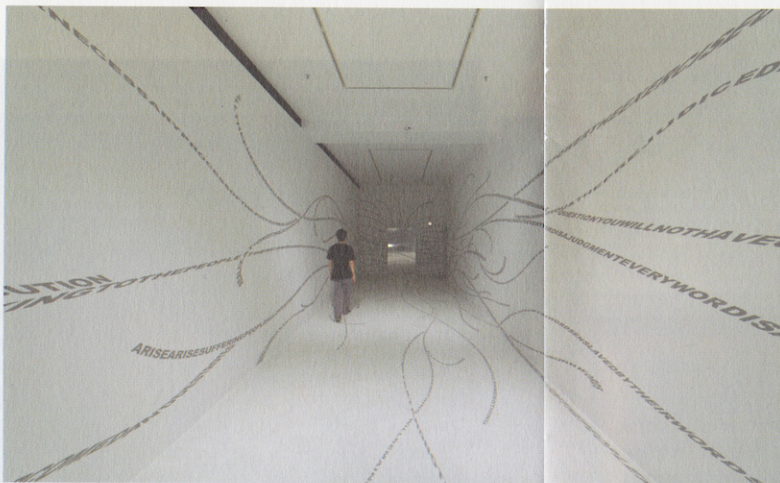


Words by Angel Li //
Images courtesy the artist //

TSANG KIN WAH

HIS CONSTANT SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH



Ecce Homo Trilogy I
2011
Dimensions variable
Multi-channel video, text & painting installation

Themes go beyond current affairs

For art enthusiasts who keep track of Tsang's works, it is not hard to detect changes as far as themes are concerned. Many of his earlier works tackle daily life and current affairs in Hong Kong. For instance, *Small Things, Big Issue*, created in 2001, takes a humorous look at problems and issues that everyone has to cope with on a daily basis. He coats pottery plaques with themes that encourage viewers to see life from a different perspective and also seek the right balance in order to survive.

Tsang admits that he has shifted his focus from current affairs to issues affecting humanity in recent years. In the past, it was mostly local happenings that triggered him to create and he resorted to text to voice his thoughts. He is now more inclined to look inward and ponders what truly matters to him. He finds that human concerns, such as religion and philosophy, appeal to him most and he creates artworks around these subjects. He does not consider social issues as separate from humanity and says that, "social issues, most of the time, boil down to fundamental humanity problems." Art, to him, is a way to consolidate and to materialise thoughts.

One of his prominent installation works is *Ecce Homo Trilogy*, exhibited at Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong in 2012. It consists of three parts *Prelude, Scene I Trial* and *Scene II Execution*. At the entrance, viewers are greeted by his signature style of graphics on the wall. The multi-channel video installation broadcasts the judgement and execution of dictators through the media and sharing platforms, thus allowing viewers to witness and participate in the process. The artwork exposes the judgement and deliberation of a legal sentence and Tsang questions the impartiality of the mechanism and ultimately, challenges the notion of absolute objectivity. He states that, "no matter how objective we are, there is always a subjectivity being injected into the absolute fact/truth/reality." *Ecce Homo Trilogy* ends on a rather gloomy note – that history will just repeat itself with slight variations.

Price of questioning

Tsang began questioning his belief systems in his teens and the internal turmoil produced almost pushed him to breaking point. He confesses that the reality appeared rather bleak when he was cynical about almost everything. Throughout the years, Tsang has learned to adjust his mental state for his own good, after realising that taking the middle path goes a long way to ensuring stability.

When asked if the local education system is far from conducive to nurturing young people who question what they are taught, Tsang actually holds a relatively positive opinion. "In recent years, some youngsters have become involved in politics as they are sceptical of authority. They are more assertive as well when fighting for justice in society." He believes that these socially conscious youngsters will be beneficial to the social development of Hong Kong in the long term.

Tsang spills the beans on his latest artwork - the theme revolves around the scandals of church clergymen molesting children. What he would like to do is illustrate the fact that seemingly moral people also have hidden desires. He does not want to keep viewers in the dark about the unpleasant aspects of society, even though some viewers may find his themes difficult and unsettling. Tsang proceeds to elaborate that he does not attempt to create an outlet that will help viewers feel less overwhelmed after seeing his works as he has not yet found the outlet himself.

Maybe it is this insatiable urge to confront the less appealing aspects of reality that drives Tsang to address fundamental problems with humanity. Definite answers are not what he is after; it is the unceasing search that matters.

Fascinated by drawing since a young age and intrigued by calligraphy since his university years, Tsang Kin Wah employs texts, presented in different art forms, as his main means of expression. His works may not be what they seem at first glance, requiring viewers to take a closer look in order to decipher the message close to the artist's heart. The art-viewing experience prompts the audience to reflect on some of the ideas widely held by society and more importantly, to question the legitimacy, authority and authenticity of such ideas.

By using texts as significant elements in his work, Tsang believes it can help reveal his thoughts more clearly and precisely than graphic art. It is also easier to express his thoughts with a theme in this way. The artist's working method usually involves first deciding on a concept that most concerns him. With the concept in mind, he begins conducting research from a wide variety of sources. His research is not limited to written texts since he also draws inspiration from music and movies. He then highlights phrases and keywords that strike a chord. He edits, amends and rearranges the highlighted texts and presents them in the art medium that he feels is most appropriate to the theme.

Considering the great bulk of sources available Tsang does not find the research overwhelming. Rather, the most difficult task is to narrow down the concept. Once he has made up his mind, the task of finding the texts to accompany it usually runs easily and smoothly. As he strives to express himself solely through his artworks, Tsang states that he does not select texts based on how eye-catching they are or just because they are easier for the viewer to comprehend. He suggests that he does not in any way create to appeal to any specific group of viewers.

Co-existence of contradictions

Some of Tsang's works challenge the notion of art. For instance, *Untitled - Hong Kong* embodies both "beauty" and "ugliness". If viewed from afar, the work displays beautiful patterns bearing a striking resemblance to those on Chinese ceramics. Yet when viewers study it closely, they will see that swear words are in fact embedded in the patterns. Polite society would see the patterns as alluring and the swear words as obscene. The artwork highlights the co-existence of these two contradictory qualities, demonstrating that there are indeed many grey areas in reality.

It is apparent that Tsang intends to raise questions about the static notions held by many people and about whether things are actually what they first appear. In recent years, the artist has ventured into installation art since the inclusion of space can have a different effect on exhibition-goers. "When a work is projected onto the floor, viewers can actually interact with the projections and become part of the installation. I believe that would be a much more interesting experience for them." How long Tsang spends on each project mainly depends on its scope. Sometimes, it is a matter of a few months. In some cases, Tsang may conceive an idea, but has to work out the most appropriate way to present it and that might take years.



Untitled - Hong Kong I
2011
Dimensions variable
Multi-channel video, text & painting installation

Tsang Kin-Wah

Born in Shantou in 1976, the Hong Kong-based artist graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Camberwell College of Arts, the London Institute. Solo exhibitions have taken place in Tokyo, New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Yogyakarta and Shanghai. Tsang is the recipient of the Tokyo Type Directors Club Prize 2007, the 2005 Sovereign Asian Art Prize (Sovereign Art Foundation), Winner of the Prize of Excellence (Hong Kong Art Biennial 2007), and his works are in key collections worldwide.