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The Malaysian independent film industry has made great strides of late. James Lee digital films such as *The Beautiful Washing Machine* and *Room to Let* have won critical acclaim, Amir Muhammad's controversial and hilarious *The Big Durian* became the first Malaysian film to

screen at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004 while engineer-turned-filmmaker HoYuhang's *Min* won the Special Jury Prize in the Nantes Festival of Three Continents in France..

Joining the list of up and coming Malaysian directors to watch is Yasmin Ahmad, whose second film *Sepet* premiered at the Malaysian Film Festival in Singapore recently. This endearing film explores what happens when a Chinese boy falls in love with a Malaysian girl in small-town Ipoh. The film takes a gentle look at two people from different backgrounds falling in love, and has touches of poetic soul, besides being thoroughly Malaysian yet universal in theme. The movie got off to a slow start at the box-office when it started its commercial screenings, but was packed to full houses for the rest of its three-week run.

The film has been invited for the San Francisco Film Festival in April 2005.

Herein the director talks about making the movie:

Q. The two leads in *Sepet* had some of the best on-screen chemistry I've seen. How did you manage to find them? Did it take them long to develop such chemistry?

A. I found them by accident. I met the girl at a warung in Sri Hartamas. The boy works in my office. It took them about 5 minutes to develop the chemistry because they had an instant crush on each other.

Q. In *Sepet*, you make use of the various Malaysian languages, but it's always natural and never becomes obtrusive. Were you ever apprehensive about this?

A. Not at all. After 2 months of intensive rehearsals, I finally gave them the freedom to deliver the emotions in their own words. It looked natural because they were being themselves.

Q. Your next proposed project is *Gubra*. Could you tell us a bit more about the inspiration behind it? Are you moving away from themes covered in your first two movies? And when can we expect it?

A. "*Gubra*" is a story about betrayal. More specifically, it is about the curious fact that we are more often betrayed by the people who love us than the people who don't. I suppose in the end, it might be about forgiveness. And no, I'm not moving away from the themes covered in "*Rabun*" and "*Sepet*". I suspect I never will.

Q. What do you think of the Malaysian film industry in its present state, with the rise of the independent film movement and now blockbuster striving for international attention?

A. It's an exciting time. Both our filmmakers and our public are getting excited about film. I know for a fact that the Singaporeans are envying the renaissance-like state our film industry is in.

by Dave Chua

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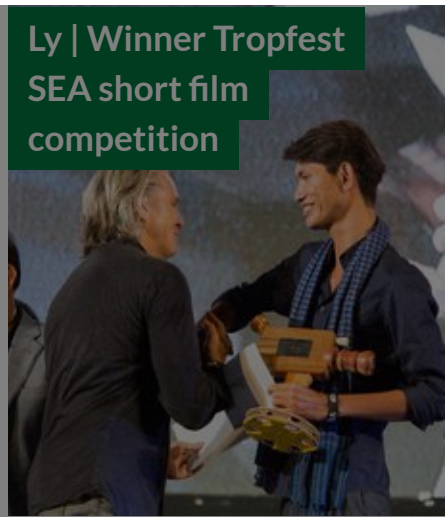
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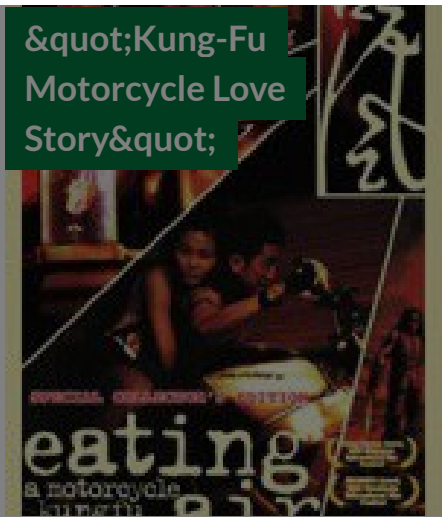
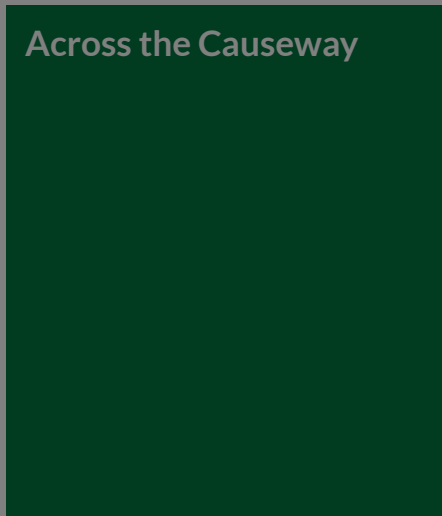
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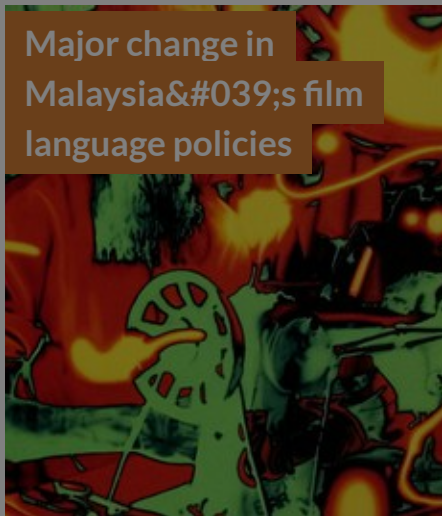
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