FOREWORD
Hello friends! Welcome to Singapore Shorts ‘22.

After more than two-and-a-half years of pandemic restrictions, the Asian Film Archive (AFA) is presenting a Singapore Shorts ’22 edition in a full seating capacity theatre throughout August 2022. 27 films in four official selections will be featured and in-person post-screening Q&A sessions with the filmmakers will be held. Two special programmes showcasing 13 films have been curated and analytic essays on the various screened films will be published.

AFA’s aim in organising Singapore Shorts is to showcase the short films made and to generate conversations about them. This 2022 edition presents a selection that reflects a diverse array of visions of the present and the future.

The special programmes this year are notable as they speak to an integral part of AFA’s work. To enable the screenings, the selection of 1980s videos had to be digitised while the collection of Rajendra Gour’s short films from the 1960s-70s were restored over a span of several years. Digitisation and restoration are two of the processes that AFA embarks upon to make older titles accessible and available for new audiences to gain insight into our history.

I would like to thank all the filmmakers who participated in the open call. Much thanks to the members of the selection panel and to all who have contributed to the programme.

May these new and older short films bring you much inspiration and enjoyment!

Karen Chan
Executive Director
For Singapore Shorts ‘22, 167 films were reviewed to yield 27 distinctive and eclectic titles in this year’s line-up. The selection process was guided by adopting the spirit of experimentation and inclusivity, celebrating the diversity, originality and creativity of Singaporean films in 2021 and the earlier half of 2022. Particular attention was paid to representing emerging voices, including student and non-professional filmmakers, smaller scale productions and ground-up methods of storytelling.

The films reflect a broad range of sensibilities and lived experiences, yet share thematic alignments related to personal and collective histories, inter-generational trauma, temporal speculations of the past and future, and negotiations of identity. In terms of form and style, the experimental comes to the fore with a playful and irreverent treatment of genre and media references—from karaoke videos, 90s slacker comedies and colonial archives to popular cartoons, national education songs and smartphone footage—repurposed to critical, humorous and even melancholic effect.

This layered quality is expressed with a range of films that expose obscured or overlooked historical narratives both personal and collective. The colonial history of the Singapore Botanic Gardens is excavated in ila’s TAMAN HUTAN Chapter.
Laced with a dose of absurdity and mischief, works disentangling asymmetrical power relations are varied in context and stylistics. Mohammad Iqbal Rohan Tutuko’s *Baked Beans*, a teen stoner comedy about how two friends selling baked beans become embroiled in the world of corporate greed has a 90s punk sensibility. The trope of the Malay Boy in the artworks of Cheong Soo Pieng is unpacked in Zulkhairi Zulkiflee’s *Proximities* through a subversive re-appropriation of the didactic tone in Western art history. Kitsch and camp emerge from two films probing social mobility in vastly different ways—Khairullah Rahim’s *Buah Dahsyat* presents the contradictions of community life in the working class neighbourhood of Boon Lay through popular cartoon and phone footage, while Eryka Fontanilla and Yang Sheng Xiong’s *Everybody Wins the Lottery* undercuts the sobriety of a family’s dashed neoliberal fantasies with a frothy karaoke sequence.

Contending with in-betweenness and fluidity runs through many films, manifested in a physical representation of a 3D animated nightmarish train journey with Bervyn Chua’s *The Wound Response*, where those erased from official archives are ceded space through an oral historical approach. In Mark Chua and Lam Li Shuen’s *A Man Trembles*, the gothic history of Sentosa Island, historically named *Pulau Blakang Mati* (the island behind which lies death) sets the stage for a family’s rapturous confrontation with mortality and terror in the midst of the Asian Financial Crisis. Besides the spatial dimensions of the past, two quietly revelatory films turn inward: Fiona A. Cheong’s *Aunty CB* reframes generational trauma through an intimate confessional while Leon Cheo’s *Two Is Enough* focuses on an expectant mother’s struggles amidst the population policies of the 1970s.
These 27 films imbue the everyday with a sense of the fantastic and speculative, imagining the past or future in ways that express new possibilities and vulnerabilities. Their forms and tendencies may vary, but together, a sensory and relational understanding of both the inner and outer worlds is conveyed, suggesting a thread of connectivity despite contradictions in our present moment.

The Last Stop, and Ang Qing Sheng’s Traffic Light, a spirited cross-section of society at a road junction. Symbolic of diasporic identity and trans-border relationships include Yuga J Vardhan’s The sea between us contemplating the uncertainty a pair of Malaysian sisters face when the lockdown separates their family, Ye Thu’s Holding Space centring the embodied subjectivities of Burmese immigrants living in HDB public housing, and Tang Kang Sheng’s docu-fictional comedy Back To One of a Singaporean filmmaker’s experiences of dislocation while shooting a film in California. Meanwhile, coming-of-age narratives delve into the liminal with a nod to whimsicality: Bernadette Toh and Sherrie See’s state is a lyrical stylisation of an identity crisis via the desktop interface, Cheryl Wong’s Stigma, Style composes a tender portrait of a girl on the cusp of adolescence and Elsa Wong’s JULIET’S DINNER features a femme character caught between two vivid dreamscapes.
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JULIET'S DINNER 09
Fantastic Fruits 10
Baked Beans 11
New Normal 12
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Aunty CB 15

Total Runtime: 63 MIN
Dreaming

Three former schoolmates—a married couple and a carefree bachelor—now middle-aged, reunite at a chalet. Hazy memories of the past are stirred up, leading to the resurfacing of a long-buried love triangle. The trio are left to confront their repressed feelings.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Nelson Yeo is a Singaporean filmmaker. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Digital Filmmaking from Nanyang Technological University in 2011. His recent short films, *Mary, Mary, So Contrary* (2019) and *Here is Not There* (2019), have been selected for international film festivals such as Kurzfilm Festival Hamburg and Cairo International Film Festival.
**JULIET’S DINNER** is a collaborative experimental film between Elsa Wong and Stephanie Jane Burt featuring the track, “Last Day” by Subsonic Eye, which follows the character Juliet who escapes a dinner party through an encounter with an enigmatic dollhouse. Originally created for video art platform Monzoom.xyz in a 12-part series, the video explores notions of identity, pop culture and translocal histories through karaoke and sci-fi aesthetics.

**DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Elsa Wong is an art director and photographer who works in a range of media, mainly on fashion campaigns, music videos and short films. She explores themes of fairy tales, creating surrealistic environments and characters. She has shot for fashion collective Youths In Balaclava which was featured on i-D and many others.

**YEAR:** 2022  
**DIRECTOR:** Elsa Wong  
**RUNTIME:** 5 min 10 sec  
**COUNTRY:** Singapore  
**LANGUAGE:** English  
**RATING:** PG
Buah Dahsyat (Fantastic Fruits) is a short film capturing the veiled and coded lives of residents in Boon Lay, Singapore through enigmatic fruits acting as multifarious symbols for intersecting themes including everyday rituals, desire, social mobility and labour. Anchored by the voice of drag queen Luna Thicc, the fruits’ behaviour and habits become enmeshed with found footage, smartphone videos and kitsch popular culture imagery.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Khairullah Rahim is an interdisciplinary artist based in Singapore. He works across objects, installation, painting, photography and moving images. His research looks into strategies of resourcefulness for survival in environments under surveillance.

ORIGINAL TITLE: Buah Dahsyat
YEAR: 2022
DIRECTOR: Khairullah Rahim
RUNTIME: 7 min 18 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: Malay
RATING: PG
An homage to 90s coming-of-age slacker comedies such as Richard Linklater’s *Dazed and Confused* and Kevin Smith’s *Clerks*, *Baked Beans* features the weird and wonderful adventures of two spirited and wayward teenagers, Roro and Rayray, as they venture into the tricky world of the baked beans business, and explore its subversive potentials.

**DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Iqbal Rohan is a fresh graduate from ITE filmmaking with a penchant for dialogue-heavy films, favouring whimsicality and the spirit of punk as a form of escapism from the world of depressing politics.

**WORLD PREMIERE**

YEAR: 2022  
DIRECTOR: Mohammad Iqbal Rohan Tutuko  
RUNTIME: 10 min 19 sec  
COUNTRY: Singapore  
LANGUAGE: English, Malay  
RATING: NC16
New Normal

In the summer of 2025 of the ‘new normal era’, where gravity changes are the norm, an unlikely bond forms between a film nerd and a dancer as they contend with strange gravity powers. Shot entirely in a vertical frame, *New Normal* is a dystopian look at Singapore through a sci-fi fantasy lens.

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<td><strong>Heo Chul</strong> is a filmmaker teaching at the School of Art, Design and Media in Nanyang Technological University. Chul has directed three feature films that were released in theatres nationwide in South Korea.</td>
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In Pursuit of Temples in the Sky introduces a fictional landscape in which the worlds of Sikhism and Queerness collide. Conceived as a fashion film where textures and textiles take the foreground, narratives are constructed by examining and dismantling the bodies of work of two poets, Avtaar Singh Paash and Richard Siken.
Strawberry Cheesecake

Confronted by an authoritative principal armed with school rules, three rebellious students take respite on the rooftop of their campus to smoke electronic cigarettes. When caught and threatened with expulsion, their revenge prank on the principal takes a sinister turn.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Tan Siyou is a Singaporean filmmaker based in Los Angeles. Her films have been shown at film festivals worldwide, including Berlin, Locarno and Toronto. She’s working on her first feature, Amoeba.
Aunty CB

Shot on Super 8, Aunty CB is a memory montage of a woman’s stream of consciousness and her honest introspection surrounding gendered family dynamics and childhood trauma. Framed as a confessional monologue, Singlish, Hokkien, and English are employed to capture a linguistic and vernacular portrait of the eponymous character.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY
Fiona A. Cheong is a Singaporean educator. She explores and expresses themes on childhood, trauma, and language through writing and film. Her written monologue as an art book, Aunty CB, was published in 2021 with Knuckles & Notch.

WORLD PREMIERE
YEAR: 2021
DIRECTOR: Fiona A. Cheong
RUNTIME: 4 min 28 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English, Hokkien
RATING: M18
OFFICIAL SELECTION 02

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A Short Walk 18
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Holding Space 20
state. 21
Traffic Light 22
Back To One 23
The sea between us 24
The Last Stop 25

Total Runtime: 71 MIN
On a quiet February morning in 1942, weeks after the Japanese occupied Singapore, a young Chinese boy accompanies his father on a walk from their home to a mass screening centre. Along with a sombre score, the animated film is a melancholic reflection on the systemic purge of local Chinese by the Japanese military known as Sook Ching and meditates on the historical trauma.

**DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Ervin Han is an animation producer and director. He has worked on multiple shorts films and production series for clients like Disney, Cartoon Network and MTV. He is the co-founder of local animation studio, Robot Playground Media.
Last Call

Nadia, in her 40s, is a new airport ground staff. In her first week on the job, she must deal with a stubborn elderly passenger who arrives late for check-in and insists on being boarded to attend his daughter’s wedding.
Holding Space explores the lived experiences of Burmese immigrants in Singapore under the gaze of neighbours in public flats. With a focus on spatial arrangements and housing exteriors, the experimental film challenges the ways architects visualise and instrumentalise their ways of seeing, seeking to hold space for subjective experiences and the subtle yet persistent influences on our domestic interiors.

Ye Thu is a Masters of Architecture candidate at the National University of Singapore. His works take an interdisciplinary approach, bridging gaps between objective modes of architectural representation and the subjectivity of his experience as a Burmese immigrant in Singapore.
state. is an exploration of liminal spaces, physical and emotional, from the perspective of a teenager. Unravelling through a desktop screen, the film navigates between different states: physical and digital, reality and whimsicality, and childhood and adulthood.

**DIRECTORS’ BIOGRAPHY**

Sherrie See and Bernadette Toh are Singapore-based filmmakers from NTU’s Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information. Their work explores the intricacies of humanity.

**WORLD PREMIERE**

- **YEAR:** 2022
- **DIRECTORS:** Bernadette Toh, Sherrie See
- **RUNTIME:** 10 min 2 sec
- **COUNTRY:** Singapore
- **LANGUAGE:** English
- **RATING:** PG
Traffic Light

At a busy traffic junction in Singapore, various types of pedestrians register their annoyance when the green man refuses to appear – from the law abiders and impatient jaywalkers, to the government critics and playful children. Brought to life in animation, Traffic Light offers a cross-section of society when daily routines are momentarily interrupted.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Ang Qing Sheng is a lecturer at the Puttnam School of Film & Animation, LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore. He has made independent short films like Lak Boh Ki and Kua Bo.

YEAR: 2021
DIRECTOR: Ang Qing Sheng
RUNTIME: 5 min 52 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English, Mandarin, Hokkien
RATING: M18
Back To One

At the onset of the coronavirus outbreak, Kang Wei struggles to prepare for his graduation film abroad. Blending elements of documentary with fiction, the film is a meditation on filmmaking and the sacrifices made in pursuit of the craft, punctuating deadpan humour with glimpses of hope amidst tumultuous uncertainty.

DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHY

Kang Sheng has directed multiple short films, of which Passenger won the Special Jury and Best Performance at the 6th Singapore Short Film Awards. He recently graduated with an MFA in Directing from UCLA.
The sea between us

When a pandemic forces the lockdown of one of the world’s busiest land crossings between Malaysia and Singapore, two young sisters are taken in and homed by a neighbouring family. As the girls struggle to come to terms with their separation from their family across the sea, they find strength in the unlikeliest of places.
The Last Stop

Rendered in 3D, this post-apocalyptic animation follows the gripping ordeal of a lone commuter trapped in a speeding MRT train, rushing against time to escape before the train crashes.

DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHY

After spending half his life in China, Bervyn has a new appreciation for Singapore’s culture and is craving to make local-themed shorts that appeal globally.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PREMIERE

YEAR: 2021
DIRECTOR: Bervyn Chua
RUNTIME: 2 min 54 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English
RATING: PG
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Total Runtime: 81 MIN
Stigma, Style

Steeped in familiar waves of nostalgia, a coming-of-age story unfolds around 11-year-old Kerri who spends an afternoon by the pool at her friend Jessica’s house and grows increasingly curious about Jessica’s elder sister, Clara.
Everybody Wins the Lottery

Opening with a nostalgic karaoke repertoire, Everybody Wins the Lottery delves into the dynamics of a Singaporean family as they deal with the effects of the father’s retrenchment. To keep her family afloat, the mother resorts to extreme financial measures until they miraculously win the lottery. However, this sliver of hope is soon threatened when the ticket mysteriously disappears.
Framed through delicate compositions, *Yi yi (Time Flows in Strange Ways on Sundays)* is a soft meditation on loss and remembrance. A mother, trapped in the comfort of memory and mourning, confronts her grief when she is invited to the wedding of her late son’s childhood sweetheart.

**DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Giselle Lin explores the bittersweet impermanence of being in her films. Her undergraduate thesis short film *Yi yi (Time Flows in Strange Ways on Sundays)* was screened at Locarno and many other international film festivals.

**ORIGINAL TITLE:** Yi yi  
**YEAR:** 2021  
**DIRECTOR:** Giselle Lin  
**RUNTIME:** 17 min  
**COUNTRY:** Singapore  
**LANGUAGE:** English, Mandarin  
**RATING:** PG
HIS BOTTOM LINE

For the first time in 57 years, Ah Guan walks the streets with his simple sign-board for all to see: ‘HONEST MAN NEED (sic) A WIFE.’ His only requirement? ‘A pretty back.’ A morally complex inquest that dismantles the voyeuristic sensibilities enabled by documentaries, 蒙在股里 (HIS BOTTOM LINE) explores the motivations behind Ah Guan’s strangely specific condition for love and antidote to his loneliness.

DIRECTORS’ BIOGRAPHY

Since graduating from college, Yun Yan has experienced different industries in creative roles that require versatility, akin to a ninja. Loyal to her passion, she will never stop telling stories and collecting funny figurines.

ORIGINAL TITLE: 蒙在股里
YEAR: 2021
DIRECTOR: Chew Yun Yan
RUNTIME: 17 min 2 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English, Mandarin
RATING: PG13
YOU WILL SEE

A young photographer, desperately looking for the perfect moment, falls prey to a supernatural camera. Immortalised in hazy black-and-white photographs, YOU WILL SEE is a gripping horror film suggesting that spirits and shadows are sometimes only a shot away from each other.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Kathleen Bu is a filmmaker drawn to themes of human emotion and fantastical concepts. Her previous film Auntie Oh Lives In Your Memories premiered at Singapore International Film Festival 2021. Her latest short film, YOU WILL SEE, is her first horror film. Mentored by award-winning filmmaker Bradley Liew, it had its world premiere at Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival 2022.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PREMIERE

YEAR: 2022
DIRECTOR: Kathleen Bu
RUNTIME: 15 min 14 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English
RATING: TBC
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Total Runtime: 68 MIN
A Man Trembles

Saddled by the Asian Financial Crisis, a family decides to spend their final day on Earth at Sentosa Island, historically named Pulau Blakang Mati (the island behind which lies death). Set against the island’s layered and gothic history, the family surrender themselves to a mysterious force that promises both salvation and terror.

Mark Chua and Lam Li Shuen are Singaporean filmmakers and artists. Their films have screened at BFI London Film Festival, Tampere Film Festival, FEST - New Directors/New Films and IFFA Macao.

YEAR: 2021
DIRECTORS: Mark Chua, Lam Li Shuen
RUNTIME: 22 min 48 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English, Cantonese
RATING: PG13
TAMAN HUTAN Chapter 4: The Wound Response

*TAMAN HUTAN Chapter 4: The Wound Response* focuses on the rubber craze of the 20th century through both archival documentation of wages and an interview with Cek Anuan on his grandfather Rasimin who worked with English naturalist Henry Nicholas Ridley. Focusing on the Singapore Botanic Gardens as the site of interaction between colonists and labourers, the film reveals the wounds of those erased from colonial records but who remain inscribed within nature itself.

**DIRECTORS’ BIOGRAPHY**

The intimate works of visual and performance artist, ila, incorporate objects, moving images and live performance. She creates pathways into the peripheries of the unspoken, the tacit and the silenced generating discussions about gender, history and identity.

**YEAR:** 2022  
**DIRECTOR:** ila  
**RUNTIME:** 20 min 12 sec  
**COUNTRY:** Singapore  
**LANGUAGE:** English, Malay  
**RATING:** PG
Captured with breathtaking clarity over a period of two years, *SKYLiGHT* is an observational documentation of the urban and natural landscapes of Singapore that evokes a sense of the celestial.

**DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Wee Han is a photographer, filmmaker and a lover of nature. Growing up in a city, he yearns to travel when time allows. His favourite place for several years has been Greenland.

**YEAR:** 2022  
**DIRECTOR:** Yeo Wee Han  
**RUNTIME:** 4 min 57 sec  
**COUNTRY:** Singapore  
**LANGUAGE:** No dialogue  
**RATING:** G
*Proximities* focuses on the trope of the Malay Boy found in the works of Singaporean artist Cheong Soo Pieng (b. 1917-1983). It attempts to locate the Malay male in art history while unpacking underlying systems of power that have shaped and naturalised the understanding of difference.

**Director's Biography**

Zulkhairi Zulkiflee is an artist-curator committed to a practice centred on Malayness and its social ontology. He creates lens-based artworks that see Malayness through the racialised Malay male body and its relation to local and global contexts.

- **Year:** 2021
- **Director:** Zulkhairi Zulkiflee
- **Runtime:** 10 min 13 sec
- **Country:** Singapore
- **Language:** English
- **Rating:** PG
Two Is Enough

In 1970s Singapore when families were pressured and incentivised to have no more than two children, a newly pregnant Teochew mother contemplates keeping her third child despite facing overwhelming financial constraints, social stigma and state disincentives.

Leon Cheo is the creator of the International Emmy®-nominated short form series People Like Us. A second in a trilogy, this film continues his interest in stories of the human consequence and impact of policy.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

YEAR: 2022
DIRECTOR: Leon Cheo
RUNTIME: 16 min 33 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: Teochew, English
RATING: PG

WORLD PREMIERE
Makes This World Live Young Again

Set against a utopian 3D rendering of Singapore, Makes This World Live Young Again is a music video featuring ant mascots in uncanny settings including cruising down the Singapore River on a giant plastic bottle and frolicking in a burning garden. With an infectious soundtrack reminiscent of national education sing-a-longs, the language of a didactic instructional video is enmeshed with universal climate movement aesthetics to hallucinatory effect.

Richard is an educator, song writer and animation producer in Singapore. Since 1990, he has written more than 50 television children drama theme songs and the official Racial Harmony multilingual theme song, entitled “Sing Our Wishes” for the National Day Parade.
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An Introduction
By Sophia Siddique

What you are about to experience is a window onto a vibrant period of grassroots filmmaking that remains at best marginalised and at worst invisible in Singapore film history. Selected from approximately 33 film titles housed in the Lee Kong Chian Reference Collection at the National Library of Singapore, these eight short works represent entries from the 1985, 1986, and 1988 Short Video Competitions co-organised by the Singapore Cine & Video Club (SCVC) and the People’s Association.[1]

The dominant narrative of Singapore film historiography proceeds from the end of the studio era of the Shaw Brothers’ Malay Film Productions (1967) and Cathay-Keris (1972), to a spate of independent filmmaking in the 1970s, to a dearth of filmmaking activity in the 1980s, followed by the revival era of the 1990s. However, by focusing solely on completed feature-length works exhibited and distributed in theatrical spaces, this account erases the prolific period of grassroots filmmaking of the 1980s and denies the beauty and power of the short film’s polymorphous possibilities.

The short film is often seen as a derivative of the feature film. The temporal limits of a short film are vexed by the absence of a standard definition, with some defining a short film as any film under 30 minutes, while others categorising it as under 15 minutes. The AFA’s Singapore Shorts’ 22 showcase centres the short film as an integral component of Singapore cinema. As producer Juan Foo remarked in
2002, a nation’s cinema “starts with shorts” since more short films are produced in Singapore than feature films.[2] This curated program proves the 1980s was an active and generative period of Singapore filmmaking.

As a key player in the grassroots filmmaking sphere of the 1980s, the Singapore Cine Club (SCC), founded in 1961, sought to extend film appreciation and production beyond the confines of SCC membership to the wider Singaporean public. The SCC changed its name to the Singapore Cine & Video Club in 1982 to accommodate an increasing interest in video production.[3] In fact, one in five households owned a VCR, with almost six million blank tapes imported during the first nine months of 1982. By 1984, approximately 500 video cameras and 350 VCRs were sold monthly, ranking Singapore “among the world’s biggest buyers of video recorders.”[4]

In 1983, the SCVC joined forces with the People’s Association (PA) to conduct video workshops and jointly organised an annual video competition. As a state organisation, the PA administered community centers, provided access to recreational facilities and, in the 1980s, offered video production courses as part of its community outreach programming.[5] Participating community centres included Queenstown, Boon Lay, and Marine Parade.

The first annual competition for amateur filmmakers in 1983 carried no thematic restrictions on films for submission. Hagemeyer Electronics, agents for National, Panasonic, and Technics video products donated $25,000 worth of prizes.[6] The categories of competition reflected the grassroots mode of production as “all residents and citizens in Singapore” could compete in the open section while students enrolled in schools, tertiary institutions, and colleges were eligible to enter the student section. The 1984 Singapore Amateur Movie Competition recognised the centrality of students’ creative voices by changing
This curated slate is formally and thematically diverse. For example, *The Garden*, an experimental narrative short, takes you on a mesmerising and sensuous journey of loss, mourning, desire, and innocence. *A Day With Labourers* is a poignant and pointed portrait of the labor force, especially those who toil in the heat and humidity for Singapore’s construction industry, while *Feathered Friends* reframes Singapore from an urban city-state to a space populated by a complex avian

The PA-SCVC workshops and the Singapore Video Competitions fostered the growth of grassroots filmmaking in Singapore and echoed video’s rich potential as a medium for constructing alternative stories of Singapore as a city-nation. These competitions and workshops filled a void since film education was not yet at a critical mass.

There were 56 total entries for the 1985 competition. *Being A Woman* (Jack Neo) and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Ling Li, Viola Kok, Belinda Yap) competed in the amateur section, while *Traveller* (Choo Hoh Yim [Zhu Houren]) and *A Day with Labourers* (Fuziah Taha, Chiang Eng Teck, J. R. Kamble) competed in the open section. The prize sponsorship from Hagemeyer totaled $12,350. The public screening took place at the PUB Auditorium at which Mr. Wong Kan Seng, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, was the guest of honor.⁸ The total entries in 1986 was lower, with 27. 18 competed in the open section including *Stranger Danger* (Lim Swee Lin, Lucy Tay, Nicolette Sage, Emily Lin, Lynn Lee, Gilbert Yap), while *The Garden* (Ong Ann Meng [Meng Ong]) joined 8 other short films in the amateur section.⁹ In 1988, the total entries grew to 52 with 34 competing in the amateur section and 18 in the open section.¹⁰ *Feathered Friends* (Ong Jong Keg and Rexon Ngim) competed in the Open Section and won a $500 Merit Prize and a Special Award for Best Photography ($400).¹¹

This curated slate is formally and thematically diverse. For example, *The Garden*, an experimental narrative short, takes you on a mesmerising and sensuous journey of loss, mourning, desire, and innocence. *A Day With Labourers* is a poignant and pointed portrait of the labor force, especially those who toil in the heat and humidity for Singapore’s construction industry, while *Feathered Friends* reframes Singapore from an urban city-state to a space populated by a complex avian
While these short films have ethnographic and historical value in terms of how they contribute to our understanding of Singapore’s popular culture and its material and built environments of the 1980s, they ask us to reimagine the dominant narrative of Singapore’s film history and invite us to consider the centrality of the short film form in Singapore’s cinesphere.
There were various names for this competition. For example, the Video 88 Awards, the 1984 Amateur Movie Competition, Panasonic Video Awards, and the Singapore Video Competition.


“Singapore Cine & Video Club,” Informational Sheet.

Bertilla Pereira, “Singapore is among the world’s biggest buyers of video recorders,” Sunday Monitor, August 19, 1984.


“Panasonic Video Awards,” Memo, b:entries.pva

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

“Ibid.

In the 4th edition of Singapore Shorts, the Asian Film Archive presents a selection of eight short films digitised from the surviving VHS copies residing at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Collection at the National Library of Singapore. These tapes contained the prize-winning entries from the 1985, 1986 and 1988 editions of the Singapore Video Competition (SVC), a locally organised filmmaking competition.
Traveller

A mockumentary on the phenomenon of Western backpackers travelling in Singapore and Southeast Asia during the 1980s. Featuring real interviews and interweaving staged sequences simulating a travel infomercial, the video offers a light-hearted look at the clash of cultures.

The film was produced by Singaporean actor Choo Hoh Yim (better known as Zhu Houren) in 1983 when he had just returned to Singapore from Hong Kong, where he was a script supervisor. Choo was working as a social worker and had intended to test out his new filming equipment. With a colleague, they headed to the streets to capture some images that eventually evolved into the idea of making the documentary.

1985 OPEN SECTION

YEAR: 1985
DIRECTOR: Choo Hoh Yim (Zhu Houren)
RUNTIME: 16 min 33 sec
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English
RATING: PG
A Day with the Labourers

This film is an expository documentary that discusses the livelihood of migrant workers in Singapore and how they are treated as a transient and disposable workforce in the 1980s.

The demand and influx of migrant construction workers reached a high in the early 1980s as Singapore started the tunnelling works and construction of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system. The film was a response in defending the dignity of the workers and highlighting the contribution of foreign labour towards Singapore’s development.
Quaintly narrated and thoughtfully weaved with stock footage, this short film is a creatively homemade live-action interpretation of Walt Disney’s 1937 film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.
The Garden

The Garden is an experimental work that describes the inner worlds of two sisters manifested through their connection with the garden outside their home. While mourning the passing of their close relative, the sisters encounter a man in the garden, evoking a sense of mortality in one and awakening the sensuality in another.

The film was directed by Ong Ann Meng (better known as Meng Ong), who went on to win numerous awards for his short films at the Singapore International Film Festival between 1991 and 1993. His first feature, Miss Wonton (2001), won the FIPRESCI Prize at the Locarno International Film Festival. 

YEAR: 1986
DIRECTOR: Ong Ann Meng (Meng Ong)
RUNTIME: 21 min
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English
RATING: PG
According to Jack Neo, the music video helped kickstart his interest in directing and was shot using a VHS camcorder that the MDC had acquired in 1985. The talents in the music video were his colleagues at the MDC and parts of the video were filmed at the former Central Manpower Base in Tanglin Camp on Dempsey Road.

*Being a Woman* is Singaporean director Jack Neo’s first short film, produced during his time in the Singapore Armed Forces Music & Drama Company (MDC). An unofficial music video played to a same-titled track by Taiwanese 80s songstress Lin Ling, it tells the story of a tomboy who tries to change herself to please her boyfriend but is rejected by him for a more ladylike woman.
Stranger Danger

An educational video for children performed using hand puppets, where siblings Jack and Jill teach one another about stranger safety and crime prevention.
Feathered Friends

A wildlife documentary highlighting some of the 300-over species of birds that were native to Singapore. It also addressed the diminishing population of birds due to Singapore’s urbanisation.

YEAR: 1988
DIRECTORS: Ong Jong Keg, Rexon Ngim
RUNTIME: 6 min
COUNTRY: Singapore
LANGUAGE: English
RATING: G
City of Masks

This is the second short film directed by Jack Neo, who created it as an unofficial music video for the Singapore Video Competition in 1988. Neo used musician Lee Wei Song’s original song from his 1987 debut album and also casted Lee in the film.

Lee Wei Song is one half of Singapore’s most prolific song writing and music producing twins. Lee won the male category in the singing competition “Talentime 1985/1986” and when offered his first recording contract, he wrote this upbeat title track that describes how a jaded man loses his way in life and conforms to the behaviour of a materialistic and pretentious society.

A 1988 ENTRY

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<th>ORIGINA L TITLE:</th>
<th>YEAR:</th>
<th>DIRECTOR:</th>
<th>RUNTIME:</th>
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<th>LANGUAGE:</th>
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<tr>
<td>City of Masks</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Jack Neo</td>
<td>3 min</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>PG</td>
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Sight and Desire (Eyes) 65
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Labour of Love: The Housewife 67
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SPECIAL PROGRAMME 2
5 Restored Shorts by Rajendra Gour

Man with a Tender Heart
by Chew Tee Pao, Archivist

The Asian Film Archive (AFA) has been preserving the prints of Rajendra Gour’s short films since 2006. This was when Gour offered to volunteer with the AFA and the existence of this early short filmmaker whose films had exhibited internationally in the 1960s came to light.

In 2010, Gour informed the AFA that the 16mm sole print of his original 20-minute short film *Eyes* (1968) was held in the library of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), where he had graduated from in 1964. It is his third short film and the print was left behind with the FTII after it was screened in 1969. He requested AFA’s help to facilitate the transfer of the reel to preserve it in Singapore. At this point, the AFA was already preserving the print of a four-and-a-half-minute version of *Eyes* (1967). My initial assumption was that the AFA copy was an earlier and truncated version of the print at FTII.

The 20-minute *Eyes* would remain mysterious and elusive in the ensuing decade. Numerous attempts to kickstart a conversation with FTII went cold and communication went unanswered. It felt like a hopeless situation as the years ticked by and it felt like there may be no chance of seeing this print ever.
A slip of paper stuck to the inside of the film can with Gour’s address when he was a young man.
In March 2020, exactly 10 years from the day Gour raised the existence of his film with AFA, he informed that his friend in Pune managed to retrieve the print from FTII. This was a month before the COVID-19 circuit breaker in Singapore and fortunately we received the print right before the lockdown began. The print looked as though it had never been taken out of the film can. The original metal can had the scribblings on the top label intact, even though rust had long set in.

The AFA team spent most of 2020 and through the height of the pandemic assessing the print and deciding on how best to digitise and restore the film. It was a challenge as many places in the world were simultaneously going into lockdowns. Communication and monitoring the work with the film restoration laboratory became much more tedious and protracted. Gour decided that the 20-minute film should be referred to as *Sight and Desire (Eyes)*. With no reference or documentation to establish the new title other than Gour’s decision, much consultation and deliberation with him finally concluded this made sense as it would enable a clear distinction between the 20-minute and the shorter version of the film.

The digitisation and restoration of the over 50-year print at time of work, enabled us to view the film in detail. The results were illuminating. *Sight and Desire* was found to be an entirely different film in terms of style and execution from *Eyes*. A whimsical charm and sophistication set it apart from Gour’s other works, and yet there was a sense of familiarity in its experimentation. I could imagine a young exuberant Gour, a new migrant with ambitious hopes and dreams expressing his views about the world. As he settled down and grew his family, he turned his camera toward his family and the spaces they occupied.
The practicalities of life led him to put aside filmmaking and the films were simply stored in his home, until he became a volunteer with AFA in 2006. Since then, Gour’s works have been screened and presented at numerous film festivals and archival conferences, opening doors to an untold history of short filmmaking in Singapore. Unfortunately, his first short film *Mr. Tender Heart* (1965) cannot be found and is considered lost.

I met Gour when I was an intern at AFA in 2009. He was retired by then and no longer making films but was always looking for ways to re-present his films in a better manner. I recall the occasions when he came to the archive with ideas on how to replace and improve the low-quality audio portions of his films with music and narration that he had newly sourced and recorded. With limited resources when he was younger, things never panned out the way he had hoped. Now he was willing to place his trust and confidence in AFA to care for his films. It was also at his persistence to find ways to bring his film back from FTII that has enabled *Sight and Desire* to be restored, preserved, and made accessible once again.

We are honoured to present all of Rajendra Gour’s surviving films:

- *Eyes* (1967), *
  Sight and Desire (Eyes)* (1968), *
  Sunshine Singapore* (1972), *
  Labour of Love: The Housewife* (1978) and *
  My Child My Child* (1979) at Singapore Shorts ’22. Now that these films are preserved and restored, generations of audiences to come, too can dream and be inspired.
In the 4th edition of Singapore Shorts, the Asian Film Archive presents the complete restored collection of short films by local pioneer independent short filmmaker, Rajendra Gour. Four works have been newly restored in 2022, including the discovery of an early work that was originally assumed to have been part of another work.
Eyes

*Eyes* explores the pain and suffering in the world caused by a lack of understanding amongst mankind. All of this is viewed through the “eyes” of the people of the world.

A 2K restoration was made possible using a sole-surviving 16mm Eastmancolor print from the AFA Collection in 2022.
Sight and Desire (Eyes)

An experimental film that investigates the act of perception and the limits and possibilities through vision. Accompanied by an omniscient narrator and the conjuring of striking imagery, the film examines various conceptual underpinnings of what it means to “see” and what our eyes can truly do.

A 2K restoration was made possible using a sole-surviving 16mm colour positive print from the Asian Film Archive Collection (AFA) in 2021.
Sunshine Singapore

*Sunshine Singapore* features the sights of sunny Singapore set to music. The film carries the hopes of a young filmmaker, the beauty of a young nation, tempered by the familiarity of daily life.

A 4K restoration was made possible using a sole-surviving 16mm colour positive print from the Asian Film Archive Collection (AFA) in 2018.
Labour of Love: The Housewife examines the role of the Asian woman within the realm of the home and the family. It features the boundless work that a housewife must accomplish in a day to run a household and to care for her family. The film is an early feminist take on the perception regarding the economic value of the stay-at-home mother and wife, whose contribution to society is underrated.

A 2K restoration was made possible using a sole-surviving 16mm colour reversal (with scenes of black & white) print from the Asian Film Archive Collection (AFA) in 2022.
My Child My Child

A follow-up to *Labour of Love: The Housewife*, *My Child My Child* begins with a woman reflecting about herself as a person and as a mother. The love and sacrifices she makes for her children are evident as she reminisces the many happy memories spent with them.

A 2K restoration was made possible using a sole-surviving 16mm print made up of both Eastmancolor and colour reversal film stock from the Asian Film Archive Collection (AFA) in 2022.

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<th>WORLD PREMIERE</th>
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<td>YEAR:</td>
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<td>RATING:</td>
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PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, 8PM
12 AUGUST

Official Selection 1
(with Q&A session)

SATURDAY, 4PM
13 AUGUST

Official Selection 2
(with Q&A session)

SATURDAY, 8PM
13 AUGUST

Official Selection 3
(with Q&A session)

SUNDAY, 5PM
14 AUGUST

Official Selection 4
(with Q&A session)
SATURDAY, 4PM 20 AUGUST

SATURDAY, 8PM 20 AUGUST

SUNDAY, 2PM 21 AUGUST

FRIDAY, 8PM 26 AUGUST

Official Selection 1

Official Selection 2

Hidden Gems: Prize-winning entries from the Singapore Video Competition 1985, 1986 and 1988 (with Q&A session)

Official Selection 3

5 Restored Shorts of Rajendra Gour

Official Selection 4


5 Restored Shorts of Rajendra Gour (with Q&A session)
The Asian Film Archive (AFA) is a subsidiary of the National Library Board. It preserves the rich film heritage of Asian Cinema, encourages scholarly research on film, and promotes a wider critical appreciation of this art form. AFA is an affiliate of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), an institutional member of the Southeast Asia-Pacific Audiovisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA) and the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA).