

Film Festival in New York. Li Lin's progression between making shorts to feature films, leaves her as one of Singapore's most watched-out for directors. In December 2010, *Forever*, Li Lin's second feature film was the first Singaporean film to receive a double world premiere, screening at both the Jakarta and Cairo international film festivals on the same date. It was funded by the MDA's first feature film fund and Iceberg design.

Not wanting to wax lyrical about her successes, Li Lin feels that as a filmmaker, she simply wants more people to watch her films and communicate her characters and stories. She said effusively, "My films are quite esoteric and yet they are not art house films. Again, I am standing in the middle ground! But I do not like to be categorised as a commercial or art house director. As long as I feel that I am making work that is of a personal standard and that the character(s) and story offers something fresh from what else is out there, I am happy with whatever happens."

Li Lin defines her films best as quirky and simple narrative films with a dreamy tone. The *mise-en-scene* is very important to her as a filmmaker, as in what goes into each frame of the film such as the cast, the cinematography, the production design and the wardrobe." Describing herself as a big time dreamer who likes to think outside the box, she wants people to just have a fun and surprising time when they watch her films and to be visually stimulated by them.

Grateful for the many guiding individuals along the way, Li Lin gushes about one very special but unexpected mentor on her journey, "I had always wanted good mentors. I would never have expected that one them would actually be Oliver Stone, the multiple Academy Award-winning director and writer. At Tisch Asia, there was to be a special session with him and he was to critic student scripts. So selected scripts were *Singapore Cowboy*, which was mine and another, a lovely script written by my classmate. I was terrified because I heard that Oliver made students cry.



Li Lin with Hollywood director Oliver Stone (third from left) and teachers and classmates from Tisch Asia.

"If you have an idea, do not box yourself in. Write it, photograph it, draw it, play music about it, surround yourself with whatever visuals and methods that will help you get closer to the character and the story and stay true to it."

He really is a no-holds barred person who did not mince his words and was not afraid to be brutally honest."

The climax of her Tisch Asia journey was this jaw-dropping moment when Oliver Stone remarked that Li Lin's script had a lot of class and observed, "This is the best script I have read in my four years as artistic director at TISCH School of the Arts". Carrying that as a point of inspiration in her filmmaking journey, Li Lin is critical about how females are seen as film directors within the international film industry. Li Lin shared that in Singapore, there are many female directors doing well, such as Kat Goh, Tan Pin Pin, Sun Koh, Yan Yan Chan and Michelle Chong.

She explained, "In the West, it is still very male-dominated in the film industry and there should be every reason that females should be seen as worthy directors. I believe the sky is the limit for female directors and I would like to see many more out there."

Li Lin also teaches at La Salle College and Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Li Lin shared how her teachers and mentors has inspired her and helped

her immensely. Speaking about her own teaching experience, "I never thought I would be a good teacher. I did not have the best experience studying in Singapore. However, after finishing my Master's, there were some opportunities to teach and I wanted to share what I have learnt from some of my greatest mentors at Tisch Asia." With a gleeful laugh, she said that it was extremely satisfying to see her students faring well and responding to her teaching methods, which she admits that sometimes are as quirky as her films. Truly enjoying being with her students, she feels that she has much to learn from them as well.

Wrapping up the chat by encouraging wannabe filmmakers of today, Li Lin suggested to never limit one's form of creative expression. With the sunniest smile on her face, she happily said, "If you have an idea, do not box yourself in. Write it, photograph it, draw it, play music about it, surround yourself with whatever visuals and methods that will help you get closer to the character and the story and stay true to it." ■

Endlessly Emerging

Photo: Akiro Koga

Insisting she still has much work to be done as a filmmaker, Li Lin explained why she is often deemed still 'emerging'. Casual and relaxed, Li Lin took an afternoon off her busy schedule, comfortably sitting beside a sunlit window to share her colourful personal and professional life story.

She remarked, "I'm pushing 40 but still a work in process. I do not know if that's good or bad, but I'm glad not to be at my peak yet. I am enjoying the journey and am learning. To be honest, I feel that I am the middle of the pack,

It is not hard to like this girl-next-door, who remains dreamy yet down-to-earth amidst her many achievements as one of the rare few, local female film and television directors today. *The Graduate* got to know **Li Lin** better as she charted her journey of constant emergence as a filmmaker and beyond.

Sometimes, I am a bit more at top, sometimes a bit more at the bottom but I am moving and making work. So I am grateful and happy about that.

A graduate from Brown University (Class of '96), Rhode Island, USA with a Bachelor in Arts (Semiotics), Li Lin won her first award at 23 years old and subsequently more followed. Recently, she graduated with another degree, an MFA in Dramatic Writing at Tisch Asia, she did so on a Media Development Authority (MDA) scholarship.

Having gone back to school after she finished her successful first film, *Gone Shopping*, she found herself exhausted from working on it but nonetheless she quipped, "I think my first film is still one of my best pieces of work. There is a part of me floating inside and I will never get it back - and that makes me really proud." The film travelled to several festivals and even had Variety praising it as "Elegantly shot with a fairytale like atmosphere ... this is something small but fresh from Singapore's tiny film industry."

Gone Shopping starred local acting veterans, Adrian Pang and Kym Ng and travelled to several prominent festivals and it

was even nominated for the Asian New Talent Award at the Shanghai International Film Festival, the Emerging Director in Narrative Feature Award at the Asian American International Film Festival and the Halekulani Golden Orchid Award at the Hawaii International Film Festival.

Li Lin's success also arrived in the form of her short film, *Autograph Book*, which became the first Singapore film selected for the prestigious 2005 Tribeca International



From top: Poster for Li Lin's first film *Gone Shopping*; With Sonia Nair on the set of the film.