

## THE TRIO HALL

Director Su Hui-yu

Taiwan | 2025

85 min. | Mandarin with English subtitles

Screenplay Su Hui-yu. Cinematography Chen Kuan-Yu. Editing Chan Ki-Yan. Music Modern Cinema Master, Monbaza Chang, Emma Shih. Sound Design Kao Chin Lun. Production Design Liao Yin-chiao. Costumes Jing Han Huang. Make-Up Tzyy Leng Chow. Casting Cookie Chen. Producers Jing Han Huang, Chen Ping-chia. Executive Producer Huang Jing Han. Co-Producer Vladimir Nadein. Production company Jing Moving Image (New Taipei City, Taiwan). With Hsiao Kurt, Chen Ching, Lai Hao-zhe, Liao Yuan-ching, Yang Chia-en, Ng Chi-wai, Shu Wei-chieh, Chen Kim.

## Synopsis

Nothing is sacred in this eccentric romp of a revue. Stalin dances with Chiang Kai-shek, Mao with a roller-skating Hitler in 80s attire, not to mention Churchill sporting a bathing costume. This contest of dictators is flashy, flamboyant, Hegelian-dialectical and global – a provocative pop re-enactment of Cold War worlds! A satire that screams a loud No to chauvinism and colonialism, told here from the perspective of the East Asian island nation of Taiwan (with vague side glances at the near future). Its mastermind: the exceptional artist Su Hui-yu, who has turned his eponymous 2023 performance at MOCA Taipei into a very special feature film debut oozing with boundless creativity. While his “reshooting” short film series resurrected the spirit of Taiwanese film history – mostly from the martial law era – **THE TRIO HALL** draws us into the orbit of two visual cultures at the ultimate crossroads of entertainment, escapism and ideology: the romances of the ‘Three Hall’ cinema of the 60s and 70s (made famous by Chiung Yao & Co) and the TV and variety shows of the 80s. What the hell is going on, asks **THE TRIO HALL**, and answers with the very best of everything! (Fabian Tietke, Barbara Wurm)

Su Hui-yu obtained an MFA from Taipei National University of the Arts in 2003 and has remained active in the contemporary arts scene and the film society ever since. Su’s works have been part of renowned festivals, exhibitions, and arts institutes, including the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, Singapore International Film Festival, BAFICI, and KIVFF. In 2017, the International Film Festival Rotterdam dedicated a retrospective to Su’s video works.

**Films:** 2008: The Fable Shoots (short film). 2009: Bloody Beauty (short film). 2010: Stilnox Home Video: The Midnight Hours (short film). 2012: The Upcoming Show (short film). 2015: Nue Quan (short film), A Man After Midnight (short film), Man Carrying Shame (short film), Thou Shalt Not Self-pollute (Dr Kinsey) (short film). 2017: Super Taboo (short film). 2018: The Glamorous Boys

of Tang (short film), The Walker (short film). 2020: The Women’s Revenge (short film). 2025: The Trio Hall.

## Director’s Statement

## The Variety Show in the Museum

Eine humoristische Performance, um den „Mist“ der Gegenwart zu reflektieren

**THE TRIO HALL** is a movie created during the museum show of the same name. In the summer of 2023 at MOCA Taipei (Museum of Contemporary Art), a movie was produced and performed live for spectators during the two-and-a-half-month exhibition, with the visitors’ participation. It references modern art, 20<sup>th</sup> century history and pop culture, and was ultimately presented in the form of a TV variety show. It revisits those who have been forgotten today, but could recall the memory of the Cold War and lead us to focus on the shit of the present day in a darkly humorous way.

Su Hui-yu

## Interview

## Challenging Common Perceptions

The director of **THE TRIO HALL** on dealing critically with conflicting narratives of Taiwanese history, questioning categories, and using irreverent humour

*Barbara Wurm: It seems perfectly fitting to have your film in Forum since it questions the borders between cinema, performance, and experimentation. Maybe you can start by taking us back to the origins of this project – when did it become clear that it would be a film and what additional steps did you take to shape it into what we see today?*

Su Hui-yu: It all started three years ago when MoCA Taipei invited me to create an exhibition. They were expecting something multi-dimensional, multi-media, and immersive. I proposed the idea of making a film within the museum. As you know, I often use the term ‘reshooting’ to describe my personal method. My previous video works often revisited both Taiwanese collective memory and my personal memories. This approach often involves films, public cultural events, or significant historical moments, particularly from the martial law era. Sometimes it is inspired by books, films, or artworks. **THE TRIO HALL** represents a broader vision. In Chinese, the title translates directly to ‘three-space movie,’ reminiscent of ‘telefoni bianchi’ in 1930s Italy. In Taiwan, we had a similar genre in the 1970s, during the final years of martial law. At that time, people needed mental space to cope with the pressures of military governance, and romantic films – often set in three domestic spaces, a café, a living room, and a dining room, became popular, though eventually cliché. For our exhibition at MoCA, we worked with Italian curator, Eugenio Viola, who had previously curated the Italy pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale. He suggested the English title, **THE TRIO HALL**, emphasising ‘trio’ as a metaphor for concepts like RGB colour

in films and visual arts. The process began with the opening of the exhibition at MoCA Taipei in 2023. Essentially, we set up a film production company within the museum. We had an office, a rehearsal space, audition rooms, dressing areas, post-production facilities, and a film studio – all transparent and visible to the public. Over the course of two and a half months, we produced the film from start to finish. During the exhibition, we continued creating new sections and clips. Exhibition visitors never saw the entire script. They only encountered fragmented pieces. It was colourful, dynamic, and carried the aesthetic of contemporary art, creating an ambiguity. Visitors often asked themselves, what exactly are we seeing? It looked like a 1970s happening or a film about the making of a film. Eventually, though, it became a feature that premiered at the Berlinale. It's an ongoing voyage. Our next stop will be Bogotá, Colombia, this October at the Museum of Modern Art, known as MAMBO. In 2026, we plan to create another new section in Manila, Philippines. We will continue adding new sections to the film.

*Fabian Tietke: Could you speak a bit about the wide variety of subjects you manage to incorporate into the film?*

SHY: I'm interested in exploring complex issues of geopolitics in Taiwan, colonial history, the Cold War era, and the influence of military governance. There's also the profound impact of Chinese culture that mainly came with the nationalist party of Chiang Kai-shek, with elements of chauvinism, Confucianism, and collectivist traditions. Through the variety show format, I aim to raise questions. There are two melodramatic scenes in the show with only two characters. They perform in front of a blue screen and the script was generated by ChatGPT. These AI-generated stories were, frankly, very boring, but we invited performers to interpret them in their own way. It became very interesting in the end because humans can also create a space themselves. Afterwards, it took us an entire year of discussions with editors, key team members and the curator to shape it into a feature film fit for the cinema. I believe we're living in an era of great tension. You can feel it in Ukraine, the Middle East, and even here in the Pacific region. I also want to reflect on contemporary issues we face today. I reference historical figures from World War II alongside current politicians, reimagining them as 'world talent kids.' Through dark humour, I try to challenge beliefs and perspectives that people hold, even if it might offend some. I think it's time to do that as an artist. If we can offer imaginative or humorous ways to foster mutual understanding, I think it might be a good way. QUOTE: As an artist, we are creating some interface. Even without knowing what it is, it triggered audiences' curiosity.

*FT: I would be very interested in hearing your thoughts on how present these different historical layers are in Taiwan today. Obviously, the post-World War II era is present because it shaped Taiwan as it is today. What about the 1970s and the martial law era – how much is it part of the current debate in Taiwan now?*

SHY: Like South Korea, in the late 1980s, we had the first wave of democratisation. Martial law was lifted. Without bloody revolution, luckily, we gradually transitioned to democracy over the course of two decades. Today, Taiwan is a very well-developed democracy with a strong economy although there are still ambiguous political undercurrents and influences from the U.S. and China. Even though most people here identify as Taiwanese, the government's official name doesn't reflect that and it is not recognised as a sovereign state by the majority of countries. We are caught between political pressures from two sides, but mostly from China, which continues to threaten to use military force. Taiwan is often compared to Ukraine – both places grapple with issues of identities and conflicting historical narratives. In Taiwan, most people support diversity. Even with differing identities, there's no violence. We resolve conflicts through democratic processes like elections, although the looming presence of China remains a source of fear for many. On a positive note, the government actively supports the arts, which

creates an environment where experimental projects like mine can thrive. Censorship is virtually non-existent in cultural spaces, allowing artists to explore freely.

*Yun-Hua Chen: A lot of your cultural references are very locally rooted, whereas your films engage with global issues and incorporate Western historical and cultural theories. How do you find balance in that interface? How do you plan to evolve the project in different contexts?*

SHY: When I was designing the exhibition, I wanted to reference the 1980s – the decade of my childhood. The 1980s was transformative for Taiwan. We began integrating into the global economy and American pop culture flooded in: variety shows, talk shows, rock and roll, modern art. I tried to merge these elements together. I've also noticed that this is not unique to Taiwan. People in Colombia, for example, also have similar experiences. When I screened my previous work, *THE GLAMOROUS BOYS OF TANG*, another 'reshooting' project inspired by a 1980s Taiwanese film, in the Czech Republic, a film professor emailed me afterwards. He said, I don't understand what you are doing in the film, but it made me curious about the original film. That encounter inspired me so much. As an artist, we are creating some interface. Even without knowing what it is, it triggered audiences' curiosity. That's been my personal approach since then.

*BW: Do you have specific audiences in mind when creating your films?*

SHY: When I was editing *THE TRIO HALL*, I had a global audience in mind. I thought about people who are familiar with the post-World War II history, TV culture, variety shows, modern art, or Jimmy Fallon's shows. We believe that this film is for everyone. In this film, I'm trying to challenge the perception of identity. What is East? What is West? Are you European, or are you German? How do you identify yourself? That's also the source of much of the world's tension today – identity, belief, and narrative. This film, in a way, serves as a metaphor for that. We expose the entire process to the audience in the museum – they see everything as it unfolds. We are asking, what is a narrative? What is your narrative? How do you construct your beliefs? Or, perhaps, do they mean nothing at all?

*FT: It's quite interesting that consumerist TV culture makes this film globally accessible. I am curious about the figures you've chosen – dictators, politicians, historical personalities. How did you choose them?*

SHY: When we talk about history, we all have limitations. We learn history through school or the media, shaping our historical consciousness over time. Winston Churchill could be a real asshole in India, and Mao Zedong could be a hero in China. The figures I chose are the familiar ones in my personal memory. In the first talk show segment, World Talented Kids Panel, the selection of characters like Macron, Trump, or Kim Jong-un is influenced by a Taiwanese perspective. In Colombia, they might not be that important. So when we bring this project to Colombia, I'll need a local producer and curator to provide new perspectives and probably create new roles. As an artist, as a person, I have my personal limitations. I can't know every historical figure, but I tried to have fun with categories like East and West, and I asked about Africa. How about Africa? It's dark humour, of course. The world sometimes feels like a kindergarten or a high school. It's not a new idea, but I wanted to put my own spin on it this time.

*YHC.: When we discuss histories and identities, Taiwan is particularly interesting because it has gone through different regimes, cultures, languages. History has been rewritten multiple times. Can you elaborate on the concept of reshooting? It seems to be more than simply filling gaps, redoing something new. It's also about archiving the past.*

SHY: Yes, archive is a keyword. Although Taiwan has an official National Archives Bureau, not all government institutions open their archives to the public. For example, we have three state-run television stations in the past. They've since been privatized, but they keep hold of vast archives of video clips, films, and news footage that technically belong to the public. These archives originated under the Kuomintang (KMT, the official name of the Chinese Nationalist Party) government during martial law, so these archives remain closed and demand substantial fees when one requests access. That's why a lot of Taiwanese artists, including myself, dig into history. We lack an open archival system, yet collective memories are so important to us. This is also why I decided to use the concept of 'reshooting.' In the film industry, 'reshooting' usually means something went wrong. For me, it's a metaphor. Reviewing our history is about confronting what was forbidden, misunderstood, or misplaced. As an artist, I 'reshoot' particular historical moments – whether it's a film, a book, TV program, or public event – and reinterpret them in my own way. As you said, it's about correcting something, and also adding a new layer. This is the only way we can engage with our past.

*FT: Is it a challenge to deal with your country's history as a Taiwanese artist?*

SHY: This ties into Taiwan's ongoing efforts towards transitional justice. It's a big project that requires cooperation across institutions, so progress is slow. As an artist, as an individual, we are also trying to contribute through our own methods. Discussing history in Taiwan can be sensitive because we lived under dictatorship for decades, with a single, state-controlled narrative. Even today, many people refuse to trust the official history taught in schools. Regardless of which political party is in power – pro-Taiwan or pro-China – there's scepticism. So this is about how trust can be built and how communities can be held. We probably still need different narratives and we also need diversity. I don't have a definitive answer, but Taiwan's history is woven with multi-layered identities and languages – indigenous groups, Hokkien speakers, Hakka communities, and the descendants of mainlanders who arrived with Chiang Kai-shek's KMT government, which declared Mandarin the official language. Taiwan is like a teenager, still unsure of who it is or who it wants to become. But it also means we don't need a singular answer, identity, or narrative. This is why we can create projects like this one. It's fun.

*BW: I was wondering, is there a chance for the film to be released in Taiwan? Being such an important way of approaching archives, history, and politics, do you think it will be received in mainstream cinemas or will it remain within the niche of contemporary art and museum spaces?*

SHY: For film festivals, there's no problem. **THE TRIO HALL** has already been invited by someone. While it mainly features commercial narrative films, it also has diverse programmes that welcome some strange works like mine. But if you are talking about releasing the film in a regular cinema for a whole week, I don't think there is a market for that. Institutions like the Taipei Fine Arts Museum would probably screen it as part of their film programmes. M+ in Hong Kong could also be open to it, but as you said, it would still be framed within the contemporary art context. But I'm curious. I haven't shown this cinema version to the general public yet. I am eager to see the reactions after the world premiere in Berlin and later in Taipei or in Bogotá. The film is challenging, I guess. For example, when I showed it to my kids, they were like, 'Why don't you just make something like Star Wars? That's easier.' Even kids, like my daughter, can recognise contemporary art, 'Yeah, that thing is contemporary art, and my father is making that. I've seen that – boring.' That's fun for me to hear. I don't see art as something sacred. I view things equally. I enjoy connecting different elements, like in **THE TRIO HALL**. Maybe after this, I will consider making a more popular film. I don't see that as a contradiction. It could be both. This film is just the first attempt.

*BW: Your film has triggered very different reactions within the selection team, as you can imagine.*

SHY: I've sometimes received very mixed reviews in Taiwan, especially when my work touches on gender politics. As a man, addressing these topics can be tricky. One previous film of mine, **SUPER TABOO**, premiered at International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2017. It was about pornography and memory, explored from a very male perspective. The film was invited to several queer festivals after Rotterdam. That made me realise that even as a straight man, queer theory and queer thought are essential because we, too, suffer under patriarchal systems, especially Taiwanese men. Taiwanese men had to perform in order to seem strong enough and man enough. Physically, we are men, but I don't know what it means to be straight enough or man enough. I'm not surprised that my work eventually found its way into queer spaces. People saw these elements in my films and over time I became part of that conversation. And I'm always interested in the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and identity. It all boils down to how groups are formed, how categories are made, and how people are forced to fit into them. Sometimes people say to me, 'You're not queer. Why do you make these films?' But how do they know? How do I know? Am I really straight enough? Everything becomes so extreme nowadays. What I want to do is to reduce some tension, but I do it through radical means: hard jokes, violent imagery, pornography, or crazy fantasies about sex. These elements aren't meant to push people towards darkness. On the contrary, they're intended to free us from rigid beliefs, even if just temporarily. We can become more human and talk to each other. I know it sounds too idealistic, but as an artist and filmmaker, that's the only hope I have.

*FT: Would you say that is a new trend in Taiwan, trying things out visually, narratively?*

SHY: There are more video artists entering the film industry now. Many European film festivals are inviting video artists to showcase their work, like Isaac Julian, for example. In Taiwan, there are animation artists who create both video art and films, artists experimenting with game engines, and others with performance art being documented and transformed into films. Artists and experimental films have more space now, I'd say. They sometimes have resources to create as well. Kaohsiung Film Festival and the Golden Horse Film Festival are also interested in curating programmes of these works.