Jeffrey Lau Wan-kit tells his readers that love is all around in his breakout comic series Feel 100%, which earned him a Gold Award at the Second International Manga Award in Japan. However, his own life tells a difficult story.

“To me, the award is a recognition for my efforts,” said the 42-year-old comic artist. “I feel like I received a good report card at school.”

Lau is the second local comic artist given the Award which was organized by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to encourage non-Japanese artists for their outstanding performance in comic books. Last year, Lee Chi-ching received the first international Manga Award for his work Sun Zi Tactics.

Lau has taken part in many art competitions and won numerous prizes since he was a child. He never thought that he would be a professional comic artist, although he was determined to follow his interest in art ever since he was small.

“I think I was destined to work in the art field. I was aware of this when I was a child. Even though my parents have never appreciated my choice, I still find art giving me the satisfaction that I cannot find anywhere else,” he said.

After graduated from Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute, now known as the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education, he worked as a toy designer and earned a monthly salary of HK$4,000 to HK$5,000.

Four years later, he suddenly received a phone call from a publisher offering an interview for a position of comic book assistant. He found out later that someone had sent his drawings to the publisher, but he did not know who had done so. “I don’t know whether it is my ex-girlfriend or my classmate. I’d lost contact with them,” he said.

Working as a comic assistant was not easy for Lau. Receiving a low salary, Lau had to endure great pressure from his family.

Whenever he felt frustrated, he would turn to Japanese sport comics, his favourite kind.

“The characters in sport comics never give up when they face great
difficulties. From the comics, I realized what determination is and regained my confidence and self-esteem,” Lau said.

Unclear about his future after struggling for three years, a golden chance came. Hui King-sum, the editor of Comic Boy and the producer of the famous local comic Street Fighter offered Lau a job as chief comic artist.

At the new company, Lau started to produce short comics of his ideas. It is also where he produced Feel 100%, which gained massive popularity among young people and has now been made into four local movies and an online drama series.

“The turning point of my life as a comic artist came in 1992 when I started to produce Feel 100%.”

According to Lau, people nowadays care more about making. They are too materialistic, and forget what true love is. In relationships, people keep focusing on taking, but not giving. It is rare to be totally devoted to love.

“People who pay more attention to their feelings and to love are more likely to be hurt in Hong Kong. It’s understandable in such a complex society and so people have no choice but to hold themselves aloof from others in order to protect themselves,” Lau said.

Through Feel 100%, Lau wanted to tell people that love is all around even though life is cruel. Although people keep on chasing after material things, what they really need is love. “Money is taken away from us when we die. At the end, what we should treasure most is
“It’s very painful to lose somebody, but time cures all wounds.”

He added that a breakup of a relationship is not all bad. It was even better for it to come as early as possible. “The younger we are, the easier we can learn from our mistakes and carry on,” he said.

Regarding his work, Lau said it takes time for him to create a comic. “I am a demanding person. I admit that I draw slowly, but I think that the pace of Hong Kong people is too fast. We are too busy earning money,” he said.

Lau said Hong Kong is not a good place for comic artists as the market is not as big as Japan and many artists fail to make a living from their art.

To lead a successful career, Lau suggested that comic artists should be sensitive to culture in order to give the story local colour. He also suggested that the ability to adapt to new kinds of storytelling techniques is also important for comic artists.

“Hong Kong comics used to include a lot of narration, but I abandoned it and tried to make the story livelier by giving more dialogue to the actual characters in the story,” Lau said.

Lau also said that comic artists should always be enthusiastic about drawing and be very clear of what message to deliver, just like the message in Feel 100%.

people who love and care for us,” he said.

Lau’s comic also touched on choices that people have to make in their life.

One of the major characters, Hui Lok, looks for true love, while Jerry, another major character, is selfish but attractive.

Lau said the two characters represented two extreme types of men which women always find hard to choose between. “Young people, just like Cherie, often do not know what they really want. When they hesitate, they always hurt others,” he said.

Throughout the years since the publication of Feel 100%, Lau has faced many difficulties in his work and in marriage. He also said it was a challenge for him to put aside his feelings and concentrate on drawing when his marriage was in trouble.

“It’s very painful to lose somebody, but time cures all wounds. Apart from lovers, we still have our family and friends and we should pay attention to these valuable people,” said Lau.