

**An Interview with Ann Hui**  
Visible Secrets: Hong Kong's Women Filmmakers



**Your 21st century films are quite eclectic. What has driven your choice of projects in recent times?** I shot *Visible Secrets* after two years' teaching and I thought, first, I'd better do a film that was marketable. My first film is also a thriller and I thought it was fun to revisit old grounds. Then followed a film which I was really interested in making (*July Rhapsody*), I thought I would never be able to raise funds for it but surprisingly it was accepted by the investor, so I made it. And so forth and so on... alternately, making films I really want to make and some I could just make so as to survive in the industry.

**Could you talk a little about *The Way We Are* and *Night and Fog*? These films seem quite different stylistically; one very much informed by social realism and the other more melodramatic, yet each seems perfect for its subject matter. What made you select these different approaches to the setting of Tin Shui Wai?**

*The Way We Are* was initially planned as a D.V. affair since I couldn't find the money for *Night and Fog*. It's also initially not about Tin Shui Wai but I decided to transport the whole setting to Tin Shui Wai. The script was already written 7 or 8 years ago about another housing estate but since I knew Tin Shui Wai well, and the lifestyle of all these housing areas are about the same, I thought it would be okay to transpose the whole story to the newest housing estate. The style of these two films is dictated by their subject matter; I hadn't initially planned these two films as a diptych at all.

**You have worked with a number of well-respected scriptwriters, such as Ivy Ho, could you talk a little about the process you go**

**through with writers?** I work in different ways with different scriptwriters. With Ivy Ho, she initiated the story, we talked about it and then she went ahead to do the writing by herself, whilst I offered comments at every stage. But I made very little changes in the script for *July Rhapsody*. I am quite content to work on a good script I can identify with.

**You seem to be very careful in the casting of your films, often, but not always, using very well known actors. Can you reflect on why and how you cast your films?** Casting is usually a compromise between the investors and me. I think of the suitability of the actors for the parts and the investors consider the marketability of the whole setup. Usually we come up with mutually satisfying compromises.

**You have been a major figure within the Hong Kong film industry for a number of years. Has it been difficult to sustain a career over this period, and what have been the highs and lows during that time?**

I have been making feature films since 1979. It is difficult but I don't think more so than in any other job. I started off with four consecutive successes, both in terms of Box Office and critical acclaim, followed by ten years of almost uninterrupted failures. I made a comeback with *Summer Snow*, which was then followed by another flop. Since then I have been quite steady in my output but continued to be shaky at the Box Office, but by then it didn't matter so much as all the local films after 1997 didn't do so well, with very few exceptions.

**What changes have you observed in the industry since 1997?** Since 1997, the local industry had gone steadily downhill. However, recently it has found some hopes in co-production with China and the Chinese market seemed heading for a boom.

**Would you consider any of the shifts and changes in the Hong Kong film industry positive or do you feel they are mostly negative as they are often portrayed in the press?**

I think all the shifts and changes are quite natural, as in any industry and any country. Films obviously have to follow the economics, the viewing habits, the cultural changes of a place and not really vice-versa.

**Are you familiar with the work of other women directors working in the HK film industry?**

**Whose work has impressed you?** I am familiar with the work of all the other women filmmakers in Hong Kong. Some of Mabel Cheung's films are very impressive. I am also impressed by another new director, whose first work came out last year, Heiward Mak.

**Do you think your career offers something of a role model for new women directors?**

**Within the Hong Kong film industry?** No, I think the new generation of filmmakers have a completely different set of problems, strengths and weaknesses. It's better for them to find their own way out. For example, I've never tried to be Leni Riefenstahl (director of *Triumph of the Will*)!

**Finally, could you offer a brief comment on the *Visible Secrets: Hong Kong's Women Filmmakers* season?**

To be honest, I am not especially pleased to be slotted primarily as a "woman filmmaker", but it's okay with me. Plus, I see the relevance and the strength of having a distinctive subject and drift for promotional purposes. Above all, I am glad that my films can be shown and watched in other parts of the world. So thank you all for your efforts and my very best wishes for the success of the event!

*Interview conducted by email with season curators Sarah Perks Programme & Engagement Director at Cornerhouse and Andy Willis, Reader in Film Studies at University of Salford.*