

曾建華 — 失去的信仰 (譯文)
LOSING HIS RELIGION

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Untitled - Hong Kong (2004)

「它們浮現，然後淡出。它們蠕動，又捲動。你的死亡。他的自負。死掉。」

曾建華雖然是一個寡言的人，卻是個多言的藝術家，其藝術事業正是始於他的文字作品系列。在他最新的宣言——《七印》之第四印，他的文字會被投射於一個放在油麻地西九龍走廊下的「游擊」黑盒內。

曾建華這個名為《七印》的系列取材於聖經最後一書《啟示錄》，參考了使徒約翰在異象中所見的書卷上七個象徵性的印。每一道印被揭開時，便要經歷一輪審判，而當七印全被揭開時，基督將再次降臨。不過，這些「審判」大都是考驗世人的災難。最先的四印有時被統稱為四騎士，是令戰爭、饑荒和瘟疫蔓延起來的反基督騎馬者。第四印——也就是曾建華這裝置主題——所啟示的是灰馬騎士，他以管轄四分之一土地的權柄「用刀劍、饑荒、死亡和地上的野獸」（啟6：8）到處殺戮。

這裏沒有馬，沒有騎士，沒有刀劍。但在這黑盒內，關於死亡的文字從上方的投影機內像蛇般爬到牆上、滑到地上，同時以撩人的嘶嘶聲把我們包圍於漆黑之中。恐懼。墜落。命運。地獄。骷髏。靈魂。他的地獄。文字起初很小，並且移動緩慢，繼而增加它們速度和數量，更鼓動起來。它們像蛆蟲般蠶食黑暗，直到全部變成一團光，然後重複整個過程。我們置身於這個不斷的循環，再次生和再次死。

一個沉靜的藝術家是怎樣創作出這種陰沉的作品？曾建華的《七印》是經歲月慢慢滲透，一再從他最廣為人知的威廉·莫里斯（William Morris）青花牆紙過濾出來。廣東俚語和英文髒話組成了牆紙上維多利亞時代的曲線，而那些文字卻跟我們現代世界中物質主義所要求的即時滿足感進行角力。他的文字藝術牆紙把美麗和粗鄙並列，只要觀眾向前多踏一步，細讀那些文字，對比便會愈加明顯。牆紙系列始於2003年他還在倫敦坎伯韋爾藝術與設計學院就讀期間，自此，他繼續朝着這方向邁進。《七印》系列是他是踏進新階段的其中一步，見證着文字由平面圖像轉化為一幕幕的移動光影。

但曾建華的文字藝術系列還建基於一個更原本的概念。無論自覺與否，當他仍是一個在香港的文學院學生的時候，他就已經開始追求這個概念了。其中一個例子是他的瓷磚組合作品，在設計上這作品可因應需要而展開和擴大，帶出了需要多少塊瓷磚才能把這件作品完成的疑問？三塊？五塊？曾建華卻聳了聳肩，因為這並不重要。他感興趣的是像迷宮般的形狀，每一個彎，每一個轉，都是思想和情感的交替。對他來說，所謂的整體其實比部份的總和還要少。

另一件跟《七印》有聯繫的早期作品是個較短期的項目——題為《Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values》的數碼印刷系列。曾建華重新演繹達芬奇的畫作，改變人物的表情，把天使轉為惡霸。那計劃從沒有被完整地或令人滿意地完成。它是男人為反抗男童時期所學到的價值而創作的，也許是曾建華最如實呈現的傳記式作品。他重繪達芬奇畫中的馬利亞和嬰孩耶穌，或是馬利亞和年輕的加百列，使當中的一人罵髒話或扮鬼臉。這是一個既衝動又帶孩子氣的男人的行為，如果說是對必修聖經課所灌輸的基督教價值觀作出的反抗，那樣做未免流於輕率。但曾建華在其牆紙藝術獲得成功後便重新着手這項計劃，他嘗試藉此擺脫他可能由

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“They emerge then fade. They worm and coil. Your Mortality. His Vanity. Be Dead.”

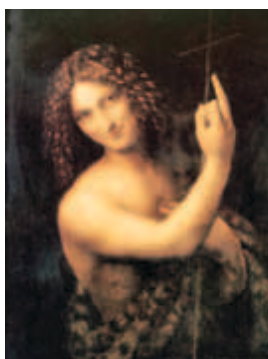
Tsang Kin-wah is a man of few words, but an artist of many — he has made his career with word-art projects. For Mobile M+, Tsang has installed the fourth part of his ongoing Seven Seals series (2009–), projecting text onto the inside of a pop-up white box under a Yau Ma Tei flyover.

Tsang's Seven Seals is taken from the Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, and refers to the seven symbolic seals that secure a scroll in the vision of St John the Apostle. When a seal is broken, a judgment is passed, and when all seven seals have been opened, Christ will return. However, the “judgment” is often in the form of an apocalypse that will test humankind. The first four seals, sometimes referred to as the Four Horsemen, are riders of “anti-Christ” here to spread war, famine and pestilence. The fourth seal, and the theme of Tsang's installation, is the revelation of a rider on a pale horse with the power over one fourth of the earth to kill ‘with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth’ (Revelation 6:8).

In Tsang's piece, there are no horses, no riders and no swords, but within the white box, from projectors above, words of death snake up on the walls and slither across the floor while sultry hisses embrace us in the dark: “The Fear. The Fall. The Fate. The Hell. The Skull. The Soul. His Hell.” The words start small and move slowly, then increase in speed and in number; they begin to agitate and shake. Like maggots, they eat away the blackness to become a mass of light. And then it repeats itself. On a continuous loop, we live and die, again and again.

How did this quietly spoken artist produce a work of such desolation? Tsang's Seven Seals has been percolating slowly over the years. It filters through from his earliest and best-known text-based works, such as *Untitled – Hong Kong* (2004), in which the curving Victoriana designs of William Morris' blue and white wallpaper are formed from Cantonese slang and English profanities. The words rail against the materialism of our modern day world that expects instant gratification. Tsang's word-art wallpapers juxtapose beauty with crudeness in a way that becomes more apparent as the viewer steps closer to read the words. The wallpaper project was developed during his days at the Camberwell College of Art and Design in London in 2003, and he has continued on this path ever since. The Seven Seals project is the latest in a series of steps that sees him pushing words from flat images to moving light.

But his word-art projects are based on a more fundamental idea that, consciously or not, he has pursued since the very beginning as a BA student in Hong Kong. One example is his series of tessellated ceramic tiles designed to expand and grow as needed, and which begs the question of how many pieces did it take to complete the work? Three? Five? Tsang shrugs. It doesn't matter. Tsang is interested in labyrinthine



Attempt at a Reevaluation of All Values (2007)
(Leonardo da Vinci, *St John the Baptist*, 1513-1516)

「文字景色」帶來的束縛和疑慮。就像許多仍在職業生涯早期（甚至在任何階段）的藝術家所面對的自我價值懷疑和憂慮被定格的問題時，相信這項計劃提供了一種釋放。不過曾建華很快便發現他與文字的關係還未完結，他開始嘗試在白色上用白色（較似抽象字母的人物在擺出性愛姿勢），以及用投射文字來壓縮空間，或使平坦的牆壁彎曲來擴大空間。他的文字超越文字表面和認知的解讀，逐步成為一種情感經歷。

由於文字景色的實驗性沉積物開始沉澱，曾建華發現自己能夠重訪那受束縛的童年。他持續着對形象化和圖畫化文字的探索，從而發展出其對基督教的道德和價值觀的一種檢視。上一次香港藝術家認真地以宗教（即使否定它）為題來創作又是甚麼時候呢？這就是曾建華非凡之處。他屬於回歸後年輕一代的藝術家，他和其他人包括周俊輝、白雙全和程展緯等的努力，讓香港能在國際藝術地圖上立足。但有別他的朋輩，曾建華甚少作品或幾乎沒有任何作品曾經提問過香港藝術家這個身份究竟意味着甚麼。如果他的朋輩在問：「我是誰？」對曾建華而言，更恰當的問題應是「我是甚麼？」。縱然如此，這都不是真正的問題，而是個起點。他沒有答案，也沒有感到需要給大家一個答案。他是個會讀尼采、黑格爾和海德格爾著作的藝術家，而為的只是樂趣。在今日全球化的亞洲藝術世界中，當每種陳腔濫調都拒絕消失的時候，實在是太容易地嘲弄曾建華的哲學興趣為另一噱頭，但這樣做也許是錯的。

曾建華有着我們對20世紀初由現代主義轉向存在主義的人的那種情操，他們期待着在被考驗的時間裏找尋意義。對於尼采，活在戰火支配的世界裏，藝術是一種令生活變得還可忍受的方法。對於活在美麗新紀元裏的我們，恐懼又是甚麼？是金錢？科技？政治？對於曾建華，是道德——並不是一般基本道德，而是一些對較黑暗事件的要求。我們身為世界公民，面對的是如《啟示錄》所描繪的事件，如科索沃的種族清洗和達爾富爾的種族滅絕，它們通過報章和電視頻道進入我們的客廳，如果我們決定要捨棄以往那種被動的旁觀證人的角色時，我們該抱持甚麼立場？這是後911事件的世界，還有右翼政權以教會之名克制婦女和她們的身體。宗教極端主義為恐怖式行為提高了賭注，而戰爭也已經使創傷後壓力症候群成為我們日常用語的一部份。在香港這個（亞洲以外的）國際新聞絕少蕩進大眾意識的地方，曾建華卻敢於去思索看到這些事後會引起甚麼樣的效果，即使幾經過濾，這些效果又怎樣影響着我們內心的景色。

《七印》的創作是經歷喪親之痛後開始，引導他重新評估自己的價值觀正是這種徹底的思考令他來到這裏。對於這個花很多時間沉溺於自己腦海中的藝術家，這個系列不知不覺地發展到可以讓他探索更大的問題和較沉重的主題。無論是對宗教上專制或對思考後結果的憤怒，這些思想和情感就是內在世界的各部份的總和，遠比整個外在的表面更有意義。

曾建華真誠地對待內在藝術需要的想法，但正因如此，他被視作倒退到早期的現代主義者的思維中，康定斯基同樣認為繪畫的塑像與反映性質應該迫使我們看到藝術本身的內在動態。康定斯基為藝術使世界變得還可忍受的尼采思想注入超自然的宗教色彩。可以說，曾建華是站在同一枚硬幣的反面，因他是一位反宗教者，不過他跟康定斯基的想法仍有某程度相通，因為他們都相信每種形象化的元素雖然會有本身的意義，但當它們聚集起來時便可抵抗單一的邏輯。先作牆紙，現作燈箱，曾建華的文字景觀創造了一個使人可以探究和發掘、可以再誕生和死亡的環境。

forms that twist and turn into different permutations of thoughts and emotions. For him, the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

Another early work that links to his Seven Seals is the digital-print project *Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values* (2007). Here, Tsang reworked paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci, changing the expressions and gestures of his figures in ways that subvert their original intent. This project, which was never fully realised nor satisfactorily completed, is perhaps the most literal and biographical of his oeuvre. It is the work of a man reacting against values learnt as a boy. His reworked Da Vinci paintings feature Mary and the baby Jesus, or Mary and the angel Gabriel, with one of the figures swearing or pulling a face. These are works of an impetuous child-man, and they are too facile to be true rebellions against Christian values indoctrinated from compulsory Bible classes. But Tsang embarked on this project after the first wave of success with his wallpaper art, and it was an attempt to shake off the restraints that he feared his “word-scapes” would bring. This project offered a release from what many young (or even more experienced) artists face: issues of self-worth and anxieties about being pigeonholed. But Tsang soon discovered that he was not done with his words. He began experimenting with white on white (of figures that are more like abstractions of letters in sexual positions), and projecting words in a way that compressed space or made flat walls active. His words moved beyond the literal and cognitive and towards becoming an effect.

As the experimental sediments of his word-scapes began to settle, Tsang found he was able to once again revisit his fettered childhood. His persistent explorations of the visualisation and pictorialisation of words gave him the means to examine his own embattled playground of Christian morals and values. When was the last time a serious artist took religion, even if to deny it, as a theme in Hong Kong? This is what makes him unusual. He belongs to the generation of young post-Handover artists that includes Chow Chun-fai, Tozer Pak Sheung-chuen and Luke Ching Chin-wai, all of whom have helped to put Hong Kong on the international art map. But unlike his peers, few, if any, of his works ever question what it means to be a Hong Kong artist. While his peers tend to ask the question “who am I?”, Tsang, however, is more interested in the question “what am I?”. Even so, this is not a real question, but a starting point. He has no answer nor does he feel any need to give us one. This is an artist who reads Nietzsche, Hegel and Heidegger — for fun. In today’s global art world, where clichés of all sorts refuse to die, it would be too easy to mock Tsang’s philosophical interests as yet another gimmick — it would also be wrong.

Tsang shares sentiments that one might expect from early 20th modernists who turned to existentialism in order to find meaning during difficult times. For Nietzsche, art was a way of making life bearable in a war-ridden world. But what are the fears of our brave new world today? Is it money? Technology? Politics? For Tsang, it is morality — not the



Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values (2007)
(Leonardo da Vinci, *Litta Madonna*, 1490)



*Attempt at a Reevaluation of
All Values (2007)*
(Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna of the
Yarnwinder* 1501-1507)

曾建華的沉思是非常個人的。他的作品正是他的旅程。如果我們，亦即觀眾，觀看他的文字景觀時變得不耐煩，我們必需意識到他做藝術並不是為了討好我們。我們是要求答案的被動證人。我們追求完整性。曾建華，他可不在乎。／

day-to-day, garden-variety morality, but the larger one that concerns us as global citizens when we dare to confront apocalyptic events such as ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and genocide in Darfur — catastrophes that enter our living rooms through newspapers and television. Where do we stand once we decide to leave our passive role as armchair witnesses? This is the post-9/11 world. We have right-wing politics subjugating women and their bodies in the name of the church. Religious extremism has upped the ante for terrorist acts, and war has made PTSD part of common speech. In Hong Kong, where international news (outside of Asia) rarely strays into public consciousness, Tsang dares to think about how seeing these events, however filtered, might affect our internal landscape.

Thinking through such questions, concerning the world and his own life, is what brought him here. Seven Seals began after a personal loss led Tsang to reassess his values, and for this artist who spends a lot of time in his own head, it is not surprising that the project grew to explore larger questions and heavier themes. The tessellation of thoughts and emotions — whether anger towards religious absolutes or the pondering of their consequences — is where the internalised world can coalesce into a sum of parts that is more meaningful than the whole of an external surface.

Tsang is sincere in this idea of the inner necessity of art, and it is this that casts him as a throwback to certain early modernists. Wassily Kandinsky, for example, believed that the representational and reflective character of painting should compel us to see the dynamic interiority of art itself. Kandinsky injects spiritualism into Nietzsche's idea that art makes the world bearable. Tsang is on the opposite side of the same coin. He is a naysayer of religion, but he shares Kandinsky's idea that while every pictorial component has meaning in itself, collectively the components resist a singular logic. Tsang's word-scapes, first as wallpaper, now as light boxes, work towards creating an environment that allows one to delve in and climb out, to live and die again.

Tsang's ponderings are deeply personal. His works are his journeys. If we, the viewers, become impatient with his word-scapes, we need to realise that Tsang does not make art to please us. We are armchair witnesses who demand answers. We seek completeness. Tsang shrugs. ✍