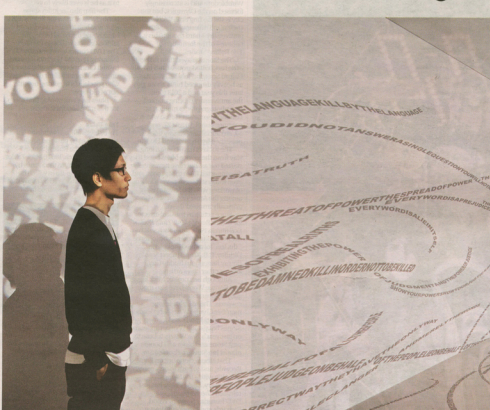


no so many words



Tang Kin-wah's text-heavy works spring from deep philosophical and religious ideas, writes Patrick Brzeski

Artist Tang Kin-wah hasn't held a solo show in Hong Kong since 2003, the year he won the Sovereign Asian Prize for one of the works he is still most closely identified with: repetitive swirling floral patterns composed of intricate, tiny icons of other professions, religious spaces and philosophical references, which envelop entire gallery interiors like psychédelic wallpaper.

This work, the 36-year-old returns with a new exhibition at Pearl Lam Gallery titled "Eve Home Trilogy 1", a site-specific installation project with curator David Chan Ho-yang, former director of Cheng Gallery and Shanghai Gallery of Art.

Latin for "beloved the Man", it is both intended to "love", criticize and be loved by Friedrich Nietzsche. And the show will contain elements both old and new to Tang's practice.

In his usual self-qualifying mode, Tang explains: "For me, this exhibition is not very important but still quite important, because it is something that looks very different from my previous work, and has some new things that I want to focus on more in the coming years."

"Eve Home Trilogy 1" is built around archival video footage of his show trial, execution and burial of Humanism movement leader and director Nicolas Chomsky in 1989. Snipping textual patterns along the walls set some of the themes and lead viewers into the gallery space along a corridor, towards a reflective aluminium plating, which turns into a series of chambers where the triumph of execution video works are shown.

The gallery visitors are made to look like those in Comenius's prison cell and the last glasses he might have taken towards the sky before his execution, according to Tang.

"I'm not interested in whether Comenius was an evil guy or a good guy, or his politics," Tang says. "What I hope the work will do is make people think about their own process of making judgments—how that process is kind of like a strange ritual and too readily attached to hard facts like we like to pretend."

"I want the viewer to feel like they are a participant in the spectacle that they are seeing, and to maybe think about the absurd act of judging, in they judge my work."

In conversation, the artist is affable but circumspect in the extreme, naming every thought over several times before offering orally spoken statements. He seldom gives interviews and always declines to be photographed by the press, preferring instead to supply portraits of his own—usually shot from long distances, or depicting him only in profile.

Asked about his aversion to

camera, he says, after several long hours: "Posting for someone makes me feel very uncomfortable."

Although quiet in Hong Kong, Tang's career has continued to flourish abroad. He has participated in several dozen group shows in Japan, Europe and the mainland, and held a solo show roughly once a year at a gallery or art institution in New York, Paris or Tokyo.

"Kin-wah is a very different artist than his peers in Hong Kong," says curator Chan. "People often see the spectacle in his work, but if you take time to understand his subject matter, it's very heavy, very critical work. He is stepping into Western philosophy, thought and religion."

Born in Guangdong province, Tang was five when his family moved to Hong Kong where he later attended Carmel PAU Secondary School, a fundamentalist Christian school in Tai Po.

He says that at the age of 17, when he was becoming more deeply interested in art, he experienced a crisis of faith and began questioning the teachings of the school. Around the same time he discovered and began reading Nietzsche, an

experience that he describes, in an interview that accompanies the exhibition, as like "throwing a bomb at my life, breating line from constraints and encouraging me to challenge all of the ideas I used to believe in."

Tang has since distanced himself from the radicalceptions of Nietzsche's writings. "I became critical of every single thing and after many years, this attitude began to have a negative impact on me... I realized I had swung from one extreme to another," he says.

"It took very simple, but there are a lot of implications and possible changes in just a single line. So you have to learn and practice a little bit better," that interests me," he says.

"This attentiveness to the subtleties of formalism led to his flowering text-based installations, which he filled with words and phrases expressing his existentialist awe, angst, and unstable sense of identity as a mainland-born, Hong Kong mixed individual. The dense,



Tang Kin-wah (far left) and his installation "Eve Home Trilogy 1", at Pearl Lam Gallery in Central, which focuses on the plight of executed Humanist director Nicolas Chomsky (above and below). The work explores the often fuzzy nature of mankind's judgments in situations that are not always clear-cut.

provocative wallpaper-like installations were coevolving with the same name.

"Nietzsche is still a symbolic figure for me and remains the key to my thought and readability of things and ideas," he adds in the exhibition interview with Chan.

Tang studied first at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and went on to earn a Masters of "Book Arts" at Camberwell College of Arts in London. Early in his formal art training he became infatuated with text, through an earlier interest in calligraphy, which he says he relished practicing in primary school.

"It took very simple, but there are a lot of implications and possible changes in just a single line. So you have to learn and practice a little bit better," that interests me," he says.

"This attentiveness to the subtleties of formalism led to his flowering text-based installations, which he filled with words and phrases expressing his existentialist awe, angst, and unstable sense of identity as a mainland-born, Hong Kong mixed individual. The dense,

provocative wallpaper-like installations were coevolving with the same name.

"Nietzsche is still a symbolic figure for me and remains the key to my thought and readability of things and ideas," he adds in the exhibition interview with Chan.

Tang studied first at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and went on to earn a Masters of "Book Arts" at Camberwell College of Arts in London. Early in his formal art training he became infatuated with text, through an earlier interest in calligraphy, which he says he relished practicing in primary school.

"It took very simple, but there are a lot of implications and possible changes in just a single line. So you have to learn and practice a little bit better," that interests me," he says.

"This attentiveness to the subtleties of formalism led to his flowering text-based installations, which he filled with words and phrases expressing his existentialist awe, angst, and unstable sense of identity as a mainland-born, Hong Kong mixed individual. The dense,

ARTIST IMPRESSIONS

KEVIN KWONG

Artist Chow Chi-mai has finally thrown down the gauntlet (and his paintbrush) by announcing his candidacy for the Sports, Performing Arts, Culture and Publication Functional Constituency seat in Legco this September.

It's a move that some had seen coming ever since the award-winning painter started to spend less time in the studio and more time with the Factory Artists' Concessions, which was set up last year to protect the interests of artists who work in former industrial buildings in the functional constituency no later than 2020. After all, how can you have one person representing artists, performing arts, culture and sports, performing arts, culture and sports... probably why for Ma, who has held the seat for 14 years, has certainly proved you can't.

One reason why Chow has decided to enter politics is that he is fed up with his job, he believes. He has failed to represent his constituents. The Hong Kong Olympic Committee president is better known for his poor attendance record at Legco than doing anything remotely interesting or useful for Hong Kong arts. What he thinks he may not run again this year, which has led Chow to consider former Arts Development Council chairman Ma Fung-kwo, who has expressed interest but has yet to declare his candidacy.

Since his announcement, Chow

has repeatedly said his chance of winning is slim. But given the political climate—anything can happen—a minister in the new government who resigned after just 20 days in office—could just happen. The first news to lobby had.

There are about 2,000 voters in this sector this year but judging from the two previous elections when it was challenged, in 1996 and 2004, only half of those eligible actually exercised their right to vote. And from that 1,000 or so vote, the margin between the two candidates was between 300 and 400 votes.

Chow supports the abolishment of Legco and his supporters have a wider range of voters still shown up in September to close that margin.

With discom in the "pro-establishment" factions—who would probably vote for Ma, member of the National People's Congress network—it's hard to tell which way the votes are going to swing this time.

Chow's platform is clear if a bit too general. He is calling for a review of the registration system for eligible voters in the sector to ensure that every professional member in each of the four fields enjoys the right to vote and is also calling for greater government support for long-term research and a stop to "extreme fees" on stage events.

He is young and full of passion, but I can also see Ma as the more politically savvy, experienced candidate. So may the best man win.

REVIEW

London 2012 Festival

London's Tate Modern gallery has unveiled in its dedicated space to live art and installations as part of plans to explore new areas of visual performance, film, video and performance art.

The Tanks, which opened their doors to the public on Wednesday, are the underground of London. Lucy and Lil Rhodes to help viewers understand the history behind its art and performance.

"This is not a museum, this is not a gallery, this is something different. This is something different," says Tate Modern director Chris Denon, who believes the creation of contemporary art of the Tanks will challenge artists to experiment with new work, the connection of the rest of contemporary art to the Tate Modern Project, a £25 million (£182.5 billion) transformation which will be a building added to the museum, expanding its size by 50 per cent.

"The Tanks allow us to offer a different space in our programming, so that performance, sound, moving images and participative can carry as much weight as anything else we are doing," Denon says.

As well as the Tanks, there are South Korean Kim Sang-hwan and Chengyuan Wang, who adapted her 1982 performance, *Four Movements by the Sea*, into two site-specific installations in Kim's spaces. Among his works is *Time to Play*, which explores the theme of progress by juxtaposing film of his parents' apartment in a

modern high-rise building with footage of contemporary home.

The exhibition, which runs until late October, is part of the London 2012 Festival bringing together an international programme of performance, film, video and live performance art.

The Tanks also features more established visual artists Suzanne Lacy and Lil Rhodes to help viewers understand the history behind its art and performance.

"This really wanted to see the other side of the coin. This is dialogue with what the youngest artists in the programme are doing," says Denon, who believes the creation of contemporary art of the Tanks will challenge artists to experiment with new work, the connection of the rest of contemporary art to the Tate Modern Project, a £25 million (£182.5 billion) transformation which will be a building added to the museum, expanding its size by 50 per cent.

"The Tanks allow us to offer a different space in our programming, so that performance, sound, moving images and participative can carry as much weight as anything else we are doing," Denon says.

As well as the Tanks, there are South Korean Kim Sang-hwan and Chengyuan Wang, who adapted her 1982 performance, *Four Movements by the Sea*, into two site-specific installations in Kim's spaces. Among his works is *Time to Play*, which explores the theme of progress by juxtaposing film of his parents' apartment in a

Kim Sang-hwan's video installation *Time to Play* at the Tate Modern, Photo: AP