURIOUS GIRL and showcased the concept for his second short film, GARLAND OF A SCARECROW at the festival's MPA-AFA Film Workshop. *"It was my first formal learning platform, and it was also the first time I'd ever taken part in this*



*Above:* Rajesh (far right, second row) poses with his batch mates and masterclass presenter **Patrick Hughes** at the 2018 MPA-AFA Film Workshop.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)



kind of competition," Khatri muses. "It certainly helped me in preparing my pitch and gave me the confidence to be able to present my ideas in front of a mass audience."

Not only did the event instil Rajesh with a first-time filmmaker's courage, but it also helped connect him with the three producers that would bring the project into fruition. As a co-production between Nepal, France and Hong Kong, SCARECROW was completed earlier this year now only awaits a suitable release platform.

Khatri continues with enthusiasm, "I consider that Busan pitching opportunity as having been a real blessing and I'm so proud to be able to put the finished film now in front of as many people as possible." ■

**Left: Rajesh** makes his pitch to the judges at the 2018 MPA-AFA Film Workshop.

### LER JIYUAN, SINGAPORE

Prolific filmmaker Ler Jiyuan confesses to having had a more parochial experience of his storytelling prior to his attendance at Singapore Viddsee Juree in 2018. "The MPA-sponsored event opened my eyes to the world. When I think of a project now, I think of how it can go 'further'. For a country with such a small population like Singapore, we need to create quality work that can attract audiences beyond our shores. We need to ensure there can be long-term sustainability for our industry." At the festival, Jiyuan also presented his award-winning short film THE DRUM, fresh from its berth at Clermont-Ferrand in France

There is little down time for this hardworking storyteller. "I am supposed to be directing a drama for a regional network, but it has been

pushed back indefinitely because of COVID-19."

The pandemic has affected many globally in the entertainment industries. Jiyuan chooses instead to see some of the advantages offered by the hiatus. "Instead, I've started working on things I'd put aside for so long because of my hectic work schedule. I've finally gotten around to writing my very first feature film, so we'll see how that goes." His concept has been enthusiastically received but there have been other complications since the event. "I am in discussions with two networks regarding the project and they have given me some notes to work in moving it forward and once this virus has run its course. I'm looking forward to rebooting the project in a fresh capacity."

[Jiyuan's THE DRUM can be seen here.](#) ■



**Right:** The Top 10 finalists of the Viddsee Juree Awards Singapore 2018 including **Ler Jiyuan** (foreground, left) with judges.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### MAKBUL MUBARAK, INDONESIA

Indonesian national Makbul Mubarak is a rare figure in the creative world - critic turned creator. The 2012 Berlinale Talent Campus alum co-founded and writes for Cinema Poetica, an acclaimed collective of film critics, journalists, academics, researchers and activists in Indonesia. Indeed, Mubarak was recognised by Indonesia's Ministry of Education when they hailed him Best Film Critic in 2015. Since that year, he has turned the camera on stories of his own and produced a raft of award-winning short films. At the Busan International Film Festival in 2018, Mubarak won first prize at the

**Above: Makbul Mubarak** engaged in a group discussion during the 2018 MPA-AFA Film Workshop.



MPA-AFA Film Workshop and was awarded a film immersion trip to Los Angeles. *"I chose not to do any pitching while I was in the US, but my time over there was invaluable in understanding how film financing and distribution works on an international scale."* It was the filmmaker's first hands-on involvement in the Hollywood system. Mubarak discovered that certain aspects of Indonesia and the US industries were markedly different. *"For example, something almost non-existent in Indonesia is the concept of representation for directors. That alone was a valuable lesson in navigating the development of a film project."*

The unique international opportunity also presented Mubarak with introductions to a fellow community of storytellers. *"It was productive and inspiring to see not only fellow filmmakers but also journalists, TV producers and even activists whose roles combine to tell the stories that are important to us all."*

Mubarak understands that even during a pandemic, there's no sense in waiting for opportunity. *"It's every storyteller's obligation to create. During the lockdown, I've been directing an online-based talk show from home, so anything's possible if we will it."*

In between the television work, Mubarak has been prepping his first feature film AUTOBIOGRAPHY. *"Beginning work on that has been inspiring and I'm excited to share this film with a live audience as soon as I can."* ■



**Above: Polen Ly** receives top prize at the 2015 Tropfest SEA.

### POLEN LY, CAMBODIA

Polen Ly has been passionate about the documentary format for many years. We caught him on the hop for this interview on his way to disappearing into the jungles of his native Cambodia. *"Right at this moment, I'm working on my new feature documentary project*

*THE TONGUE OF WATER* and a new short film *FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY*, both of which revolve around the natural world, modernisation and its nexus with contemporary Cambodian society."

In 2015, Ly put himself on the map as winner of Tropfest South East Asia with his film COLOURFUL KNOTS and in 2018

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

he was invited to participate in the Asian Film Academy's MPA-sponsored pitching workshops during the Busan International Film Festival. The workshop gave Ly a glimpse into the Hollywood film production system. *"Even though, my aim is to make more independent films, the workshop gave me some useful ideas on pre-production and how to prepare for the rigours of production on my first feature film."*

Ly noted the importance of the pitching session of the festival in building confidence and precision in communicating his concepts to investors and producers. *"As filmmakers, I believe that sometimes we lack confidence*

*in presenting our ideas to others, but once we present it in a forum like this, it can really bring the idea to life."*

While Ly hasn't continued with his pitch project as yet, he looks forward to getting the work out into the world when the time is right. Today he is busy utilising his new-found skills in developing and crafting the best outcome for the films right ahead of him. *"It's been a great lesson. In presenting ideas and concepts to fellow filmmakers and learning to take good counsel, it's really allowed clarity to shape my stories - no matter whether they're shorts or feature films."* ■



**Above:** 2017 Tropfest NZ winners **Mary Rinaldi** (second from left) and **Sasha Nixon** with MPA representatives.

### MARY RINALDI, NEW ZEALAND

Tropfest New Zealand 2017 winner for THE ANNIVERSARY, Mary Rinaldi and fellow storyteller Adam Harvey both attended the MPA-sponsored LATC workshop in November 2017. A couple of years later they joined forces to make a clever and insidious horror short MINIMALLY INVASIVE as a pre-cursor to Adam's full-length feature film, which is still in the script development phase. *"We are nearing completion of post-production on the short but we're having to rework our festival strategy because of the pandemic."*

As to ANAHERA - the pitch project that Rinaldi took to LA, along with her husband and creative partner, Sash Rinaldi - work has been put on hold due to the birth of their son in 2018. New family members haven't halted Sash working on the story whenever inspiration strikes. Mary offers, *"He has been continuing to work on the concept since the*

*pitching workshop but we're not there yet."* Rinaldi is confident that the workshop itself was instructive to their process. *"It really taught us the value of sharpening the direction of the film and refining our thinking about the kind of story it is. It also reinvigorated my desire to work on low budget, local projects to help them succeed."*

Clarity takes time though, so while Sash fine-tunes, Mary Rinaldi is using her experience to shepherd the production process for a new filmmaker. *"I have also recently signed on as an Executive Producer on a micro-budget short drama film for a local, emerging writer-director. It's kept me busy applying for local creative funding initiatives and overseeing the production process to date."*

Rinaldi is excited to be able to present her developing works to audiences once more. *"For now, we keep working, but I can't wait to sit in screenings again with live audiences."* ■

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### NIRATTISAI RATPHITHAK, THAILAND

Filmmaker Nirattisai Ratphithak attended the MPA-sponsored Thailand Script to Screen Workshop in 2019, where his pitch for THE LIAR became top pick of the judges. Ratphithak credits the event for building his confidence in translating ideas across to an audience. *"Before the workshop, I lacked a depth in my pitching and a comprehensive*

*Below:* Filmmaker Nirattisai Ratphithak on set.



*understanding of the industry."* Spending a few days with industry professionals proved a boon to the Thai filmmaker. *"It improved how I project my message while maintaining the interest of a creative accepting a pitch."*

Although the workshop was also powerful opportunity to network with other filmmakers, it hasn't yet translated in the production of Ratphithak's pitch project. *"I'm hoping that a producer will pick it up soon, but I don't think that the project will be shot this year as COVID-19 is still playing havoc with our industry."*

Virus or no, Ratphithak remains a creator in demand. *"Surprisingly, the pandemic is keeping me busy. I'm working on multiple writing projects which include novels, TV series and a feature film. There is also an upcoming TV series that I am writing - MANNER OF DEATH - a romance-thriller about a doctor who performs autopsies and discovers suspicious details in the bodies. I'm excited that this TV show is due to be broadcast later in 2020."*

Ratphithak is hopeful that the MPA Script to Screen workshop continues to inspire other filmmakers *"I hope that the next group of storytellers will get the same opportunity and find the experience as transformational as I did."* ■

### AMINA JINDANI, MALAYSIA

British national Amina Jindani has lived in Malaysia for the past twenty-nine years and is seeking to incorporate a mixed media approach to her new film. SILAP MATA (MAGIC TRICK) is the story of a young actress

embarking on her first role as the lead in a low budget film, and she learns, to her horror, that movie magic is more real than she imagined.

*"The challenge is two-fold. Not only must this project engage an audience in a slightly different film form - with live action and animation - but producers I've spoken to are demanding that the film play to audiences in both Malaysia and internationally."* Audience focus is a constant juggle for any filmmaker working outside the Hollywood system. *"The international market and the local market are looking for different aspects in their cinema: different themes and storylines. I want to see myself as a bridge between what might appear to be contrary in taste and style. It's a matter of aiming at both markets strategically and with accuracy."*

Jindani presented the pitch for SILAP MATA at the Malaysia Script to Screen Workshop in 2019 and was awarded a trip to Hollywood and an LA film immersion course. It was a valuable opportunity to mingle with and learn from Hollywood-based script executives. *"I learned a lot about how the different marketing strategies worked - what excites Hollywood producers and where the industry is heading in the future. So much has opened up in the past few years and it was eye-opening to see the different potential across various platforms. The data being compiled is proving that old marketing strategies are outdated, and*



*Above:* Amina Jindani speaking at the Malaysia Script to Screen Workshop in 2019

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

nobody has all the answers anymore. The industry is certainly shifting, and we are all kept on our toes now as we navigate new pathways.”

As Jindani waits for the industry to catch up with her, she’s busy polishing SILAP MATA for production and redrafting her next project HIKAYAT 365. “As I’m the main scriptwriter for both,

I see it’s best to have a second script ready to go as it seems to make a filmmaker more marketable. Luckily, writing is a passion of mine and I really enjoy the whole process. It’s all about getting my ducks in a row ready for an impactful launch and a strong follow up.” ■



Above: Chinese filmmaker Zheng Ye

### ZHENG YE, CHINA

In 2014, Chinese filmmaker Zheng Ye won the Beijing MPA’s Film Workshop pitching competition with his film concept for MOMO. “A film company bought the script for it five or so years ago and promised they’d produce it, but it never got off the ground. Things never go as smoothly as you expect.” Undeterred, Ye has since moved onto a low budget film set during the introduction of China’s One Child Policy in 1980. “COUNTING 123 is a story about the last sibling in a family fighting for their right to own a pet and is currently in post-production.”

Ye is grateful that the MPA experience benefited his growth from writer to director. “Prior to the workshop, I was well known as a scriptwriter. This opportunity saw my ability recognised by the wider industry and has encouraged me to take my storytelling to a whole new level.” ■



Above: Zhang Chi (second from right) clinches the top prize at the 2017 MPA-BFM Film Workshop.

### ZHANG CHI, CHINA

Filmmaker Zhang Chi is deep at work on her new feature film CASTLE IN THE AIR which is based on the true story of a migrant worker family. Chi offers, “the main character Qiao Qiao is forced to leave for the city for work and takes with her her son and disabled daughter. After a series of challenges, she decides home to return home for the sake of her family’s happiness.”

Chi’s pitch for her film COSPLAY won the 2017 MPA-BFM Film Workshop in Beijing. She is presently re-drafting the screenplay into a shape that satisfies not only her own passion as a storyteller but also those likely to get behind its production and distribution. Chi is accepting that the filmmaking process is never streamlined. “The filmmaking workshop made me realise that telling a good story and being capable of shooting that same story are indispensable in filmmaking. Attending the pitch contest gave me a chance to hear different voices and opinions over a short period of time and this was vital in encouraging me to continue to improve my project step by step.” ■

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### ZHANG HANSHENG, CHINA

Chinese national Zhang Hansheng has turned to crime as inspiration for his latest work BLOOD PHOBIA. "A police officer related the story to me, and it sprang from there. It's about an HIV-positive criminal who robs his victims by threatening them with a blood-filled syringe." Hansheng was keen to put a more emotional tangent to his crime story. "Then the criminal meets a schoolboy from a broken family who is incessantly bullied and together they concoct a plan to stave off the boy's oppressors using the infected blood."

The real-world pandemic has caused its own drama to Hansheng and his creative output. "The very project I pitched at MPA - FOREST OF TUMOR - didn't get off the ground. Our principal

investor withdrew his money at a critical time and the project just stopped. Right now, I'm getting in touch with other investors to raise the money."

As much as filmmaking is about lining up the finance, a further important part of the process is strategies and partnerships. "I'd been working as a scriptwriter before attending the pitch contest and so hadn't had the opportunity to work on-set. Winning the MPA workshop got me in front of director Su Zhaobin who has since offered me a chance to work on his projects with him." Hansheng is confident that experiences on sets like those of the acclaimed Zhaobin this will assist in laying the foundations for him shooting his own films in the future. ■



Above: Zhang Hansheng



Above: Zhang Hansheng was awarded the runner-up prize at the 2017 MPA-BFM Film Workshop, which has since opened doors for his career.

### MAO ZEXIANG, CHINA

Beijing filmmaker Mao Zexiang is passionate about international perspectives in storytelling. After winning the MPA Workshop

Beijing in 2018, Zexiang was offered a glimpse into the US production process. "It really gave me an opportunity to get to know the industry over there." He was most impressed by the ideas of diversity and inclusion in that market and it has challenged him to be more open in his own filmmaking. "It convinced me that cinema can encourage people from different countries to communicate beyond their geographical barriers."

Zexiang's pitch project WILDER has met its own challenges. "I've been raising money for the shoot but much of the action has stopped due to the effects of the pandemic. I have a great team ready to go and we're all very enthused to get shooting and get a really compelling film in the can." ■



Left: Filmmakers and judges join the closing ceremony for the MPA-BFM Film Workshop, including Writer/ Director Mao Zexiang, who screened WILDER

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### YIN MENGYU, CHINA

Shanghai director Yin Mengyu won the MPA-ICCI Film and TV Workshop Shanghai in 2018. Prior to taking home the prize for top pitch, Mengyu admits to filmmaking having been little more than a hobby. *"I never really believed that I could have made it into the industry before that, so the win was extremely encouraging and now I'm determined to be a professional filmmaker."* To that end, Mengyu has thrown himself even deeper into his

art. *"I'm presently raising money for my winning pitch, the revenge story SCAVENGERS and a new drama I'm calling FUTURE. The first tells the tale of a female ex-special forces soldier who tackles an insidious division of the Dark Web in order to seek justice for her brother."* The other project - FUTURE - focuses on the last few months of a man with advanced cancer. *"It's a family drama where a dying man gets to connect with a daughter whom he's never met."* ■



Above: Yin Mengyu



Above: Yin Mengyu bags top honours at the 2018 MPA-ICCI Film and TV Workshop

### SONG LINGUO, CHINA

Song Linguo was crowned winner of MPA's Beijing workshop in 2019. Since then, he has been busy turning his pitch for WORLD OF TALES into a reality. *"I've been raising money for it, but due to the pandemic, everything has*

*slowed down."* His film tells the story of a cantankerous female teacher who hires a smart, young girl to play her daughter in her retirement, eventuating in a series of humorous and life-affirming adventures. *"Right now, we already have 30% of the budget and we've already made some progress in shooting preparation - the script has been approved internally, location scouting is underway in Shanghai and we are lucky enough to have two of our principal actors signed."*

Linguo is appreciative of the opportunity granted to them by the workshop. *"The MPA experience did wonders for my confidence as a storyteller and it has certainly helped grow my reputation within the filmmaking industry."* ■



Right: Song Linguo worked as assistant director on Jackie Chan's KUNG FU YOGA (2017)

Far right: Song Linguo directing on set.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)



**SUN QISHUN, CHINA**

In 2019, Chinese filmmaker Sun Qishun won the MPA Pitching Workshop's top prize in Shanghai. *"Winning the workshop built up my confidence in this project and it has encouraged our team to work even better together."* The prize for the best pitch was a film immersion course in LA's film capital, Hollywood. *"The week long program broadened my mind and made me realise how the global film market works. It was an unforgettable experience."*

Back home in China, Qishun is working on their MPA award-winning project, LOVE IN A HEARTBEAT. *"It's a romantic comedy based on a fictional scientific theory - a woman who uses an algorithm to find her Mr Right. On her way to making her plan come true, she begins to understand herself and in so doing, finds her true love on the journey."* Qishun has recently finished a first draft of the screenplay. ■

Left: Sun Qishun

**ANUBHAV CHOPRA, INDIA**

MPA workshop award-winner Anubhav Chopra from India has since had a number



of encouraging responses to his pitch project from local studios and production houses. *"Nothing solid has materialised as for the film as yet, but I did manage to procure representation for myself from Tulsea Pictures - one of the best talent agencies in the country."*

The film immersion course was the top prize for pitch winners and Chopra's visit to Hollywood opened doors and introduced him to some of the best film professionals in the business. *"It was an amazing experience to meet filmmakers from around the globe and it gave me a sense of how the process works in different regions. It was a unique opportunity to engage with the finest talent in LA and benefit from their wealth of knowledge and experience."* These intimate interactions broadened his horizons by giving Chopra exposure to the ins and outs of the Hollywood process in all its myriad stages of production. *"The MPA / APSA / LATC team had prepared a fantastic week for us. I met with writers, directors, indie producers, studio execs, lawyers and agents - and of course the opportunity to go to AFM was outstanding."*

The trip has encouraged Chopra to continue his winning streak, most notably picking up a recent contract with a streaming powerhouse. *"Currently, I am directing a crime docu-series for Netflix International with acclaimed filmmaker Leena Yadav. I am also in the process of pitching a couple of my projects to various OTT platforms and production houses in India."* ■

Left: Anubhav Chopra

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)



**ANUSHA RIZVI, INDIA**

Indian filmmaker Anusha Rizvi won a film immersion trip to LA as prize for her winning pitch at the 2017 Launch Your Script contest by MPA and the Screenwriters Association. *"The trip was a great learning opportunity, especially from the point of view of the business and the international reach of cinema. Meeting filmmakers from diverse backgrounds is always an enriching experience."* Although Anusha hasn't yet been able to bring her pitch project THE GREAT SHAMSUDDIN FAMILY to fruition, she hopes to do so soon. Her currently busy schedule includes more content. *"I'm currently working on a fiction series for Hotstar which is based in Asia's largest prison and - in between - I'm writing a new feature film."* ■

Left: Anusha Rizvi

**EMI SAITO, JAPAN**

In 2018, Emi Saito participated in MPA/DHU/TIFCOM's Film Workshop & Pitching Seminar and was awarded the President's Special Recognition Prize for her feature film pitch BIRTH CRY. As winner, she was invited to the



Right: Emi Saito

Asia Pacific Screen Awards held in Brisbane in 2019. *"They were wonderful days at APSA. I interacted with filmmakers from various countries and was stimulated by their works and passion to create film. The experience was a treasure."* APSA even encouraged Saito into re-writes of her work. *"I've presented the new draft of BIRTH CRY to producers who have since offered their interest."* Saito's film is based on the true story of the switching of fertilised eggs that occurred in Japan. *"I planned this project to challenge people with concepts of the value of families as they face greater internal diversity. I hope to get the film produced and in front of as many audiences as possible."*

Saito has recently completed a new short film, ONE NIGHT, TWO THREADS. The film has been nominated in various foreign film festivals and scheduled to screen in Japan shortly. *"I am excited to show this new work right now and I'm open to offers for more screenings."* ■

Right: A still from Emi Saito's short film ONE NIGHT, TWO THREADS



## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

### DAISUKE YAMAOKA, JAPAN

In 2016, Daisuke Yamaoka joined the 4th MPA (Motion Picture Association)-DHU (Digital Hollywood University) Film Workshop and Pitching Contest and won first prize for his pitch of HELLO BABY!. He won a comprehensive five-day film immersion program held in Hollywood in 2017. *"It was exciting to get acquainted with independent filmmakers from around world and to know that all of them are intensely working to make their films."* Yamaoka concedes that filmmaking is never an easy career choice, but he was

encouraged that there were many others following the same dream.

While Yamaoka is currently seeking a production company with whom to partner in order to produce the full-length version of HELLO BABY!, he is also writing a new screenplay for a horror/suspense feature set in Japan. Interested parties can contact Yamaoka at [mountain\\_cross\\_staff@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:mountain_cross_staff@yahoo.co.jp) and find the trailer for his pitch project in the link below <https://youtu.be/jICBbeWM7PM>. ■



Above: Daisuke Yamaoka was awarded first place for HELLO BABY! and won a comprehensive five-day film immersion program in Hollywood.



### KANON MURAKAMI, JAPAN

Japanese screenwriter Kanon Murakami attended the 4th MPA-DHU Film Workshop and Pitching Competition with her pitch for MINATO (THE PORT) and won the President's Special Recognition Prize. For her efforts, she was invited to the Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSAs) in Brisbane, Australia in 2016. *"Being at the awards, I built so much self-confidence and it encouraged me to continue to turn my screenplay into a reality."*

Presently, Murakami is involved in several other films as script-writer. One of her recent achievements, SHRED (<http://shredmovie.com>), has already won several short film festival awards like Around International

Left: Kanon Murakami gives a short thank you speech after receiving the runner-up prize at the MPA-DHU Film Workshop 2015.

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? (cont'd)

Film Festival in Paris and Capital Filmmakers Festival in Berlin. She has also written the feature script for AIGA, SOIDE, KOI (<https://youtu.be/cbulgpog4ss>) which screened in 2018. Next on Murakami's slate is STORY OF

HACHI AND PALMA, a Japanese/Russian co-production due to be released across both countries in 2021 and 2020, respectively. ■



Above: Chang-hun Kim

### CHANG-HUN KIM, KOREA

Chang-hun Kim's experience at MPA's film workshop in Busan in 2014 was the Korean national's first contact with the global filmmaking community. The experience served as a stepping-stone for him and he

has since become a commercial film director. His workshop pitch project is nearing completion as a final draft screenplay and Kim is grateful that there have been no setbacks due to the pandemic. ■



Above: Eun-Sang Lee

### EUN-SANG LEE, KOREA

For Korean director Eun-Sang Lee, winning the MPA Workshop in Busan in 2015 was one of the most exciting things to have happened in his film career. *"Filmmaking is not always about winning and having honours. As a matter of fact, it's the opposite. So, experiencing the excitement of the MPA workshop was truly amazing. More importantly, it gave me a constant reminder that I can make movies that count."*

Lee has not yet produced the film he pitched at the Busan workshop, but he has since directed and released his first feature THE THRESHOLD OF DEATH in November 2019. *"It's a serious drama about empathising with the lives of North Korean defectors and the film was supported by KOFIC's independent film subsidy."*

Lee is currently working on the script for his next commercial thriller slated for production in early 2020. The trailer for THE THRESHOLD OF DEATH is [available here](#). ■

## ACADEMY FILMMAKERS DELIVER ON DIVERSE STORYTELLING FOR THE SCREEN



Above: Daniar Alshinov in A DARK, DARK MAN

Over the past decade, some of the members of the Asia Pacific Screen Academy have benefited from receiving grants from the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund. We asked the Chair of the Fund, Andrew Pike, to provide us with a status update on some of the recent projects and the legacy that the Fund is helping to create in the Asia Pacific region.

For 10 years now, the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund, a joint venture of the Motion Picture Association and the Asia Pacific Screen Academy, has given 40 grants of \$25K (USD) each, to filmmakers in Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, Russia, Turkey, China, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Bangladesh, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Australia and New Zealand.

Recipients of the grants include an Oscar-winner from Iran (A SEPARATION) and films that have won top-tier awards at Cannes, Berlin, Toronto and other Festivals, as well as prizes in the APSA Awards. Another of the Fund's proudest selections is NO BURQAS BEHIND BARS, a feature-length documentary by Maryam Ebrahimi, a female Iranian filmmaker resident in Sweden, and her male collaborator, Nima Sarvestani, shot inside a women's prison in Afghanistan. Despite the risk and challenges of its production, this quietly impassioned observational film went on to win an International Emmy for Best Documentary, and the Prix Europa for Best European TV Documentary.

Around 50% of grants have gone to films that have now been completed or are in active production: a very high strike rate for any development fund, anywhere.

While the Fund has major industry backing through the MPA, it differs from most development funds world-wide in the deliberate decision not to consider marketing plans, finance plans or distributor attachments. The focus of the Fund is resolutely on ideas, concept, originality, boldness, craft skills and

creative potential. Once a year, a constantly changing panel of three people drawn from film festivals, producers, directors, distributors and academia around the Asia-Pacific area, convenes to allocate the grants. The criteria are deliberately broad and give each year's panel optimum flexibility in selecting projects that promote the exchange of ideas and experiences and facilitate creative empowerment and diversity.

At the same time, films triggered by grants from the Fund automatically gain a stature that can significantly enhance their potential to attract financial investment, whether from government agencies or commercial entities. As a by-product, the Fund thus creates business opportunities by giving hand-picked films a strong international endorsement.

To take some randomly selected examples of films that are still works in progress but moving steadily towards production readiness with the aid of their MPA APSA grant:

**NENE:** this feature project from Georgia, links an exciting new talent, Mariam Khatchvani, with one of Georgia's most successful independent producers, Vladimer Katcharava, following their award-winning collaboration on DEDE, Mariam's award-winning first feature. NENE, a Kafkaesque and disturbing story of uncontrolled police corruption, is destined to be a distinctive work with strong potential for festivals and art house cinemas world-wide.

**WORSHIP:** an idiosyncratic feature-length documentary by award-winning director Uruphong Raksasad about aspects of religious culture in Thailand, revealed through a man's search for a miracle cure for his dying wife – again, a distinctive project with excellent potential for festivals, art cinemas and university markets world-wide.

## ACADEMY FILMMAKERS DELIVER ON DIVERSE STORYTELLING FOR THE SCREEN (cont'd)

**SWEET LIPS:** a quirky, inventive film from Samoan writer-director Tusi Tamasese melding the experiences of a German film director in Samoa in the 1920s with a young Samoan woman's involvement in her country's struggle for independence.

**I, THE SONG:** a compelling drama about identity theft in a reckless digital age, to be written, directed and produced by a team of female filmmakers in Bhutan.

MPA APSA grants often represent "first money in", and help selected projects over that most difficult of hurdles - achieving the credibility that initial funding can give. The advantages of a grant from the Fund are not only financial: just as important as money is recognition and endorsement from outside a filmmaker's own country, especially when it comes with networking possibilities with peers in other countries through membership of the APSA Academy.

An excellent example of the Fund's power above and beyond its financial value, is **A DARK, DARK MAN**, a project from Kazakhstan, a country with a long history of film production but very little of seen internationally. The film went into production soon after the grant was received. The end result is a sardonic but sometimes playful story of governmental corruption and police brutality in a provincial Kazakhi township. The film gained great power from its austere directorial style, its bare rural landscapes, and its narrative that became increasingly confronting as the film progressed. A clever and intriguing concept had evolved into a masterwork that revealed a director, Adil Khan Yerzhanov, hitting stride with supreme self-confidence. The film was nominated for Best Film at San Sebastian, and won Best Director at the 2019 Asia Pacific Screen Awards before COVID-19 interrupted its Festival run and international release. Producer of **A DARK, DARK MAN** Olga Khasheva recently

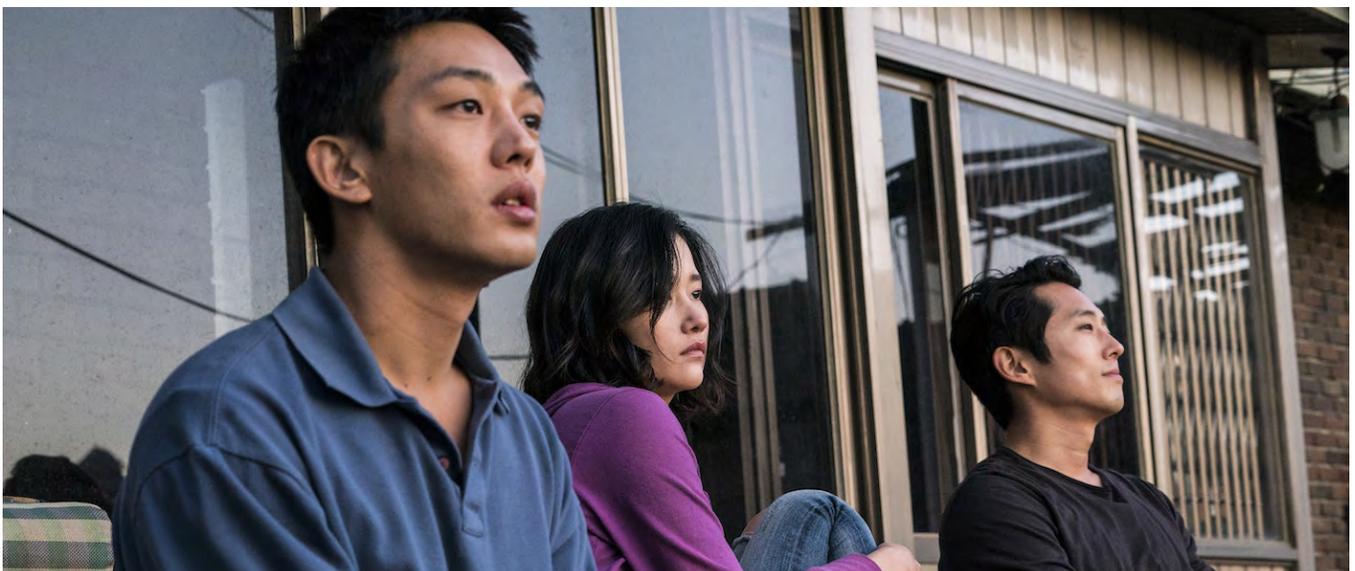
said that receiving the film fund and then the Best Director Award inspired the team to make new a film in **YELLOW CAT** which was announced in the 2020 Venice line-up.

**A DARK, DARK MAN** put the MPA APSA Academy Fund front and centre in enabling the production of a masterwork by a unique directorial talent, from a region that is rarely represented in international platforms. As is often the case for Fund recipients, the film positioned both the MPA and APSA in a public role as facilitators of cutting-edge creative work. Were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic, we would all have heard a lot more about this remarkable film and its director.

**BURNING** was another remarkable success story from the Fund. This contemporary drama about alienated youth was adapted with haunting elements of surrealism from a novel by celebrated Japanese author Murakami Haruki. The film won numerous international awards including the FIPRESCI prize at Cannes, Best Foreign Language film from the Toronto Film Critics' Association, and the Grand Jury Prize at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards.

Once again, with **BURNING**, the MPA and APSA were key participants in the evolution of a remarkable work that attracted significant attention globally, and which is set to stand as an enduring landmark in South Korean cinema.

With all of these films, whether completed or in pre-production, the grant demonstrably carries the potential to magnify exponentially, especially when audiences become involved. These films tend not to be ephemeral, tend not to date easily: they are conceived by committed creative talents, and their films have the power to endure and to attract and stimulate new audiences with each new generation. ■



Above: Ah-In Yoo, Jong-seo Jun, and Steven Yeun in **BURNING** which won the Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) Jury Grand Prize in 2018



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