The big picture

MES scholar Sheryl Tan Weilin wants to share compelling stories that will take viewers on an emotional journey.

Hazel Tan

Before she started her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication degree at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Ms Sheryl Tan Weilin already had an impressive body of work under her belt.

While studying for a diploma in communications and media management at Temasek Polytechnic, Ms Tan interned for six months in the branding and promotions department at Mediacorp.

After graduating in 2013, she participated in an inaugural film production course by Team Academy run by director Jack Neo’s outfit Team Productions. Her team produced a short thriller film, The Note, for which she received two awards for Best Director and Best Editor.

Following that, she joined Team Productions’ social media channel as a video editor for four months before starting her undergraduate studies at NTU the same year.

During her first year at NTU, Ms Tan freelanced as a producer with record and entertainment company Hype Records so she could pay her tuition fees. There, she worked with local artist Taufik Batisah to create this music video #breakfastMann, which has garnered more than seven million YouTube views to date.

She also designed the singer’s compact disc album Fique, as well as promotional posters and television commercials for music concerts held in Singapore.

“I have always been fascinated with the media and entertainment industry. I knew from the start that I wanted to be a part of this exciting journey,” says Ms Tan, 24.

With her diploma and media work experience, she applied for the Media Education Scholarship (MES) awarded by the Infocommunications Media Development Authority (IMDA). She was awarded the scholarship in August 2014.

The MES scholarship, which came with a three-year bond with the co-sponsoring company of her choice, was a launching pad for her career.

“The scholarship opened doors for me in terms of educational and employment opportunities,” says Ms Tan.

She joined mm2 Entertainment, which co-sponsored the scholarship with IMDA, as an associate producer when she graduated last June.

The company handles the financing, production and distribution of films, and helps to secure advertising and sponsorships for them.

Conquering the digital space

According to IMDA’s website, the MES scholarship was launched in 2003 to build and nurture industry leaders in the media industry.

Since its inception, more than 200 scholars have become part of the local media talent pool. These include film and television directors, game developers and visual effects artists.

The scholarship was revised in 2012 to include industry collaborations in matching scholars to companies directly.

While the MES covers tuition fees and other compulsory university fees, the sponsoring media company gives an annual allowance and offers a job to the scholar. The latter will then be developed as a media professional or groomed for a leadership role during the bond period.

All MES scholars will also be offered training, internship and career opportunities in editorial, interactive media, journalism, television production and new media engineering.

Currently, Ms Tan is leading a new start-up to help produce bite-sized content that expands mm2’s reach in the digital space.

She says: “I am passionate about creating content for the masses. Over the years, people are consuming more media content than ever and the way they do so is also changing.

‘While mm2 continues to produce content for big, medium and small screens, we are constantly exploring new ways to bring new and exciting content to viewers.”

Life in pictures

Ms Tan’s visual expertise and penchant for telling stories are evident in the various accolades she has garnered so far.

Last October, her final-year project for a visual communication module won the main prize at the Bio Art Contest (The 5th Theme: Virtual Life) organised by Gwangju National Science Museum, South Korea.

Entitled Snap Nation, the idea was inspired by her interest in media and technology, and Singaporeans’ fixation with mobile photography.

She explains that the project is a data visualisation series on the growing cultural phenomenon of ephemeral photography in the digital age. It was produced after a year’s worth of research, design and execution.

Ms Tan recorded a total of 5,056 video clips from 25 Snapchat and Instagram Stories users over three months. The clips were then compiled chronologically into 45 videos to reveal the underlying social trends and behavioural traits of its users.

“It is through recapturing what is gone that ultimately provides tangible evidence to better illustrate society’s cultural obsession with capturing the everyday, and how social media users are drawn to creating content in the moment,” she says.

As part of ASEAN’s 50th founding anniversary last December, Ms Tan represented Singapore in a four-day Dream ASEAN Youth camp held in Thailand. There, she shared her ideas and hopes on media literacy and ASEAN with like-minded individuals from 10 ASEAN countries.

All stories are real, including the middle and end, but to Ms Tan, the crux of a good story lies in its originality and authenticity, as well as its ability to grab one's attention while allowing one to live vicariously through the characters’ experiences.

“A good story should also bring viewers on an intense emotional journey,” she adds.