

# 2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships

## Mohawk Fine Papers Honorable Mention



**MAYURAM TIRUCHELVAM**

Film  
Graduate student  
Columbia University

I have always been a storyteller, a writer, a weaver of tales. When my family immigrated to the United States in 1983, escaping the bloody civil war in Sri Lanka, storytelling and my imagination helped me to cope with the strange world of suburban Pennsylvania, where, as a foreigner and minority, I felt isolated. I devoured literature, history and film, which enabled me to see worlds where people transcend their differences to build a better world. My personal story has been about realizing these worlds and turning the beauty of human difference into a shared understanding of humanity.

Working with children has forced me to hone my storytelling skills with wit, whimsy and spontaneity. In 2005, I cofounded Regeneración Childcare NYC, a volunteer group that provides childcare for low-income families involved in grassroots community organizations. While their parents work on local campaigns for social change, Regeneración provides an environment where children feel safe, supported and free to explore and imagine. The kids around me have taught me about inventing stories that charm, engage and elicit emotion in audiences with brutally short attention spans. I've learned to tell stories that incorporate the experiences of children who come from rich cultures and diverse but sometimes difficult backgrounds.



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## MAYURAM TIRUCHELVAM

Film



My experiences as a community organizer and storyteller led me to return to filmmaking as a career. I've always been passionate about cinema, and have used film and video to tell fictional and nonfictional stories. Now, my goal is to create age-appropriate films to inspire, educate and entertain young people.



I recently began the graduate film program at Columbia University. Columbia is known for its focus on narrative filmmaking and strongly supports my interest in creating socially aware films. With Columbia's support, I am combining my work in the community with my filmmaking. I am currently developing a film called "Exile Generation"—a story of five unique kids with amazing powers who overcome injustice and change the world. Last semester, I developed the story, using the tools I gained in the classroom, and performed it as an episodic children's program at the Critical Resistance 10 Conference in California. It was a huge hit with kids and adults alike.



This summer, I am producing a film called "Domestic," about a little girl who creates a fantasy world inspired by stories her grandmother tells her. The film follows Luna, a 7-year-old girl born in New York to immigrant parents, and her grandmother, a Guatemalan house cleaner in New York. My inspiration for this film came from Regeneración's work with the nonprofit Domestic Workers United. I am also directing a film called "27 Days," a romantic story about an Asian-American telemarketer who falls in love with a magical multiracial New York artist. This film shows my commitment to featuring characters that represent the beauty and diversity of America.



My intent as a filmmaker and a community activist is to translate the beauty, wonder and mystery of today's world into language and imagery that all people can understand, while simultaneously manifesting visions of our hopes and dreams. In short—I see the imagination as magic and storytelling as a way of creating magic in our mundane world. Films are the means through which I tell the stories of struggle, and through which I hope to inspire magic in the adults and children around me. As a community activist and a filmmaker, I am in a unique position to create visions of our better future—humanity, dignity and peace—and project them to the world.

