

Rising Stars: Joan Chong Lay Kheng An Olympian in Design

Nanyang Polytechnic graduate wins Singapore's first gold medal in graphic design technology at the WorldSkills Competition.

MISS Joan Chong Lay Kheng is an Olympian in graphic design technology.

After all, this 21-year-old won Singapore its first gold medal in graphic design technology at the 40th WorldSkills Competition (WSC) -- better known as the "Olympics of Skills" -- last September. Some 900 participants from 51 countries competed in 45 skill areas, ranging from robotics to web design, welding to cooking, and car-body repair to landscape gardening, at the biennial event held in Calgary, Canada.

Team Singapore had a cohort of 21 representatives from local tertiary institutions, and the team brought home a bronze and three gold medals, eight medallions of excellence and the top Albert Vidal award in what was Singapore's best ever performance at WSC.

Miss Chong, who graduated with a diploma in Digital Media Design (Animation) from Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Interactive and Digital Media (SIDM) in 2008, now works at her alma mater as a development technologist. Her job scope involves designing promotional materials for the school.

She shares her experience at the competition.

How did you get selected to represent Singapore in this competition?

I went through two rounds of selection process in Singapore. In the qualification round, my tasks were to design a logo, name card and a water bottle label within six hours. The second and final rounds were a three-day competition, where I competed with seven other representatives from Singapore Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Nanyang Polytechnic and the Institute of Technical Education

Tell us about your experience in Calgary.

It was intense as the 21 competitors were from all around the world, and each of them was a champion in his own country. The judges were from the various countries that took part in the competition. In my category alone, there were 21 judges. The competition was held over four days and we were given a shorter time to accomplish our tasks, compared to what I had gone through in Singapore. The competition tested our creativity, endurance, attention to details and our speed in delivering concepts and designs.

First we had to design a poster, a stencil and three postcards for War Child Canada, a non-profit organisation, in less than six hours. We also had to come up with designs for board games, a desktop calendar and a book cover for a fantasy book targeted at teenagers.

Despite the tension during the competition, it was a valuable experience. I had the chance to

interact with participants from different countries and see for myself how cultures could affect design.

Why do you think you won in Calgary?

The animation course that I had taken in Nanyang Polytechnic gave me a strong foundation in design skills. Many of the designs that we had to come up with were targeted at teenagers. Hence my illustration skills came in useful. I was also able to stay focused throughout the competition even though people could walk up to my booth and watch me work.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in digital media design?

When I was young I loved watching Disney movies and Looney Tunes cartoons. The animated actions and stories had piqued my interests. And I love to draw.

What is your dream job and how do you think you can achieve it?

My dream job is to be a world-class designer! I am intending to further my studies in design and bring it to a more advanced level.

How do you think your design skills will help you shape a career in digital media design?

To me, the knowledge of 2D graphic design is the foundation for better animation. I believe my skills and knowledge in visual communications will help me in developing appealing animation characters. The competition made me realise my passion for design and I would love to continue in this line. As for my future plans, I would definitely love to further my studies in visual communications, learn more about its history and improve my design skills.

What is digital media design?

Digital media design uses both art and digital technologies to create interactive and creative design for the entertainment, edutainment and media industry. It covers animation, games design and interactive media.

What are the career opportunities?

Graduates from the course can apply for jobs in animation studios, film and post-production studios, games and software design companies, broadcasting companies, advertising agencies, online interactive games companies and web design companies.