

Irwin Young

Irwin Young, former SMPTE president and long-time chairman of the board of directors of DuArt Film Laboratories (later DuArt Film & Video), New York, NY, died on 20 January 2022. He was 94 years old.

Young also served as president of Western Broadcasting WOLE (Channel 12), Aquadilla-Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, for decades.

Young, who was a Fellow of both SMPTE and BKSTS, served as the SMPTE president from 1993 to 1994. He was also a three-term president of the Association of Cinema and Video Laboratories (ACVL) and a member of the Technical Achievement Awards Committee of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). In 1987, he was awarded the SMPTE Progress Medal for his contributions “to both the motion picture and television industries.”

Young, along with DuArt president, Paul Kaufman and engineer Fredrik Schlyter, received an Academy Award for Technical Achievement in 1979 for developing a frame-count cueing system for laboratory printers utilizing Data General Nova mini-computers and Bell & Howell punched paper tape. In 2000, he received a second Oscar, this time for the Gordon E. Sawyer Award that recognizes “an individual in the motion picture industry whose technological contributions have brought credit to the industry.”

In the cultural realm, Young was the past president of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, the chairman and a board member of the Moving Image Inc. (New York City’s Film Forum), and a member of both the New York State Council on the Arts and the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities. He served on the board of directors of the independent distribution company Cinema 5. In 1988, he was awarded a



New York State Governor’s Arts Award for his support of independent filmmaking, and in 1991, the Independent Feature Project chose him as the first recipient of their annual Gotham Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ironically, Young passed away on the first day of the 2022 Sundance Film Festival, a showcase of independent filmmaking that he supported in its early years with direct sponsorship as well as by ensuring that young filmmakers at Sundance, a preponderance of whom were DuArt customers back then, had their answer prints ready in time for the festival, regardless of whether or not they were able to pay their lab bill. His festival condo parties, jammed with excited filmmakers and distributors, were often the biggest networking events of the fledgling festival.

Young assisted filmmakers such as Fred Wiseman, Barbara Kopple, John Sayles, Michael Moore, Spike Lee, Mira Nair, Jim Jarmusch, Errol Morris, Victor Nunez, and Joel & Ethan Coen at critical junctures of their early careers. DuArt also provided original processing for films directed by Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, Jonathan Demme, Barry Levinson, and shot by cinematographers Nestor Almendros, Allen Daviau, and Gordon Willis, among many others.

Young grew up in the shadow of the motion picture film lab his father, Al Young, co-founded in 1922 in a 12-story building on West 55th Street in Manhattan—the same building that DuArt was still occupying 99 years later when the company ceased operations. As a young man, he worked in film quality control and in DuArt’s bustling film titling operation. After a stint in the navy, he attended Lehigh

University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering in 1950. Soon after, he joined DuArt.

When Al Young died in 1960, Young became the president and the CEO of DuArt. Irwin’s only sibling, older brother Robert M. “Bob” Young, with whom Irwin remained remarkably close, pursued a different path, becoming a cinematographer, screenwriter, and acclaimed director. Bob, who co-wrote and photographed the independent classic, *Nothing But a Man* (1964), is widely regarded as the “godfather” of American independent filmmaking.

Irwin grew sensitive to the plight of independent filmmakers as a result of Bob’s filmmaking challenges. Irwin went on to produce not only *Nothing But a Man*, which won a double prize at the 1964 Venice Film Festival, but also Bob’s first Super-16 film, *Alambriستا!*, which won the *Camera d’or* prize at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival.

Due to Bob’s enthusiasm for Super 16 as a low-budget but high-quality format, DuArt became the first U.S. film lab to provide Super 16 services, including its renowned 35mm blow-ups. Young also imported the first NTSC Rank Cintel Mark III telecine in the U.S. in the late 1970s, and a few years later, the first full-immersion 16-mm telecine liquid gate. Later, in the 1980s, Young introduced video dailies priced per foot rather than per hour, which ruffled some in the telecine industry while lowering costs for filmmakers.

Young’s contributions to SMPTE would become a family affair over time. His daughter, Linda, chaired the 1993 SMPTE Winter Conference and was Editorial Director, Motion Pictures, of the *SMPTE Journal* for several years.

In addition to Linda, Young is survived by his other daughter Nancy, his brother Bob, and granddaughters Samantha, Michelle, Lindsay, and Mia.

—David Leitner