



POP AYE

A FILM BY KIRSTEN TAN

SUNDANCE 2017

World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award
for screenwriting

ROTTERDAM 2017

VPRO Big Screen Award Winner

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Synopsis

On a chance encounter, a disenchanted architect bumps into his long-lost elephant on the streets of Bangkok. Excited, he takes his elephant on a journey across Thailand, in search of the farm where they grew up together.



Director's Biography

Kirsten Tan's works have screened at film festivals in Singapore, Rotterdam, Toronto, and Busan. Spotlighted by CNN's "Ones to Watch," she has received numerous international awards, including Best Southeast Asian Short Film for Dahdi (2014), and Best Director for Fonzi (2007) at the Singapore International Film Festival.

Her debut feature, POP AYE, developed at Berlinale Talents, TorinoFilmLab, where it won the Production Award, and Cannes Atelier, is premiering in competition at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.





Director's Artistic Statement

I've always felt like a bit of a wanderer. Having lived in Singapore, Jeonju, Bangkok and New York within the last decade, I'm not quite sure where I fit in sometimes. I'm never sure where home is, and I've always felt for outsiders who don't sit comfortably within one particular system. POP AYE is essentially about two misfits—a man past his prime and his displaced street elephant—searching for meaning and belonging in space and time.

A road movie with an elephant set in Thailand, POP AYE is the story of Thana, a disenchanting architect, who bumps into Popeye, his long-lost childhood elephant, on the streets of Bangkok. Dissatisfied with his current life, he takes his elephant on a road trip across Thailand, in search of the farm where they grew up together. Along the way, they meet a whole host of colorful characters, from a fortune-telling vagabond to a pair of bureaucratic policemen to a lonely karaoke singer, as a series of absurd mishaps befalls them on their journey.

Bangkok was the last place I lived in before moving to New York. I was in my early twenties then, when I was still figuring life out. Time seemed sprawling and infinite. I had a t-shirt shop at Chatuchak Market with my friends; we hardly made enough to cover rent, but we had fun. I travelled around Thailand a lot and whilst filming at a beach once, I witnessed a group of village boys pulling their elephant to sea to shower him.

That memory of the elephant by the sea came up when I was writing POP AYE. It was not merely because it was beautiful, but because it was both mystical yet banal. This begs the question of whether the elephant in my film is a metaphor, but I don't have a didactic answer to that. What I can say is, when animals are used in films, their use is often symbolic, but with POP AYE, I wanted the elephant to be something that was true to my character's life. It was definitely not going to be an exotic, Disney elephant placed in there for colour. The elephant is as much a misfit as Thana feels himself to be. There is no space for him wherever he goes.

Tonally, I believe that life is—and has always been—simultaneously tragic and comic. It only depends on the perspective and distance with which one is watching events unfold. In my films, this inadvertent mixing of tragedy and comedy is important, because that is the truth of life. There's something both intimate yet distanced, warm yet cold. In POP AYE, one moment something is very serious and the next moment, it appears frivolous. Which is it really? It is neither and both because life is sad and beautiful at once, and time is the only constant, yet ever-changing.

Time and its passage thereof has always been a big theme for me. It is a dimension that never stops happening to us at every moment. Its effects add up, but we can't possibly be aware of how they will all add up, in life as we live it. The road-movie lends itself well to cinematic explorations of the journey, which of course is never just the journey on the road, but life's journey. We get to see how the beats add up. In POP AYE, the way various moments add up in the plot—both in the road trip and in the arc of Thana's life—are testament to the quiet brutality of time. We live our lives moving forward even when we are doing nothing. Things are getting lost each second, and there is nothing we can do about it.

Time is the witness to it all and when time shows its hand, do we laugh or do we cry?

Selected Filmography

Pop Aye (Feature), 2017

Dahdi (Short), 2014

Cold Noodles (Short), 2009

Sink (Short), 2009



A woman is lying in bed, looking upwards. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved top. The bed has a white floral patterned sheet. In the background, there is a wooden bedside table with a lit lamp and some items on it. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the lamp.

Cast

Popeye BONG

Thana THANETH WARAKULNUKROH

Bo PENPAK SIRIKUL

Dee CHAIWAT KHUMDEE

Jenny YUKONTORN SUKKIJJA

Peak NARONG PONGPAB

Executive Producer

Anthony Chen's films have won awards and screened at film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Busan, Rotterdam, London, Dubai, Mumbai, Stockholm, and Melbourne. His debut feature film *Ilo Ilo*, was awarded the Camera d'Or at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. It went on to pick up 40 awards at festivals worldwide including 4 Golden Horse Awards at the 50th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan. Anthony was named as Variety's 10 Directors to watch in 2014. He recently launched Giraffe Pictures, a boutique film company with an aim to nurture and develop new voices in Asia.



Producer

Lai Weijie is a film producer based in Singapore. His producing credits include the upcoming debut film by Kirsten Tan POP AYE, and her short film Dahdi, Best Southeast Asian Short Film at the 25th Singapore International Film Festival. He works closely with Anthony Chen's Giraffe Pictures and was producer for the Singapore/Taiwan segment of Distance, a film spanning four countries and starring Chen Bolin. As Project Manager at the Singapore International Film Festival, Weijie initiated two film mentorship programmes: the Southeast Asian Film Lab and the Youth Jury & Critics Programme.







