



Germaine Chong and Felix Ng of Anonymous (photo by Tan Hai Han)

'is it art or design'

BY YVONNE XU | IMAGES COURTESY ANONYMOUS

A Design Film Festival will be presented this year with the theme, 'On a Scale of Art to Design', inspired by the contemporary rhetoric, 'Is it art or is it design?'



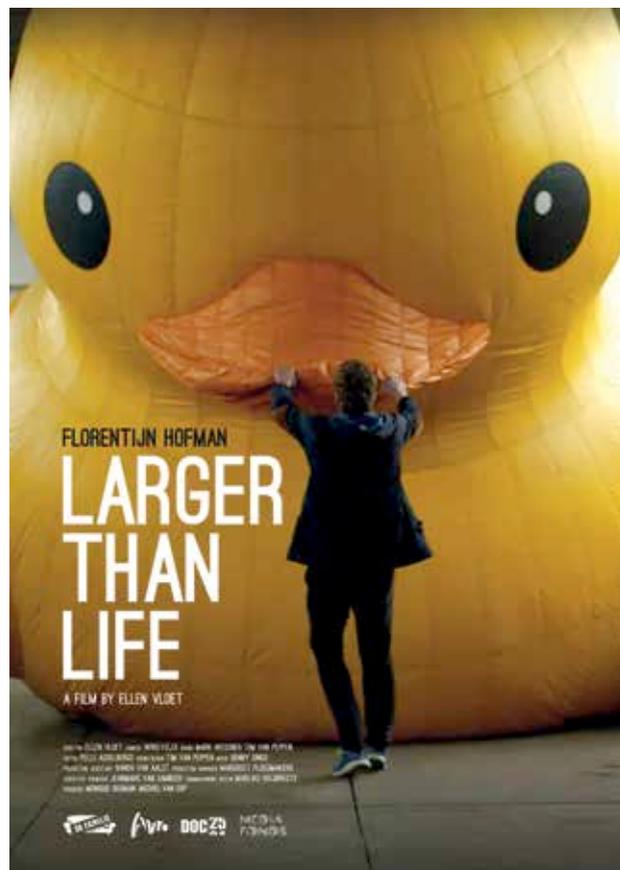
The Story of Rice (Director: Yu Yamanaka; Language: Japanese (Eng sub); Runtime: 45 mins)

Originally created for 'KOME: The Art of Rice' exhibition at 21_21 Design Sight, Hakusho: The Story of Rice is a four-part documentary that takes the humble staple food as its central subject matter. From the wet fields of a rice farmer in Chiba to the white winter of Kagoshima where a community welcomes Tano Kami (the deity of rice harvest), the film offers rare glimpses into a cultural landscape that has arisen from the life-giving grain. This will be the first time that the film is presented in its entirety.

'Design is an intimidating subject, but when you disguise it as entertainment, through a medium such as film, it works,' says Felix Ng, creative director and festival curator of A Design Film Festival.

What works? Ng is explaining how film, as a medium, serves his wish to create an event that would not only celebrate design and its community, but also inform and reach into people's imaginations – including the imaginations of non-designers.

In popular culture, films are largely received as entertainment. This can be more than amusement. The etymological roots of the word entertainment points to a keeping up, a maintaining, a keeping (of someone) in a certain frame of mind. In cinema, entertainment can be seen as that which facilitates an 'enter-ing into' – ideas can be conveyed more swiftly, and easily, when the audience is in a receptive state. In this context, what are the ideas, the messages the festival organizers want to convey?



Larger Than Life

(Directed by Ellen Vloet; Dutch (Eng Sub), Runtime 23 mins; Part of a 3-short compilation titled Designing Art) Artist Florentijn Hofman is conquering the world with his iconic, larger-than-life sculptures. Popular with the general public, Florentijn however lacks recognition in the art world. As the film documents Hofman at work on one of his largest projects in his career, it asks: What is more important to him – commercial success or the acknowledgement of the critics?



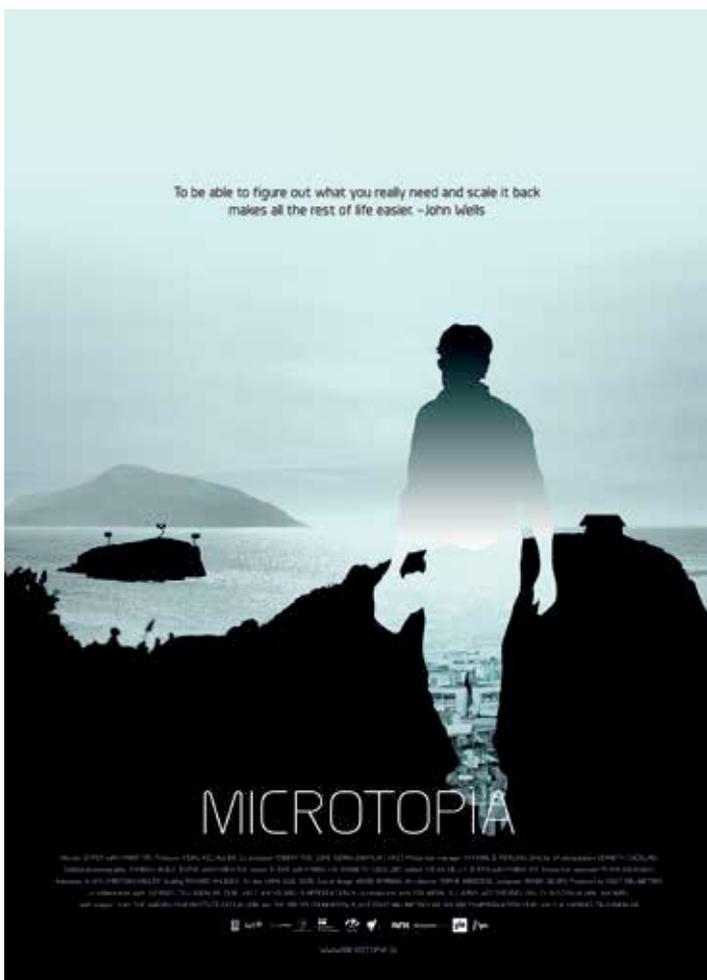
Finding Vivian Maier
 (Directors: John Maloof, Charlie Siskel; Language: English; Runtime 83 mins) Now hailed as one of the greatest street photographers of the 20th century, Vivian Maier was once a nanny who, unknown to the world, secretly shot photos only to hide them. Her work came to light in 2007 when a box of her negatives was discovered at a thrift auction house. Still very much an enigma, Maier's riveting life and art are revealed through never-seen-before photographs, films, and interviews with dozens who thought they knew her.

'The festival is about design and its subcultures,' Ng shares. 'Design is a broad subject that continues to evolve and redefine itself constantly. What makes the cut? Films that are relevant, entertaining and timely.'

This all-encompassing approach, as well as the recognition that design is a multitude that has its main discourses and subcultures, stances and nuances, as well as range and depth, sits the film festival as a true independent event.

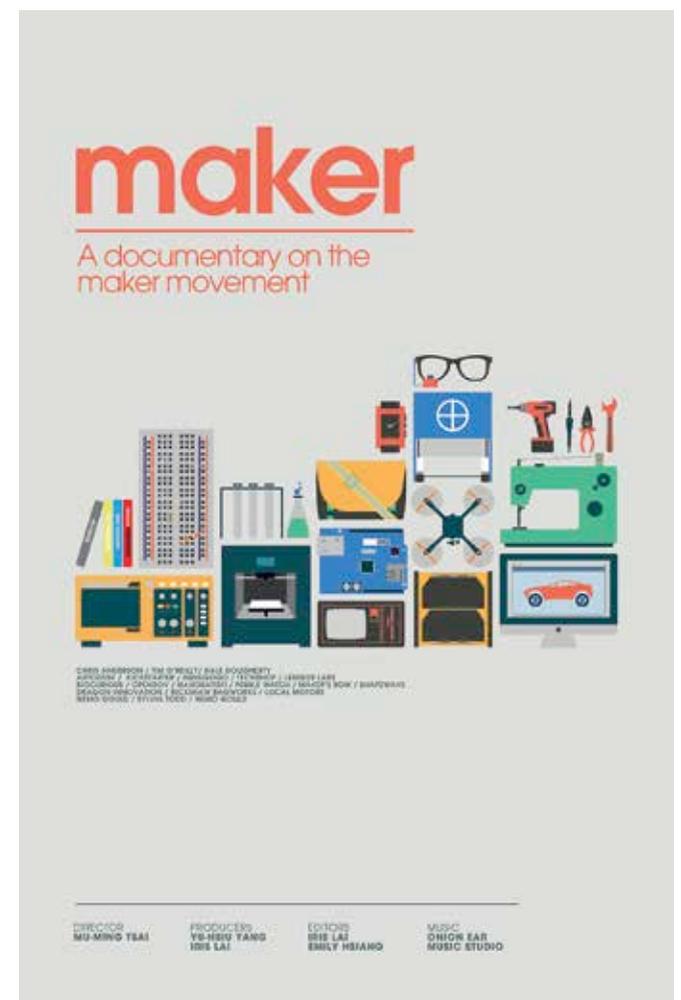
A Design Film Festival was started in 2010, and has travelled to Bangkok, Berlin, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Portland, Seoul and Latvia. This is the fourth Singapore edition, and, for the first time, the festival carries a theme. 'On a Scale of Art to Design' asks the contemporary question, 'Is it art or design?'

'It's a personal interest of mine. I've been questioning over the past few years if art can be design and vice versa. Is it possible to be in that middle ground?' Twelve films will serve as fodder for discussion, with the opening film, Hakusho: The Story of Rice from director Yu Yamanaka forwarding the question: what has rice – so basic, so rudimentary as a staple and ingredient – got to do with design culture? Also zeroing in on the thematic rhetoric is 'Designing Art', a compilation of three short films featuring three distinguished creative figures whose work, each in their own way, resist categorisation.



Microtopia (Director: Jesper Wachtmeister; Language: English; Runtime: 55 mins) Many of us live as a mobile, tech-equipped society in an increasingly dense world. Against this milieu wrought with discontent, Microtopia offers possible solutions by way of entering into the homes and worlds of architects, artists and problem-solvers who have invented new ways of living. The alternative to this modern phenomenon may be in micro dwellings, downsized habitats and lifestyles that go off the grid.

Maker (Director: Mu-Ming Tsai; Language: English; Runtime: 65 mins) Fuelled by passion and powered by the advent of new technologies, the Maker Movement in America is the 'do-it-yourself' and 'do-it-together' creative new wave. The film delves deep into the emerging ecosystem of design and manufacturing, looking at how the community is subverting traditional manufacturing in this Internet age, if not indeed developing next-generation products based on new methodologies of local manufacturing, crowd funding, digital fabrication and open source.





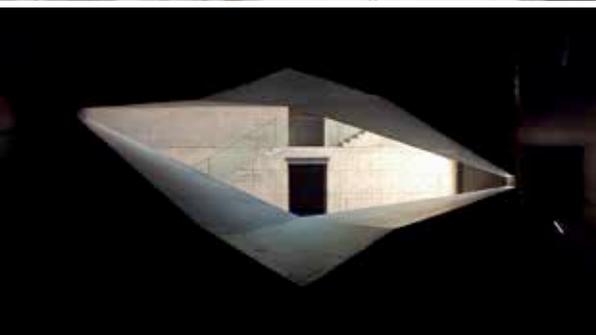
Flake And Flames (Directors: Jesper Bram, Dirk Behlau; Language: English; Runtime: 80 mins) Centred on the Kustom Kulture movement, Flake & Flames is fantastic filmic adventure that seeks out the hottest Kustom Kulture spots across the United States and Europe. Some of the world's best car and motorcycle builders, tattoo artists, custom painters, pinstrippers, as well as pin-up models share their tricks and experience. Artists dedicated to art forms traditionally frowned upon by established society show you why nothing else can compare.



Obey The Artist (Director: Ondi Timoner; Language: English; Runtime: 14 mins; Part of a 3-short compilation titled Designing Art) Street artist, graphic designer and activist Shepard Fairey became widely known during the 2008 US presidential election for his Barack Obama Hope poster. As it watches Fairey bring a twelve-foot mural to life, the film also traces his early punk rock days of rigging copy machines to the high points of his thriving, independent business that harnesses the power of technology.



The Art of Design t-shirts (various designers)



Tadao Ando: From Emptiness To Infinity (Director: Mathias Frick; Languages: German, Japanese (Eng sub); Runtime: 52 mins) Called the 'Japanese Master of Minimalism' and 'the father of haiku architecture', Tadao Ando is one of the most revered architects working today. The film interviews, accompanies, and observes the Pritzker laureate at work to understand the sources, inspiration, and motivation driving him and his world-famous buildings.



Cutie And The Boxer (Director: Zachary Heinzerling; Language: English, Japanese; Runtime: 82 mins) An intimate observational documentary, Cutie And The Boxer chronicles the unique love story of Ushio and Noriko Shinohara, a pair of married Japanese artists living in New York. Anxious to shed her role as assistant to her overbearing husband, Noriko finds an identity of her own. This film is a moving portrait of a couple wrestling with the eternal themes of sacrifice, disappointment and aging — all set against a background of shared lives dedicated to art.

The festival has been independently run by Ng's studio, Anonymous, with no public funding nor major corporate sponsorships. 'The festival's sustainability is constantly under siege with the rise of venue rental, shipping fees and manpower. What has made the festival possible are the support from the attendees and our partners and collaborators.'

Having a theme this time also offered up opportunities for new programming, as Ng shares: 'Introducing a theme to the festival seems like we are running ourselves into a corner when the festival is already about a niche subject in design, but so far, it's given us wider opportunities to develop interesting spin-offs around the festival — such as The Art of Design t-shirt series.'

This series of special edition t-shirts is produced in collaboration with North East (Japan). Seven invited international designers were each tasked to create an artwork around a creative discipline (of architecture, contemporary art, fashion, food Design, photography, DIY culture and graphic design — all based on this year's film selection). +

A Design Film Festival will run between Sept 5 and 14 at Shaw Theatres LIDO, Singapore. Between September and December 2014, a selection of present and past festival films will be screened on-board Singapore Airlines flights