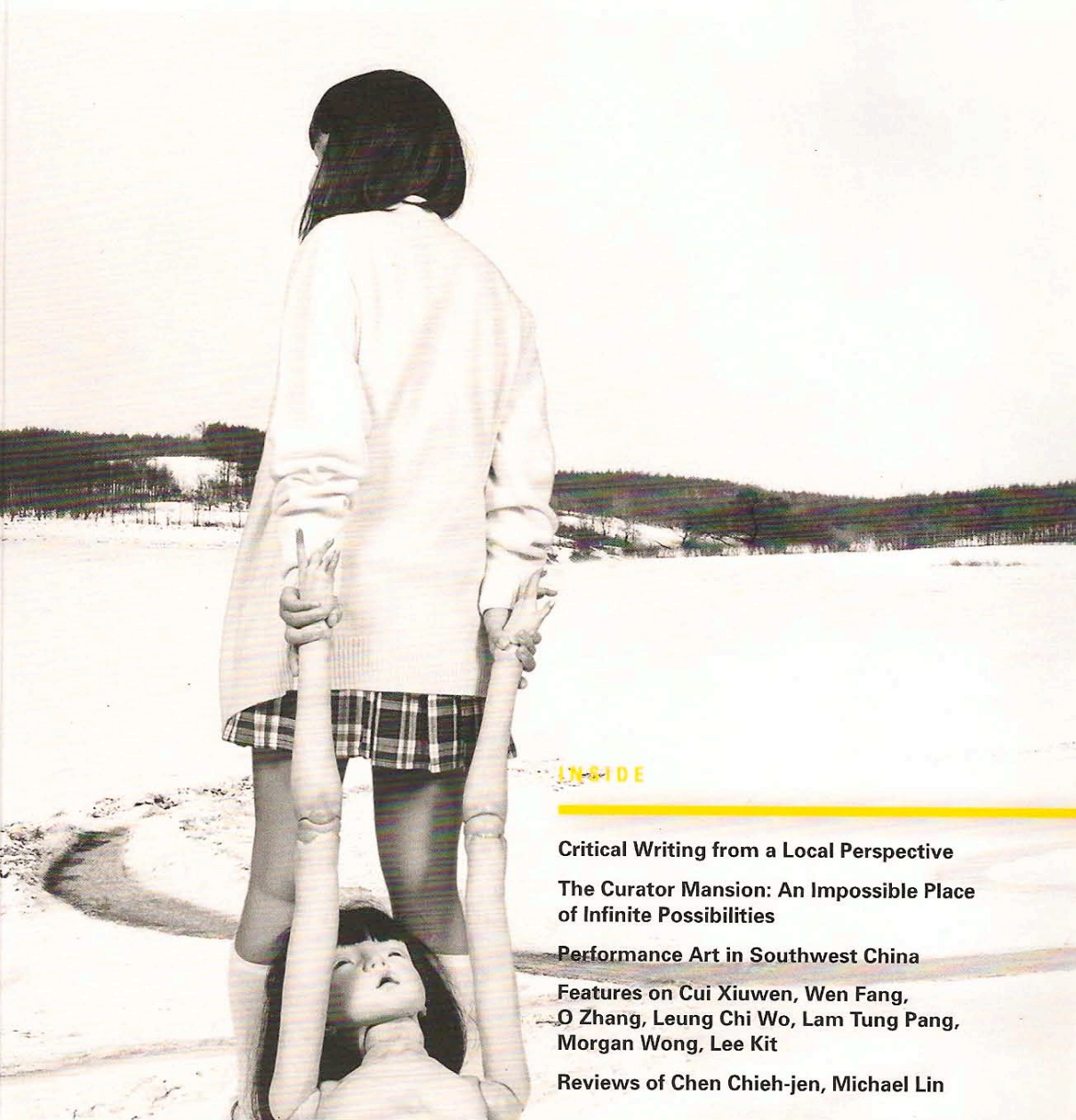


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Four Discussions with Hong Kong Artists: Leung Chi Wo, Lam Tung Pang, Morgan Wong, and Lee Kit

In 2010, Hong Kong artists Lam Tung Pang, Lee Kit, Leung Chi Wo, and Morgan Wong exhibited their work at No Soul For Sale: A Festival of Independents as part of Tate Modern's tenth anniversary celebrations. The artists were showing with Para/Site, co-founded in 1996 by Leung Chi Wo with Lisa Cheung, Phoebe Man, Patrick Lee, Leung Mee Ping, Tsang Tak Ping, and Sara Wong. One of Hong Kong's most prominent non-profit art spaces, Para/Site's mission is to "to establish and maintain a platform for artists and other art practitioners to realize their vision, in relation with their immediate and extended communities, with the aim of nurturing a thoughtful and creative society." An active artist and assistant professor at City University of Hong Kong, with a B.A. and M.F.A from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and having participated in numerous residencies worldwide, Leung Chi Wo is widely regarded as one of the driving forces behind Hong Kong's burgeoning arts scene. In the following discussion, he provides insight into a city that Milton Friedman once hailed as the perfect capitalist society, has undergone a transition from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China, and will remain under the joint Basic Law until 2049. As an artist, Leung Chi Wo's concerns extend beyond Hong Kong's status as the third largest art market in the world in auction sales and the fact that ART HK has become the Art Basel of Asia.

LEUNG CHI WO—ART AND EXPRESSION

Stephanie Bailey: How did Para/Site begin?

Leung Chi Wo: In the beginning we needed an exhibition space, so we created Para/Site. After finding the space, we realized we wanted a forum for art, so we organized talks and lectures. Then we were encouraged to move into a curatorial practice, so we produced thematic shows, and when we found a need for a critical perspective, we organized publications. That's how Para/Site evolved. The whole thing happened because it was something we needed for ourselves. Para/Site is also a reflection of my own character in that I am very adaptive. I respond to the situation and to reality. I'm a kind of pragmatist, not an idealist.

Stephanie Bailey: You left Para/Site in 2007. Why?

Leung Chi Wo: Para/Site should be independent and have its own life without depending on me or any other founding member. I have met people who founded their space thirty years ago, and they are still the



Morgan Wong, *Alliance*, 2007, interactive installation, computer with motion sensor, projector. Courtesy of the artist.

Morgan Wong was born in Hong Kong and specializes in media art. Sensitive to investigating Chinese culture in the twenty-first century, he exploits the language of technology and interactive media to encourage active engagement with the artist's thoughts. Having studied

Creative Media at City University, Hong Kong, where he was also taught by Leung Chi Wo, he has actively worked in a number of jobs, from Web editor to project assistant. Wong describes his journey toward becoming an artist with a sense of flow. One of his first interactive installations, *Alliance* (2007), was exhibited at Videotage, a non-profit Hong Kong space specializing in media and video art; it eventually won an award at the 13th Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards in 2008. Consisting of a large screen displaying Chinese characters that combine to make meaningful phrases, the viewer is involved through movement detection. Characters shift and form in accordance with viewer interaction, creating unexpected phrases with a sense of unpredictability that expresses an inherent order in the chaos of change, adaptation, and alteration.

Stephanie Bailey: Do you see yourself as a Chinese artist or a Hong Kong Chinese artist?

Morgan Wong: I see myself as an artist based in Hong Kong. Although I would love for people to understand from where my ideas might be generated, it's more important to focus on the uniqueness of each artist. Giving titles positions people within a restricted framework that may not always be appropriate; this is a limitation for the audience and might also be for the artist himself.

Stephanie Bailey: How would you define interactive art?

Morgan Wong: It's really about interaction between humans and how important it is to trigger the audience into thinking. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is definitely one of the first artists to inspire me. The philosophy behind his work *Standards and Double Standards* is about human interaction in real life, a real phenomenon with an artistic representation.

Stephanie Bailey: You grew up in Hong Kong when it was a British colony. Did the mix of East and West there influence your work?

Morgan Wong: Yes. I was brought up in quite a traditional family, where my father emphasized a lot of Chinese traditions. I feel very glad I was brought up this way, instead of receiving a very monotonous flow of information. I think this crash of cultures helped build my critical point of view, since I have always needed to think about who is really "right," who is really "wrong," and whether a point of view truly reflects a situation objectively.

Stephanie Bailey: Do you feel part of an “in between” generation?

Morgan Wong: Yes. I think these ideas of “Western”–“Chinese” are sometimes a hidden agenda in my work since the world is becoming more “flattened,” and the differences between the life of an American, Chinese, European, or whoever else, are much less than before. The loss of cultural characteristics is almost impossible to avoid these days. A work like *Alliance*, about Chinese characters, actually has a similar hidden agenda about communication among people to my latest video, *Untitled*; they are both in a way preserving Chinese culture.

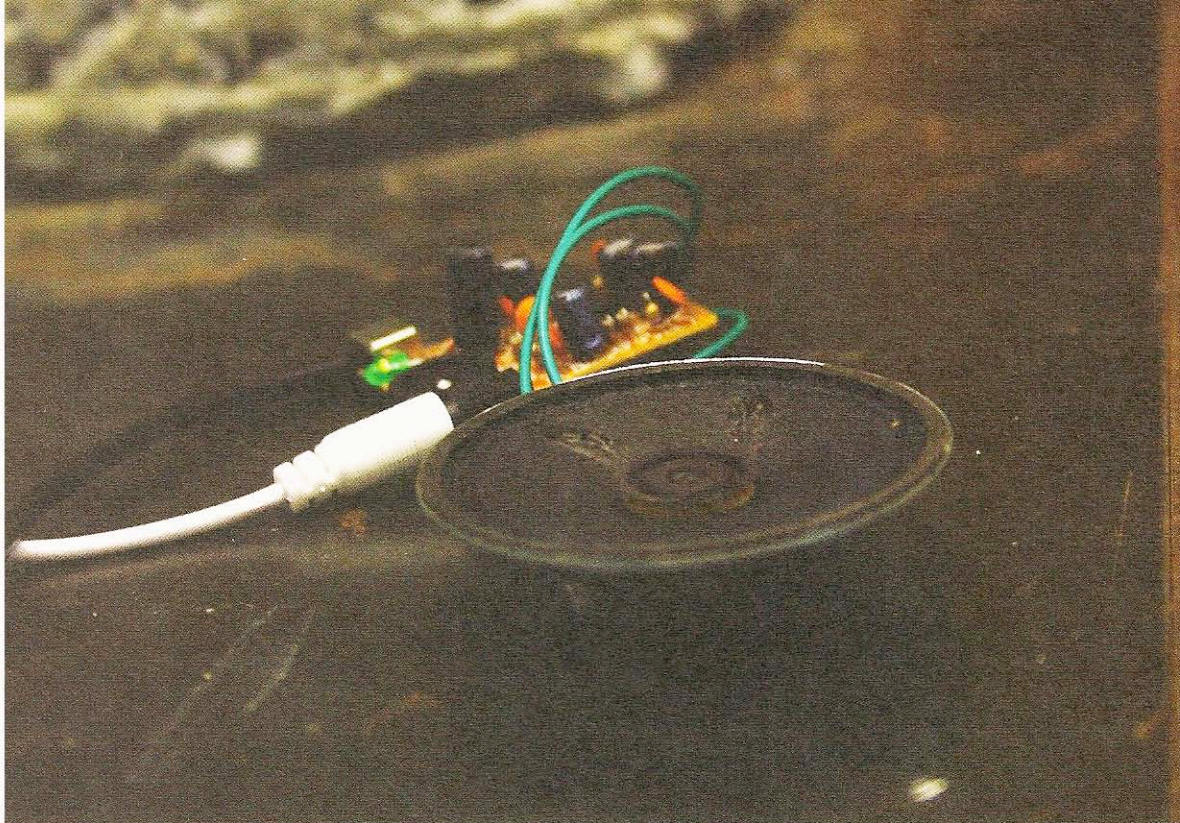
Stephanie Bailey: There seems to be less importance placed on the cultural past in Hong Kong and mainland China these days.



Top: Morgan Wong,
Demolishing Rumour, 2010,
video installation, bricks,
concrete, TV, DVD player.
Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom: Morgan Wong,
Demolishing Rumour, 2010,
video, 21 mins., 3 sec.
Courtesy of the artist.

Morgan Wong: Yes. There is not so much importance placed on the past, which is expressed in my work *Once you were Here* (2009). There is not so much interest in old buildings, referred to in *Demolishing Rumour* (2010), shown at the Tate. There is not so much interest in old people, which *A Story of an Eel Chef* (2010) and *Untitled* (2010) touch on. One motive behind *Demolishing Rumour* was the demolition of heritage in Hong Kong and mainland China, especially in Beijing. But actually this is a global issue, so it's good to use the work to reflect on ways of thinking and on values in the world. I'm not really demolishing the past—I'm demolishing the “rumour” of the past's demolition. This is a pessimistic way of acting, but I hope the fulfilment of the rumour can stop the real situation from happening.



Stephanie Bailey: As *Alliance* demonstrates, developments are often random yet retain an element of natural or inherent logic. So even though China is becoming increasingly flattened or Western, this is also a natural development in the context of a contemporary “globalized” world. Does this relate to your interest in the “middle distance” as defined by George Trow, where individual experience is disconnected from collective mentality as a result of television and media?

Morgan Wong, *Once You Were Here* (detail), interactive installation, charred wood, concrete, speakers, computer with motion sensor, 200 x 200 x 200 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Morgan Wong: I enjoy playing around the “middle distance,” as it gives me a lot of room to reflect. Mainland China is definitely a middle distance; even inside China there is a middle distance. I once heard an art professional in Beijing say that contemporary art is actually very Western: It hijacked the Chinese art world, and all of a sudden people are trying to adapt. The West provided the model for contemporary art in China during the 1980s, but now a lot of techniques have been learned and artists have received a lot international exposure. Now it’s time to be confident, unfold our own ideas, and investigate our culture.

Stephanie Bailey: The discourse in mainland China between “traditional” and “contemporary” is interesting because this rejection of “Western-linked” work from the 1980s and 90s somehow limits artistic discourse. Contemporary art is a universal visual language in that it attempts to dissect contemporary culture using influences that are not singularly nationalistic.

Morgan Wong: Yes, in this sense visual art is a universal language, but once contemporary art was “imported” to mainland China, Chinese artists implemented it as an “authority.” There is a huge gap between traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy and the Chinese contemporary art world. This is also a case of the middle distance.

Stephanie Bailey: Is there a sense that Hong Kong and mainland China are “in between” political, social, and cultural states right now?

Morgan Wong: Yes, but the funny thing is they are going in the opposite directions. Since after the Handover, Hong Kong is changing to be more like the previous China, not the upcoming one. As for the mainland, I can't say China is undergoing Westernization, but it's adopting more Western ways and thus losing its own character. This goes back to what I said about becoming a flattened world. But this state of “in-between” is always interesting. More critical points of view will be voiced since we are always thinking about what is “right” and what is “wrong.”

LEE KIT—ART AND LIFE

For Lee Kit, art is a lifestyle, not an occupation. A graduate of the Chinese University with a B.A. and an M.A. in Fine Art, he was one of the first artists who set up studio in Fotan. In the same year that Lam Tung Pang took part in 318 Studio Opening Show, he hosted his first solo exhibition at Chinese University Professor Lui Chun Kwong's studio nearby. An artist with an unending interest in daily life and what it means on both an individual and collective scale, Lee Kit exposes the constructed nature of reality within the larger context of society through the creation of situations within exhibition spaces using painting, drawing, video, and installation in a way that de-stabilizes the relationship between what is real and what is not. From painting un-stretched canvases to resemble tablecloths and using them in communal performances and documenting them photographically to creating sugar packets with song lyrics printed on them and placing them in a café, Lee Kit recontextualizes the everyday to reveal deeper meanings that lurk beneath oft-contrived surfaces. Preferring the audience to interpret his work from a personal standpoint, just as he has interpreted the world around him, Lee Kit invites viewers to partake in a kind of performance where the freedom to redefine life is more important than anything else.

Stephanie Bailey: Was it a difficult decision to become an artist?

Lee Kit: I knew how to make money from a young age, so my mum said I could study whatever I wanted in life. I probably made everything happen because of my working practices.

Stephanie Bailey: How did you start the idea of your fabric paintings?

Lee Kit: In 2001, when I was a student, I opened the closet, saw one of my shirts, and painted it. I was painting on a table and was too lazy to stretch the paintings afterwards, so I folded them and put them away. At that time I was thinking about the form of painting. One day I went for my first picnic with friends. I brought along a few paintings as tablecloths and my camera, which I normally wouldn't do. From then on, I started to constantly find uses for the paintings, like when I ate with my parents. It took so long to paint them that I thought I might as well use them. It was like finding a solution to what art is.