Tisch arts school’s first Asian campus opens doors here

Amalia and Lai, both 25, joined another 31 students from abroad to enrol in a three-year Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree course in film and television.

About 300 applicants had applied for places. Half of the students accepted were from the United States and the rest from Australia, Europe, Asia and Central America.

In his speech, Mr Lee said Singapore has a shot at becoming the Hollywood of the East.

“Singapore has been stressing on science and technology education for the last four to five decades,” he noted.

“We realised many of the economies at this stage of their development require something else - creativity and the understanding of the human. It is this expression of ideas and aspiration where there is room for Singapore to develop,” he said.

He hopes the Tisch School can play a critical role in nurturing the local creative industry, chiefly the film-making community.

The branch is part of the Government’s Global Schoolhouse initiative, which has attracted 16 renowned institutions here such as the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Established in 1965, the Tisch School of the Arts is also the first American art school to open a campus here.

Said Dr Mary Schmidt Campbell, its dean and chairman of the board of directors of Tisch Asia: “We can’t imagine a more ideal location for us than in Singapore amid its cultural diversity, entrepreneurial spirit, rich history and teeming community of artists.

“We are thrilled not only to be here but also that Tisch Asia will play a role in helping Singapore become a regional and global media centre.”

The branch occupies a 40,000 sq ft building in the former Ministry of Education premises in Kay Siang Road. Costing $12 million to renovate, it houses, among other facilities, two studios, editing laboratories, and a script and film library.

It has nine full- and part-time teachers.

Next year, it will offer MFA degrees in animation and dramatic writing.

Said Ashish Gadhia, 28, from Britain: “It’s an exciting and inspiring moment to be part of Tisch Asia now.

“The culture of cinema is shifting from the American centres towards China, India and Hong Kong. And Singapore is perfectly placed to capture that movement.”

Amalia and Lai feel the same way too.

Before enrolling, Amalia spent two years in Japan teaching English after graduating from Singapore Management University in business management.

Lai is an honours graduate in philosophy from the National University of Singapore.

Asked about the $60,000 annual school fees, Amalia said: “It’s great that the Government is promoting the arts but there ought to be more funding.”

For now, she is footing her bills through bank loans while Lai has a scholarship from the Media Development Authority.

In an award presentation last night at the Mandarin Oriental, Tisch alumnus Brett Ratner, director of the Rush Hour trilogy, presented Jackie Chan with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

douglasl@sph.com.sg