



# Culture Shock

Hong Kong painter Tsang Kin Wah explores dilemmas relating to self and society through his wallpaper-like works

TEXT: MADHAVI TUMKUR PHOTOGRAPHY: TSANG KIN WAH

At first glance it's easy to perceive Tsang Kin Wah's paintings as mere wallpaper. Unusually interesting wallpapers to be sure, with their curvy damask patterns and delicate pastel-shaded stalks, leaves, petals and tendrils, or designs borrowed from classic blue-and-white porcelain vessels and tiles. But it is not until the viewer is drawn closer to their detail that the truth begins to dawn. Suddenly, from their seemingly innocuous motifs emerges a torrent of embedded profanities, and what seemed to be decor is revealed to be a challenging medium of dialogue about the nature of art.

Confusing as the experience of discovering the secrets of Tsang's artworks may be, their essence is actually quite straightforward. As the artist himself explains, "My main concern is to explore the way we perceive and miss the things that surround us, and how we are cheated by the appearance or surface of an object. I try to explore a juxtaposition of elegant, classic and vulgar elements in one piece".

Born in Guangdong in 1976, Tsang migrated

with his family to Hong Kong in 1982. As a British colony with a history steeped in Chinese heritage, its urban culture was — and still is — deeply influenced by the interplay of two not always complementary influences. Tsang, like many others of his age, has found himself teetering on the cusp between them. Thus, whilst much of the inspiration for his art is drawn from the influential 19th century wallpaper prints of the great William Morris, he also felt moved to weave Chinese calligraphy through the patterns, expressing a side of his psyche otherwise repressed by the norms and taboos of Hong Kong society.

"Image and text are two different representational structures. One is pictorial and visual, while the other is the written form of language," Tsang explains. But in his works, Tsang has not just tied together these two modes of expression, but blurred them into something quite new which he uses to explore stereotypes, beliefs and perspectives.

'Blurring' is perhaps the key to unlock many of Tsang's text-free works as well. His 'White

Cube' exhibition with its white-on-white imagery, for example, sought to 'dilute' art into a blank background, raising the question of 'art as beauty, art with a message or art with a market value'. Covering the walls, floor, bench and cushions within a shopping mall with a wallpaper of computer-generated screen prints, Tsang's installation art criticised consumer habits and the brainwashing effects of glossy advertising. In another exhibition entitled 'Chinglish', he evaluated the uniqueness of Hong Kong's language, culture and mixed identities through depictions of blue-and-white Chinese pottery — a scheme which symbolised a bridging of traditions between the East and West.

Tsang's paintings are reflections of oneself — and this automatically invites one to find them offensive, humorous or simply outlandish. And that's the beauty of it all.

'Chinglish' will run from March 22 to June 3 at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Visit [www.tsangkinwah.com](http://www.tsangkinwah.com) for more information.

## 字裡行間

香港畫家曾建華的作品驟眼看來只是一堆像牆紙的圖案密碼，細看才發現它們其實正在探索個人與社會之間的矛盾

撰文: MADHAVI TUMKUR 攝影: 曾建華

第一眼曾建華的作品，通常會把它們當作模稜的牆紙圖案，極其量也只是些設計十分吸引的繡紙，彎彎曲曲的織花、淡淡的粉色枝葉、花瓣和藤蔓更是精緻無比，還有經典的藍白雙色中國瓷器及瓷磚。走近細看，真相才會慢慢浮現出來，優雅的圖案其實由一行行微型字體排列出來，字裡行間爆發出來的是花樣百出的粗話。透過裝飾性的手法探索藝術的本質，才是它的終極挑戰。

解讀真相的過程或許令人莞爾，不過作者的訊息其實相當明確。曾建華解釋道：「我希望發掘人們感知的方式，及如何忽視身邊的事物，受表象所蒙騙。所以我將典雅大方和粗俗文化並列，帶來全新的認識。」

曾建華1976年出生於廣東，1982年隨同家人移居香港，一個奉行中國傳統的英國殖民地。直到今天，中西文化的對立與融合，依然深深影響這個雙重性格的都會。曾建華這一代正是身處這個跳板的兩端，搖曳不定。他的繡紙作品既汲取19世紀英國藝術與手工藝運動先驅威廉·莫里斯的養分，同時又渴望將圖案編成中國書法模樣，這分裂的人格源於一種壓抑，壓力來自香港

的社會普遍的規範與禁忌。

曾建華說道：「映像與文字是兩種表達結構，一個是圖像及視覺，另一個是語體。」他的作品不但將兩種手法連接起來，更互相融合混和，撞擊出一連串的新見解，帶出他對世俗的定型、信仰和觀點的種種見解。

融和，也許是解密曾建華非文字作品的關鍵。例如他的White Cube展覽，就全是一個個有關白色的想像，將藝術淡化成一個空白的背景，質疑藝術的美學、訊息及市場價值。他也曾經在商場、地庫、地板、凳及坐墊上鋪滿電腦打印的繡紙，以裝置藝術諷刺當今的消費模式及鋪天蓋地的洗腦式廣告宣傳。他另一個名為《不中不英》的展覽則透過藍與白的中式瓷器概念，觀察獨特的港式語言、文化及多重身份現象，象徵東西文化的互動與交匯。

曾建華的作品是一種自我的反射，欣賞他的創作猶如看見自己討厭的、幽默的甚至乖僻的一面。這個自省的過程，就是藝術的真義。

《不中不英》展覽將於三月二十二日至六月三日在香港藝術館舉行，詳情可瀏覽 [www.tsangkinwah.com](http://www.tsangkinwah.com)



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