

KINO LORBER

POP AYE

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL – WINNER
WORLD CINEMA DRAMATIC SPECIAL JURY AWARD
SCREENWRITING



A film by Kirsten Tan

2017 | Singapore / Thailand | 102 minutes | DCP | 1:2.35 | Color
5.1 | in Thai with English subtitles

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Press materials

www.kinolorber.com/film/popaye

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SYNOPSIS

A man and his elephant walk into a bar: well, not quite — but close. **POP AYE** is the story of a successful Bangkok architect whose late-midlife crisis leads him to an encounter with the elephant (Pop Aye) with whom he spent an idyllic childhood in the Thai countryside. Together they embark on a road trip to deliver both man and beast to their origins. The local police cite him for not having a permit to travel with an elephant; a transgender sex worker joins him in a karaoke duet at a roadside dive; and a poetic, possibly delusional, pauper offers companionship. But the real star is the big guy: Popeye lumbers along with great dignity and endless fortitude. He is the center of a mysterious, funny and often absurd universe that while seemingly particular to Thailand is, ultimately, not unlike our own. (Karen Cooper, Film Forum).

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I've always felt like a bit of a wanderer. Having lived in Singapore, Bangkok and New York within the last decade, 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.

Bangkok was the last place I lived before moving to New York. I was in my early twenties then, 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. 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 color. The elephant is as much a misfit as Thana feels himself to be. There is no space for him wherever he goes.

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. \

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Time and its passage thereof has always been a big theme for me. 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.

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?

DIRECTOR'S BIO



KIRSTEN TAN (writer/director)

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, premiered in competition at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

POP AYE (Feature) – 2017

World Cinema Dramatic Competition, Sundance Film Festival 2017

GRANNY (Short) – 2014

DAHDI (Short) – 2014

THIN AIR (Short) – 2010

COLD NOODLES (Short) – 2009

SINK (Short) – 2009

FONZI (Short) – 2007

10 MINUTES LATER (Short) – 2005

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Giraffe Pictures is a boutique film company founded by Singapore filmmaker Anthony Chen and producer Huang Wenhong. Based in Singapore, the company prides itself as a home for emerging filmmakers in Asia. Giraffe Pictures aims to become an

international label for the best of Asian cinema, focusing on cinematic creativity and vision, telling unique Asian stories that will resonate with a global audience.

ANTHONY CHEN (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.

LAI WEIJIE (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.

CHANANUN CHOTRUNGROJ (Director of Photography)

Chananun Chotrungrroj is a director of photography and artist based in New York City and Bangkok. She served as Director of Photography alongside Sandi Sissel on the feature film *Karaoke Girl*, which premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2012 and won the Best Cinematography award at the Bangkok Critics Assembly Awards. Her latest works include the feature films *Yosemite* by Gabrielle Demeestere, *Motel Mist* by Prabda Yoon and *POP AYE* by Kirsten Tan. While pursuing an MFA in Film at NYU, she was awarded the Ang Lee Fellowship and Department Fellowship and received Nestor Almendros Award for Outstanding Cinematography by a Woman in 2013 and 2015.

RASIGUET SOOKKARN (Production Designer)

After graduating from architecture school, Rasiguët Sookkarn started as an art director for several TV commercials and later made his way as production designer for many award-winning feature films such as *Eternity* by Sivaroj Kongsakul (Tiger Awards, Rotterdam Film Festival 2010), *P-047* by Kongdej Jaturanrassamee (Venice Film Festival 2011), *Tang-Wong* by Kongdej

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Jaturanrassamee (Berlin Film Festival 2012), 36 by Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit (New Currents Award, FIPRESCI Awards, Busan Film Festival 2012) and Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy by Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit (Venice Biennale Collage 2013). He has received many awards for his designs in his homeland and attended Berlinale Talents in 2014.

LEE CHATAMETIKOOL (Editor)

Lee Chatametikool is a Thai film editor and sound editor. He is a frequent collaborator with Apichatpong Weerasethakul where he worked on films including *Blissfully Yours*, *Syndromes and a Century* and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall his Past Lives*. At the 2007 Asian Film Awards, Lee won the Best Editor award for *Syndromes and a Century*. He has also worked on commercial films including the hit Thai horror film, *Shutter*. Bangkok Film Critic's Assembly also named him Best Editor in 2008 for *Wonderful Town*. He took a break from editing to direct his debut feature film, *Concrete Clouds*, which premiered in Busan and was screened in competition at Rotterdam.

ABOUT BONG, THE ELEPHANT STAR OF POP AYE

Bong, the mammoth star of Kirsten Tan's *POP AYE*, currently lives with elephant handlers and his pachyderm family in Northeast Thailand, under the guidance of P'Somsak – one of the most respected elephant handlers in the country.

Descending from a line of elephants that participate in traditional religious ceremonies, Bong's main caretaker is P'Ek, P'Somsak's eldest son. Bong and P'Ek are both twenty-two years old; they grew up together and retain an inseparable bond.

POP AYE is Bong's feature film debut. In real life, Bong works as a ceremonial elephant for religious festivals steeped in Thai traditional culture, where elephants are revered religious symbols. He currently lives in Surin, in an open field the size of a soccer field, adjacent to P'Somsak's house.

During the making of *POP AYE*, the film's producers enacted strict measures to ensure that Bong was comfortable, safe and happy. He never worked for more than eight hours a day, and wrapped shooting every day before 10pm. The crew used his favorite fruits (watermelons and bananas) as incentives and he was always under P'Ek and P'Somsak's guidance.

Bong's innate intelligence, playfulness, curiosity and calm energy captivated everyone who worked on *POP AYE*.

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CAST

Popeye – BONG
Thana – THANETH WARAKULNUKROH
Bo – PENPAK SIRIKUL
Dee – CHAIWAT KHUMDEE
Jenny – YUKONTORN SUKKIJA
Peak – NARONG PONGPAB

CREW

Executive Producer ANTHONY CHEN
Producer LAI WEIJIE
Producers DENG LI, ZHANG JIANBIN, HUANG WENHONG
Co-Producer SOROS SUKHUM
Line Producer CATTLEEYA PAOSRIJAREON
Production Manager PARINEE BUTHRASRI
Written & Directed by KIRSTEN TAN
1st Assistant Director PIPAT JOMKOTT, GAYLE HARIFF
2nd Assistant Director CHINNAPAT POTHIEG
Casting Director SOIFA SAENKHAMKON, TIPPAWAN NARINTORN
Acting Coach JARUNUN PHANTACHAT, ROMCHAT TANALAPPIPAT, PIANGPAITON
SATRAWAHA, KEERATI SIVAKUAE
Location Manager WITHIT CHANTHAMARIT
Location Assistant SASIKARN GANMANEE, PAKKAWAT TANGHOM
Director of Photography CHANANUN CHOTRUNGROJ
Focus Puller/Camera Operator NAWAROPHAAT RUNGPHIBOONSOPHIT
1st Camera Assistant CHARAN MUANG-ON
Production Designer RASIGUET SOOKKARN
Art Director MANOP CHAENGSAWANG
Assistant Art Director MONKUM KHUKHUNTIN
Costume Designer VISA KONGKA
Wardrobe/Costume DAMMAROS SUKHABOON, NEERANUTE PATTAMASOOT
Makeup Artist KUBOON KUNSOOKSAN, CHADA PIANKIT
Hair Stylist THANON SONGSIL
Onset Photographer LEK KIATSIRIKAJORN
Behind the Scenes Video KONG PAHURAK
Editor LEE CHATAMETIKOOL
Composer MATTHEW JAMES KELLY
Supervising Sound Editor LIM TING LI