



colette

YOUR WORDS, OR MINE?

In this issue on Word-as-Art, all our featured artists, whether from New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Beirut, Baghdad, Mumbai or Cairo, are working in the English language, reflecting its cultural hegemony as a universal means of communication. Some of them, like Lawrence Weiner and Jenny Holzer, take things further by translating their work into multiple languages in different contexts. Here, we explore the cultural positioning of text in contemporary visual culture and look at how artists have decentralized the primacy of the image by radicalizing text, turning the textual into sculptural, visual material.

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Robert Montgomery. *Slow Disappearance*. 2014. Plywood, copper, aluminium, 12 volts LED, light bulbs. 220 x 120 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

Tsang Kin-Wah. *Men and Women, Young and Old, Cattle, Sheep, Donkeys - Everything*.
2010. Ink, emulsion and black vinyl.
Approx. 3.5 x 6 m. Image courtesy of the
artist and Osage Gallery, Hong Kong

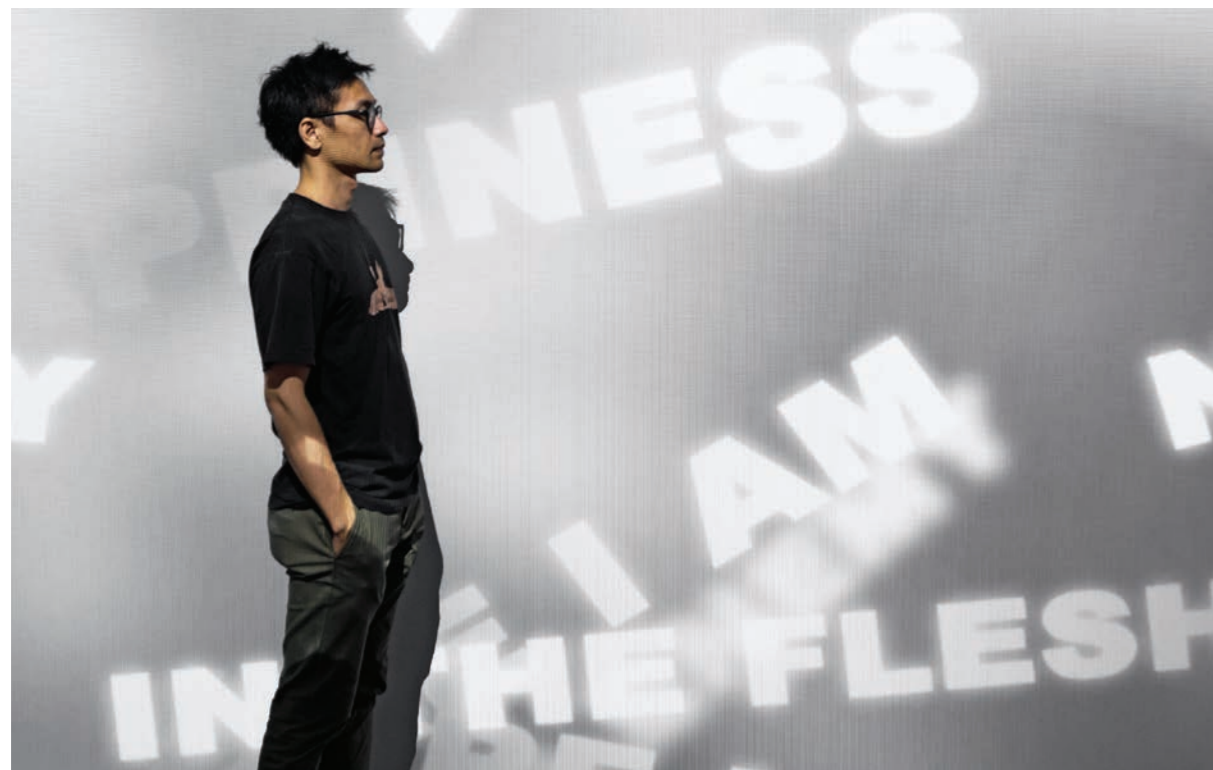
MEN AND WOMEN, YOUNG AND OLD, CATTLE, SHEEP, DONKEYS - EVERYTHING

**In the End
is the Word**

TSANG KIN-WAH



Above: Tsang Kin-Wah. *The Infinite Nothing*. Hong Kong Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Multi-channel video and sound installation. Dimensions variable. Commissioned by M+ Museum.
Below: Tsang Kin-Wah portrait. Images courtesy of the artist



Tsang Kin-Wah. *The Sixth Seal - HE Is Something That Should Be Overcome. You Are Something That Should Be Overcome*. Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou, 2014. Digital video and sound installation, colour and stereo sounds, 6 mins 36 secs. Dimensions variable

because it is my second language, so in some way I can keep a distance from the language and content." The tone has shifted from the erstwhile profanities to literary references and words of wisdom. With a mischievous look in his eye, he admits that, "There was a time when I was using swear words a lot because it's something local, rather temporary and radical; they try to challenge authority and power. But then some teenagers told me it was a little old-fashioned. Now I feel that foul language has an expiration period. I think, some years after I'm gone, it will be again something rather different because language keeps changing."

Perhaps surprisingly, some of his works incorporate explicit figuration, as with the *La Petite Mort* series (2011–2015) and his subtle (as in, barely visible) but highly graphic *Porn Painting* series (2009). He has alternated between the two methods (image and text) in a constant cycle of experimentation. Since images don't have the same visual clarity of text, he claims they offer greater possibilities and more room for interpretation. But instead of isolating image from text, his

current practice now integrates both. "After some time, I realised that the two directions can actually mix together, which is what I am trying to now work on in the studio."

Tsang's recent commission at New York's Guggenheim, *In The End Is The Word* (2016), demonstrates this by merging found footage with text in an immersive sonic environment. It features the controversial Diaoyu Islands, also known in Japan as the Senkaku Islands, an archipelago that China and Japan both lay claim to. A calm ocean is disturbed by unidentified passing boats, resulting in a confrontation between anonymous battleships. As things escalate, text streams vertically from the horizon and spreads across the floor, like water leaking and flooding the space in liquid language, only to be later submerged by a blinding white light. The title of the work refers to the prophetic outlook encapsulated by novelist John Steinbeck during his 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech: "St. John the Apostle may well be paraphrased... In the end is the word, and the word is man – and the word is with men." Amen.