

DIRECTOR'S VISION
AFLOAT, ADRIFT - SHORT FILM



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WHY THIS FILM?

I think everyone has always wondered at some point in their lives, where is home, and what does that mean personally to them. Since the definition usually has a direct correlation to their identity, at least traditionally speaking. I left home when I was 16 to look for a better education. Since that day, I have constantly been confronted with the barrier of a new language and a new culture. Meanwhile barely having a clue of who I am, trying to find out where I belong and what I want in the transitional stage of in between youth and adulthood. This challenge forced me to mature and grow up quickly, being an outsider to both environments gave me a perspective on the ambiguity of the perception of differences.

After trying to adapt for three years in Australia, I managed, and it became my new home. Yet I had to leave again. I believe that we always project a romanticized version of our past, or that exact turning point when we made an important decision. In my case I thought going back to HK would feel the same as when I left. I spent 6 months back home trying to figure out the next step. And I never felt more out of place than during that period. That time was conflicting for me, and I began to make work that explore the notion of diaspora. The idea of belonging and identity was confusing for me, especially when it was constantly shifting, even now.

I left again to study and work in the UK, and surprisingly enough I was faced with the same dilemma.

When people ask me where home is for me, I can't really answer them. The home I had 8 years ago was not the same. I changed, and HK also radically changed itself during this intensely political time. However, during the time when I was away, I began to create a fantasy version of my supposed home. It's an idea, a romantic notion.

I didn't want to tell a tragic tale of a migrant family and I didn't want to alienate our audiences and differentiate Afloat Adrift's story. I believe all of our tales and feelings share an emotional, universal truth across borders, genders and differences. Cinema for me is the only medium which manages to utilize a wide variety of art forms, images, music and people to depict a small or big voyage, where its so encapsulating that it allows an audience in a darkroom to travel to that exact same place in that exact same time. I did not feel the need to dramatize the hardship of this family, rather I just want to provide an opportunity for the audience to observe and be in these characters everyday life.

In the script the characters were forced to leave and undergo self imposed exile since they made the choice to leave Hong Kong before the 1997 takeover by China. They left their identity, their belonging, their city, their home in order to provide a better education and opportunities for their child. This is universal to all parents who have sacrificed some part of themselves. Along the way of living in this foreign land, the UK, they got lost. They are subconsciously dreaming of going back, because to be consciously thinking about this everyday just isn't an option. They're forced to go on everyday, while reminiscing a place that they no longer actually know. This film is about a family and a home that is forever stuck in time on repeat, and people who had to lose and reconstruct their identity.

I often find myself thinking, what if I never left? Would I be able to find my place again? Does home actually exist?

Water is the very changing element of life, it can destroy, inhibit, free, give life to a person. I chose to have water. It is the very element that we encounter before birth, in the womb. The symbolism of water and swimming is all encompassing for me. Just like the mother. It creates an interesting contradiction by having our character Mei to be fearful of it, yet constantly surrounded by.

MEI, THE MOTHER

Our Mei used to be an established, respected and independent woman with a passion and a fierce sense of self. Even though HK is traditionally chinese and patriarchal, Mei never conformed and has always been equal to her husband, Yiu Fai. Mei never envisioned a future of herself as a housewife, yet this is what happened when they moved for their son.

It's scary how one's identity can be entirely reinvented, to the point where one cannot actually recognize oneself. By moving to the UK, not being able to speak english and having to focus on the dreams of her family. Mei made a choice to put her family first, and lost herself along the way. Their house suddenly became the notion of what their home used to be. Filled with memorabilias, it became this comfort zone which it is the only place where Mei feels safe, and manages to make her remember bits and pieces of what she used to be. Over the years, this comfortable home has become the very force that stopped Mei from moving on.

She barely goes out except for necessities, and is forever stuck in play and rewind of her daily routines. Her only pleasure became making sure the boys are fed and happy, as this is her only form of power. Giving up on the idea of happiness or fulfillment became easier than fighting for it. Swimming is a freeing passion that her boys intimately share and treasure, yet it is also her worst fear.

In this film, Mei goes through a personal transition finally realizing that she isn't actually just a housewife, and her old self never died. Having Mei go on a journey to find herself again is my way of celebrating the strength of a mother, who nurtures all things except themselves. She is our hero who at a very late stage in life, changes. I deeply believe in the power and motivation of change and realization. I believe in flawed characters who are rounded, three dimensional, edgy and not perfect as human beings are. Yet it is the change, the effort and the power that interests me as I believe it is possible for everyone.

YIU FAI, THE FATHER

Yiu Fai is a discreet, respectable yet distant man. He represents most father I know who comes from an asian culture, yet he is obviously different from having a wife like Mei at the beginning. He has harboured resentment towards Mei becoming a woman that he did not know, or was ever fond of. However this is conflicting since they are both a victim of circumstances, and it was easier to allow Mei to become this housewife since it was necessary, at least in his mind. Yiu Fai used to be a championed swimmer, it was his lifelong passion. Even though both him and Mei have sacrificed, lost their established lives and social standings, Yiu Fai could still keep his most treasured hobby, swimming. Swimming for Yiu Fai is a way to fight the current, yet at some point, it also turned into an escape where Yiu Fai no longer had to confront his failing marriage.

Yiu Fai is a quietly loving man, by not communicating with his wife and son is also his stubborn way of keeping the family together. He treats everything in life like a swimming race, you just keep going, until you can't. This is also why Yiu Fai is more moved on, because failure just isn't an option. This is also passed on to his son Peter, who has been made to be a successor with all the pressure and attention they have given him since he's the only son.

PETER, THE SON

Peter in a way is the character who is closest to my personal experience. Peter was brought to the world during a confusing time, even though he has early memories of living at home till about the age of 7. His upbringing although almost entirely western, he has a confusing sense of self since he was raised in a very chinese home. Unlike his parents, Peter is challenged by the questions of his roots and identity. He considers himself a British Born Chinese, even though he was born in Hong Kong. He is like the typical rebellious teenager who feels he is more worldly than his parents. Peter's love for his mother is very conflicted, he adores his mother and yet feels sorry for her at the same time. Conversely, Peter feels more suffocated by his father's pressure on him to becoming what he never managed to be, a successful swimmer. In fact the entirely family's broken dream and hope is projected onto him.

'A film for people who ever felt lost at sea, on dry land'

Afloat
Adrift

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