



PROJECTION ROOM

BY ROSALY B. GAVILORIA

WHAT WOULD welcome art lovers at Peel Street in Central upon entering John Batten Gallery are English swear words and bad Chinese characters through its glass door. But what really surprise someone when inside are the not-so-subtle patterns, twirls and flourishes of both languages printed in white wallpapers. It is an intuitiveness adapted from the 19th century designer, William Morris.

A 28 year-old, slim and tall guy let me in. He wore eyeglasses (the usual Chinese accessory) and his big Adam's apple was very evident. Sporting a blue Nike t-shirt, navy jeans and rubber shoes, I was expecting a mature looking man (at least over 35) after arranging an interview over the phone, as his voice was so masculine (but he wasn't). Suddenly, I reminded my hypothalamus to get down to my task.

I took out my recorder, ball pen, notebook and digital camera and laid them at the table he prepared. After all, this guy was well mannered, a big irony of what he painted all over the gallery!

Tsang Kin-wah is Hong Kong's well-known contemporary artist who won the Asian Art Prize of US\$25,000 (HK\$187,500) of the Sovereign Art Foundation. His winning artwork, titled "I Love You", was exhibited at IFC Mall Atrium. A closer look at his masterpiece reveals words like "ILOVEYOURDOLLARHONEY."

"The term White Cube is used to describe a gallery after modernism. During modernism, most galleries were painted white and they just try to exclude all things from gallery space to make it an isolated space just for showing art. So you can see that most of galleries were painted white and they won't put extra things inside because they want to create a so called neutral space for art," Tsang explained.

While "cube" is usually associated on the rectangular boards or boxes as commercial gallery lay-outs.

"I met John last year and

There's something about the white cube

Tsang Kin-wah's current exhibition at John Batten Gallery is a true picturesque of money issues in the art market, racial stereotyping and his records of personal emotions.



discussed about an exhibition here. This is about the nature of gallery space—to explore whether there is something hidden behind. Just like money issues, relationships, the selection of artists, the pricing of an art piece and some things related to art market," he continued.

His installation art seemed like swallowing you up and captivating the very truth about the artist and the gallery owner. It displayed statements like "TRUSTTHISF*****ARTIST" and "F*****WHITEMANJOHN BATTEN."



"Well, I heard John is quite happy about it. He is a very open-minded person. He told me to paint whatever I like on the walls. So, I think he don't mind it," he stated.

"Actually, I first find some images, create the text and arrange them for the text in the computer. I print something out and after that I hand print on some rice paper. Then I used the papers to cover the surface of the walls," Tsang said.



One of the sub-themes of the exhibit recounts to an actual verbal racist attack he experienced in United Kingdom. He recalled that, "I was in the bus somewhere in Camberwell in UK—that was 2003. So, when I get on, there were two black kids going down to the lower deck. They saw me. At that moment, there were available seats near mine and they took those seats. They started laughing at me and they said: Oh, Chinese. There's a Chinese over there. F*****"

Chinese. I was very, very angry. I just used Chinese swear words to express my feelings. But what really shocked me—was they responded to me in Cantonese!"

After that experience abroad he narrated that, "I met some nice white guys there but I also met many white guys who didn't spoke nice to me."

More often than not, Asians who went overseas were discriminated or stereotyped. However, he said that it also

happened in Hong Kong.

"The whole work is the record of my emotions. It could be applied to Asians and other people as well—not just me. There are some people who share the same experience as mine.

A close inspection of the price list for the exhibition reveals a crashed-out in the prices of the art pieces.

"This tells the up and down of the prices of installation art in the market," Tsang explained. "It reflects the common norms in galleries that owners marked up 50 per cent in commission from the total selling price of a painting. Sometimes, it is a bit tricky. There are some art pieces that the price is very unreasonable 100,000 or more. There are some that are also cheaper—some hundreds. Here in Hong Kong, galleries can't really have a standard pricing for an art. At the same time, you can't really tell the value of an art. Most of them are too commercial."

Tsang is quite sad about the maturity of Hong Kong audience in terms of installation art.

"I think that most of them are still looking for paintings or decorations for their homes. Probably the most expensive art in Hong Kong are paintings and sculptures. Installation art, they think they just can't collect them or there's nothing worth collecting them. They just want something, like painting. That is easy to hang, take off, carry on and transfer. The space here is too expensive. Spaces among Hong Kong homes are so small and the walls are so low. So, you can't really put too much inside. For some rich people, their houses are so big but some don't really have the idea about this," Tsang lamented.

Tsang is a graduate of Bachelor of Fine Arts in The Chinese University of Hong Kong and earned his MA in Book Art at Camberwell College of Arts, The London Institute. Miss Choi, who is one of his best teachers at Camel Pak U Secondary School in Tai Po, encouraged him to be an artist.

Asked how he will spend the amount he won, Tsang answered "In Hong Kong you can have too much crown or get a lot of sponsorships for shows. So I think I will use that to continue my exhibition and support my art."