

SF State :: NEWS

SF STATE NEWS

News Home
Headlines
SFSU in the News
Events Calendar
Gator Sports News

EXPERT COMMENTARY

Design and Industry
Broadcast media
China

FOR JOURNALISTS

News Releases
Faculty Experts
Backgrounders
Staff Contacts

FOR FACULTY

Submit a News Item
Be an Expert Source
Working with the Media

SFSU PUBLICATIONS

CampusMemo
e-News
SFSU Magazine

CONTACT

Public Affairs & Publications

Filmmaker Arthur Dong named alumnus of the year

May 15, 2007

Award-winning producer/director Arthur Dong has been named San Francisco State University's 2007 Alumnus of the Year. He will receive the award at the University's [106th Commencement](#) exercises at 12:30 p.m., Saturday, May 26, in Cox Stadium.

Throughout his career, Dong has focused his camera on complex social issues. He was a 16-year-old student at San Francisco's Galileo High School when he made his first film, "Public." The animated short, which follows a child's disturbing spiral into violence, earned Dong first prize at the California High School Film Festival in 1970.

The festival also established Dong's bridge to a future at SF State. One of the festival's judges, Professor Jameson Goldner, encouraged Dong to develop his talents in the Cinema Department. Today Dong appreciates that "little extra push in order to dive into a new challenge."

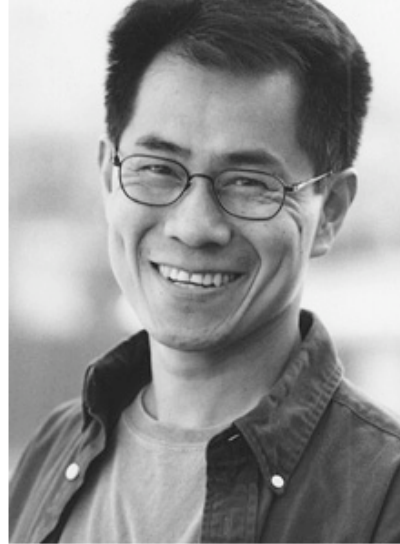
At SF State Dong enjoyed the freedom to express his ideas and also grow as an artist. "I was given a sense of freedom to express myself, have radical thoughts," he recalls. "A lot of the education was hands-off. I was left alone but I also knew that my professors were there when I needed advice. I really appreciated that."

He received plenty of guidance from cinema faculty including former lecturers Irving Saraf and Bill Chayes, who encouraged Dong to continue shooting footage for what developed into "Sewing Woman," a documentary about his mother's immigration to America from China. The film, co-written with his sister, Professor of Asian American Studies Lorraine Dong, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Short in 1984.

Dong remains especially grateful for lessons learned in an introductory English class. "That is really where I learned the basics of storytelling -- the beginning, middle and end. That was the spring board, the foundation and I took it from there," he says.

Dong graduated Summa Cum Laude with a bachelor's degree in film in 1982, the same year he established his Los Angeles-based company, DeepFocus Productions Inc. The company released Dong's first DVD collection, "Stories from the War on Homosexuality," which includes "Family Fundamentals," a study on America's cultural wars over homosexuality, "Licensed to Kill," a look into the minds of murderers who killed gay men, and "Coming Out Under Fire," a historical investigation of gay and lesbian soldiers during World War II.

In addition to "Sewing Woman," Dong's other films about Asian and Asian American culture include "Forbidden City, U.S.A.," a musical tribute to the plight of Asian American nightclub performers in the 1940s, and "Lotus," a half-hour drama about the foot-binding of Chinese women, also co-written with his sister.



His latest feature, "Hollywood Chinese," is a visual and cultural history of the Chinese in Hollywood feature films, from the early 1900s up to present day. In March the film had its world premiere at the 25th anniversary of the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival and will be released later this Fall.

In a way, Dong says he has been conducting research for "Hollywood Chinese" for most of his life. Born and raised in San Francisco, he spent many childhood afternoons watching films at the now defunct Surf Interplayers theater. "The whole notion of being able to watch images made decades before I was alive fascinated me. These people on screen were moving -- that astounded me," he says. "That was always the attraction of film -- to see the span of history through the decades on the big screen."

In addition to the Oscar nomination, Dong has received a George Foster Peabody Award, three Sundance Film Festival awards, and five Emmy nominations. He has been named a Guggenheim Fellow in Film and a Rockefeller Fellow in Media. Retrospectives of his work have been presented at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Hawaii International Film Festival, and Outfest in Los Angeles. Dong is also a past governor of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and currently represents the Academy on the National Film Preservation Board.

SF State President Robert A. Corrigan says, "Arthur Dong's body of work is a reminder of the power art can have to move us -- not only emotionally but also to move us to action. His films merge artistry and activism, making him an impressive role model for all of our students who are taught that their talents can and should be used for the greater good of society."

Dong has received numerous awards for his public service, including the James Wong Howe Award from the Association of Asian Pacific Artists; Steve Tatsukawa Award from Visual Communications; Asian American Media Award from Asian CineVision; Historian Award from the Chinese Historical Society of America; two consecutive GLAAD Media Awards (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation); Paul Monette Award, the community service award from Community United Against Violence; and OUT 100 Award from OUT magazine.

Dong lives in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles with his partner of 30 years, SF State alumnus Young Gee and their son, Reed. For more information about Dong and his work, visit: www.deepfocusproductions.com.

The Alum of the Year award goes to former students who have gained recognition for significant contributions to their field of work. Previous winners include Kenneth Fong, the chairman of Kenson Ventures LLC, Manny Mashouf, the founder and chairman of bebe stores inc., E-LOAN co-founder/CEO Chris Larsen, journalist Ben Fong-Torres, "Frasier" co-creator and executive producer Peter Casey, jazz and cabaret singer Wesla Whitfield, actress Annette Bening, conductor Kent Nagano, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown and physician and NASA astronaut Yvonne Cagle.

-- [Adrienne Bee](#)



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