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Introduction

An image that overwhelmed both international and local news on 1 July 2003 was the parade that marched through the streets of Hong Kong to fight against the controversial legislation of the anti-subversion Basic Law Article 23.[1] The image, of streets flooded by reportedly 500,000 citizens, vividly stood as a picture of the public's petition for their interests in public space. This public statement was intensively visual. Press coverage on the follow day showed streets blackened by the black-clad participants, banners, ridiculing dummies of government officials, protesters with papier-maché knives on their head and protesting signs painted on babies' faces. Along with their political connotations, a point worth considering with these pictures was the eminent use of the visual in public expression, particularly during moments of public crises.

A memory that was recalled by this parade was inevitably the comparable march in 1989, when the Hong Kong population took to the streets on an unprecedented

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[1] The march made headlines in every local newspaper on the following day. See for example, *South China Morning Post*, "The People have spoken. They deserve a response," 2 July 2003, internet edition. For international press coverage, see for example Rebecca Buckman, "In Hong Kong, Hundreds of Thousands vs. 23; March Against Security Act Known as Article 23 Proves Biggest Since Tiananmen," *Wall Street Journal* (New York, Eastern edition), 2 July 2003, internet edition; Oliver August, *"*Protests over new security law halt Hong Kong," *The Times* (London), 2 July 2003, internet edition*;* Jonathan Watts "Day of protest: Hong Kong takes to the streets to defend freedoms," *Guardian* (Manchester), 2 July 2003, internet edition.

scale in support for the pro-democratic movements in Tiananmen Square. That march

could be considered as a critical moment of an awakened public sense in Hong Kong.

As the marchers paraded in specially designed T-shirts, wore badges and yellow

ribbons, the march also marked a certain beginning of conscious uses of the visual for

public statements. A further, more eminent visual element on the occasion was the

Goddess of Democracy. Images of this statue at Tiananmen hit the globe via the

international media.[2] In Hong Kong, besides having the image on television screens

and printed publications, a replica of the statue was made by Paul Fowler and erected

in Victoria Park during the demonstrations.[3] Miniatures of the statue were also

produced by the organizer of the rally, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic

Democratic Movements in China, and bought by supporters of the events. In a wider

view of history, the intense use of the visual in these two moments reflects a tendency

in Hong Kong over the past decades. The tendency, in short, was the use of the visual

in parallel with the fostering of public feelings. It is with such a background that the

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[2] The global reach of the *Goddess of Democracy* through the media, particularly the electronic ones, is discussed in the introductory chapter of W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1992), pp. 1-2.

[3] See Paul Fowler, "The Hong Kong Goddess of Democracy. An onlooker becomes a participant," in *Someone else's story – our footnotes. Contemporary Art of Hong Kong (1990 – 1999)*, Oscar Ho, David Clarke, eds., (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2002), pp. 16 – 19. A further note on the *Hong Kong Goddess of Democracy* was the subsequent decline for its continual display, which led to another public anecdote. When petitioned for permanent installation of the statue, the late colonial government sent a secret letter to the Chinese government. At the end the petition was turned down, yet the supposedly secret letter was printed on the front page on the *South China Morning Post* on 26 October 1989. The case sharply indicates the critical concern for public expression through visual media. See David Clarke, *Hong Kong Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), pp. 115 & 219.

subject of this thesis, visual art in the public, or namely "public art," comes up as a topic of interest.

This thesis is titled "public art in Hong Kong." The earliest "public artworks" that appeared in Hong Kong were the statues of British Royalty, commissioned by the colonial government since the 1880s.[4] After these earliest power manifestations, the very first works that had a certain art and public appeal came up in the 1960s as murals or sculptures in municipal open areas.[5] Similar installations of outdoor artworks were continued occasionally by large private corporations and estate developers in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] Until that time, the commissioned works were not exactly conceived of as "public art." Their purpose was basically decorative and there was very little critical reflection on their status as art in public space. Yet a remarkable change has taken place since the mid-1990s. The term "public art" got

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[4] The statues, starting from an earlier one of Queen Victoria (commissioned in 1887 in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of her reign) were placed in Royal Square (later renamed Statue Square), lately reclaimed in Central in the late 19th Century. Other statues, as pictured in photographs of the Square in the 1910s, included one of King George V (opened in 1907) and that of Queen Consort Mary (who was then Princess of Wales, set up in 1909). See Ting Sun-pao, *City of Victoria: a Selection of the Museum's Historical Photographs* (Hong Kong, Urban Council, 1994).

[5] A few such commissions in the 1960s still remain in Chater Garden. However, no title plates are available. A most notable example is a relief ceramic mural by a pool facing the statue of Raggi (founder of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank) in Chater Garden. The work, as suggested by local artist Law Hon-wah in a public seminar on public art (*Yijian gonggong yishupin de dansheng* 一件公共藝術品的誕生 (The Birth of a Work of Public Art), organized by the Public Art Team on 18 August 2001 at Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre), was one of the first local public artworks. Law attributed the work's commission date to the early 1960s.

[6] Commissions by large corporations and estate developers in the 1970s and 1980s are most notably represented by Swire's commissions of bronze sculptures (by Van Lau) in the estate project of Taikoo Shing; and commissions of sculptures and murals by anonymous artists by the developers of Mei Foo Sun Chuen and Riveria Gardens. Artworks were also commissioned for open areas around corporate buildings. For example, Henry Moore's *Central* and Elizabeth Frink's *Water Buffaloes* were commissioned by Hong Kong Land and placed on the Exchange Square podium.

into usage and replaced earlier titles like outdoor sculptures, open-air sculpture, etc. around 1995 to 1996.[7] This switch in names was important because it underlined the beginning of a new way of conceptualizing artworks in public places. Paralleling this adoption of a new name, the practice of art in public places went through notable changes. As opposed to the prototype decorative sculptures, there was a growing consciousness of the public implications of the works. "Public art" in Hong Kong, acknowledged so since the mid-1990s, has been frequently used for "public" purposes, from the construction of public feelings to experiments of local public space and art's position in the public at large. The evolution from ornamental sculptures to objects with heightened relationships to public space provides a certain framework for considering public art as a particular category.

While "public art" became a new category in Hong Kong in the mid-1990s, the subject, on a global scale, was already quite a developed discourse with well-discussed histories, theories and avocations, critical reflections and problems. This global discourse started primarily with the United States because of a historical

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[7] It is difficult to pin down the exact moment when the term "public art" began to be widely used in Hong Kong. An appropriate date is around the mid-1990s. Before then, works in public places were either given no special title (as commissions around the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in 1992), or referred to with names other than "public art" such as "outdoor art" (as in the case of the "Sculpture Walk" in Kowloon Park, 1987; refer to chapter two, p. 98 for details) or "open-air sculpture" (as with an exhibition of sculptures co-presented by the Urban Council and Hong Kong Sculptors Association in the public venue of the podium of the Hong Kong Stadium in 1984). The title "public art" has appeared in local literature since around 1995 and 1996. In official documents, the term appeared in 1995 in *Hong Kong Arts Development Council: 5-year Strategic Plan* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1995), p. 105.

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factor, as the term "public art" was chronologically first adopted, in a modern sense as opposed to the so-called privately owned "public" artworks in Renaissance piazzas, during the presidency of Roosevelt in the 1930s.[8] This very early public art incentive was driven largely by economic factors. In face of the ailing economy after the hit of the Great Depression in 1929, the Works Progress Administration was set up as a relief measure in 1935 to offer work to the unemployed through a wide variety of programs, including highways and building construction, slum clearance, reforestation, and rural rehabilitation. In the scheme, the Federal Arts Project gave unemployed artists the opportunity to decorate post offices, schools, and other public buildings with murals, canvases, and sculptures.[9] Practices of municipal public art continued in the United States in the following decades. In the 1960s, during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, public art was officially institutionalized. The National Endowment for the Arts was set up in 1965 as the principal agency for the

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[8] The following outline of American public art is a summary of information from a number of sources, for example, the institutional background is addressed in Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (New York, Da Capo, 1993). A brief review of the trajectory is also present in Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000), which, based on the history, goes on to discuss new dialogic models. For the development of different approaches see for example a special issue of *Public Art Review* on "Navigating New Territories," Issue 8, Vol.4., Spring/Summer 1993; Mitchell, ed., op. cit.; Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the New Terrain* (Seattle, Bay Press, 1995), which deals with changing tendencies in approaches and involved issues; Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996) and Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures* (New York, Routledge, 1997) on public art and spatial relationships with the sites. As for the relationship between public art and public citizens, see for example Raven, op. cit.; Erika Doss, ed., *Spirit Poles and Flying Pigs: Public Art and Cultural Democracy in American Communities* (Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution, 1995); and Linda Burnham and Steve Durland, eds., *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena* (New York, Critical Press, 1998).

[9] Steve Paul Johnson, WPA Historical Records Survey [Online] (cited on 26 August 2003) Accessed through the World Wide Web: (http://www.interment.net/column/records/wpa/wpa_history.htm).

development of the arts. Under the Endowment, continual commissions of public art and legislation of compulsory art policies, which required spending of a certain percentage of building costs on art, were assertively implemented.

Affirmed practice over decades, together with growing reconsideration of the public by social (typically subaltern) groups and the artistic community in the 1970s, eventually propelled changes in thinking about public art. Instead of simply having traditional art objects in public areas, new concepts such as site-specificity and functionality, which aimed to foster links between the works, their locations and their users, got into the agenda. The objective of public art also went through a critical transformation. Public art makers began to see the social function of public art. Works were not just designed aesthetically, but construed as a way through which community interests got channeled into public space. With this shift in emphasis, a great variety of new forms, ranging from billboards to video, happenings and social events, exploded in the 1980s.[10] In the 1990s, a concept of "new public art," as theorized by one of its keenest advocates, Suzanne Lacy, was started by many non-government organisations as a model aiming to deal actively with public or

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[10] Examples of such practices include Barbara Kruger's uses of posters and billboards (see Mitchell, op. cit. pp. 234-248), the Guerrilla Girls's uses of billboards (see Miles, op. cit., pp. 52-53), Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections onto architecture (see Finkelpearl, op. cit., pp. 337-339), and Suzanne Lacy's performances, public and media events (See Burnham and Durland, op. cit., pp. 7-12, Miles, op. cit., p. 167).

community matters through art.[11] To date, public art in the United States has gone

through a notable evolution and the due course has provoked numerous critical

questions and debates. Regarding this history, an enormous body of literature,

comprising reviews, critiques, avocations and theories on public art has accumulated

and the subject is established as a well-developed discourse.

This American history is worth mentioning because of its influence on later

conceptions of public art. References to the American example appear frequently in

overseas literature. A most typical example is Taiwan, the first Asian country with

public art legislation. In a series directed by the official Council for Cultural Affairs,

practices in the United States were repeatedly referred to as a standard.[12] In less

absolute ways, the American model of public art has also been influential to practices

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[11] See Lacy and also Burnham and Durland, eds., op. cit. The tendency could be most typically shown
with the example of *Culture in Action*, organized by the American non-government public art agency
"Sculpture Chicago" in 1995. The project comprised eight innovative public art projects, each
collaboratively done by artists and a particular social group. The eight projects include: *Full Circle* by
Suzanne Lacy and a coalition of women in Chicago (which formed a huge circle through the streets of
Chicago with boulders, on which names of the participating women were engraved); *Tele-Vecinadario*
by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle and residents at the ghetto area of West Town (video showing the residents'
livelihood, set up outside their houses all over the area); *Flood* by Haha and a volunteer network for
Active Participation in Healthcare (which turned a store in Rogers Park into a vegetable garden);
Naming Others: Manufacturing Yourself by Robert Peters and users of public telephones at O'Hare
Airport (which later turned out as a variety of objects, such as vehicles' titles plates, developed from
interviews with the telephone users); *The Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group* by Mark Dion and
The Chicago Urban Ecology Group (study groups on ecology); *We Got It!* by Simon Grennan and
Christopher Sperandio and The Bakery, Confectionery and Tobacco Workers' International Union of
America Local No.552 (the manufacturing, promotion and sale of a kind of chocolate bar, with
production decisions all made by workers in the union); *Eminent Domain* by Kate Erison, Mel Ziegler
and residents in the housing area of Ogden Courts (a colour chart of colours used in the neighbourhood
architectural environment); and *Consequences of a Gesture* by Daniel Martinez and the activist group
called The West Side Three-Point Marches (a march and installations of banners around the city). For
details of these projects, see Mary Jane Jacob, ed., *Culture in Action* (Chicago, Bay Press, 1995).

[12] See for example, Chen Hui-ting 陳惠婷, *Gonggong yishu zai taiwan*公共藝術在台灣(Public Art in
Taiwan) (Taipei, Yishujia chubanshe, 1997), Ni Zaiqin 倪在沁, *Taiwan gonggong yishu de tansuo*台
灣公共藝術的探索(Exploration of Taiwan Pubic Art) (Taipei, Yishujia chubanshe, 1997).

in other countries. For example, an artists' handbook published in the United

Kingdom acknowledges that "America is not a model for everyone, but it has

developed a wider and deeper set of objects and strategies that inform art in places."[13]

The prominence of American public art as a discourse is particularly obvious when set

along aside practices in Europe.[14] While public art has also been keenly practised in

Europe over the past decades, there is scarcely as clear a discourse as the American

one. This lack of a distinct European discourse could be reasoned with two practical

factors: first, the technical difficulty in pinning down a clear-cut history as the

European trajectories were not at all started off by any specific programme, but built

on remains of outdoor art dating back to antiquity; and the next, the lack of

centralized institutionalization which would consolidate ideas as the United States did.

Thus what turns out in the present view of public art world-wide, while European

public art is undeniably eminent in practice, in terms of conceptual development the

American discourse is still the most pronounced one and its global reach has made it

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[13] Paul Swales, "Approaches" in Jones, Susan, ed. , *Art in Public: What, Why and How?* (Sunderland, AN Publications, 1992), p. 77.

[14] As opposed to the centralized discourse of American public art, practices and theories in Europe are more individually or regionally based. A typical example of practices of public art in Europe is *Skulptur, Projekte in Münster*, a large scale outdoor sculpture programme held in the German town every ten years since 1977. The latest Münster project in 1997 is documented in Klaus Buβmann, Kasper König, Florian Matzner, eds., *Contemporary Sculpture. Projects in Münster 1997* (Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1997). The book demonstrates a very different treatment of the subject as compared to the American texts. Instead of formulating any unified discourse, it is more like a study of individual cases and a few specific themes such as different forms of site-specificity, alternative models, etc. A similar approach is shared by another book on public art among European practices, Florian Matzner, ed., *Public Art* (München: Hatje Cantz, 2001), which again, advocating no single theory, is a collection of essays by artists, curators, and theorists under general themes like "Art and the City," "Art and Architecture," "Art and Society," etc.

an indispensable background for considering contemporary public art in any place.

Besides considering the American prototype, another significant background for the present inquiry into public art in Hong Kong is the case of China. Although the Chinese example is a lot less eminent in the global discourse of public art, it is worth considering because after the return of sovereignty, Hong Kong has been essentially a part of the country. The trajectory of Chinese public art, in the modern sense as opposed to historical artworks sited in publicly accessible locations, could be traced back to the 1950s when the Communist regime started to seize different types of art for propaganda.[15] During the period, a large number of monuments, public sculptures or images were put up for such a purpose. Statues of political leaders, typically of Mao, and the People's Liberation Army were set up ubiquitously. The practice persisted for a few more decades, yet in a later phase, particularly after the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s and 1980s, overt political propaganda turned into the celebration of patriotism. Comparable forms were commissioned, frequently as a collaboration between regional official bodies and community agencies. There were commemorations of the "struggles" of the People's Liberation Army, and

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[15] The following outline is primarily based on two sources. A photographic collection by John T. Young, *Contemporary Public Art in China* (London, University of Washington Press, 1999), which provides a visual account of public artworks (primarily sculptures) since the 1950s; and a recently published book on public art in China by Weng Jianqing 翁劍青, *Gonggong yishu de guannian yu quxiang : dangdai gonggong yishu wenhua ji jiazhi yanjiu*公共藝術的觀念與取向：當代公共藝術文化及價值研究 (Concepts and inclination of public art: cultural and values studies on contemporary public art) (Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002).

frequently as a new propaganda strategy, imaging of fraternal partnerships between the Army's soldiers and peasants or the working class. Besides these more politically-tinted images, patriotic feelings were also fostered through memorial statues of other national figures such as Song Qingling, and literary figures like Zhu Ziqing and Wen Yiduo. Paralleling these continued ideological manifestations, a boom of more neutral commissions took place in the 1990s. These commissions were again frequently collaborations between regional bodies and the government. Under the notion of making "public art," which had then got into China, a great number of artworks, still primarily sculptures, usually "modern" looking as steel works, were installed in different public areas ranging from public plazas and walkways to other open spaces between buildings.

While the above works mostly convey positive national or regional messages, a very different mode of art was also practiced by artists who took a more oppositional stance. Two most remarkable examples happened during the 1989 pro-democracy movement as the defacement of Mao's portrait in Tiananmen Square and the erection of the *Goddess of Democracy*. The two visual gestures registered a most dramatic moment when public space in China was visually annexed for oppositional politics.[16] The *Goddess of Democracy* was destroyed in the June Fourth crackdown and Mao's

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[16] See Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments," *Representations*, XXXV, Summer, 1999, pp. 84-117.

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portrait was subsequently restored. Yet critical rethinking of social space became a

keen concern for many Chinese artists of the new generation in the 1990s. As a result,

simultaneously conditioned by the lack of indoor exhibition space for socially deviant

art (as most exhibition venues are officially run), many Chinese artists turned to

public venues to make art. Their works are significant to the present study, not just

because they appeared physically in the public space, but also as they evidenced a

critical tendency: though public space in China was still largely controlled by the

government (and used for the aforementioned propaganda), lay artists have also

shown an interest in the space, and managed to annex it for alternative discourses.[17]

   With both global and national backgrounds in mind, the question for this thesis is

how to look at the history of Hong Kong public art. Development of such public art

has been tightly related to contextual social history. The intense evolution of public art

has overlapped with the historical period of Hong Kong's transformation from a

British colony to a Special Administrative Region returned to Chinese rule. Society

became a lot more obsessed with common meanings amidst ideological struggles

concerning the return of sovereignty, questions of a Hong Kong identity, attempts to

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[17] Issues on contemporary Chinese art concerning problematic exhibition conditions and artists'
practices in public sites have been extensively addressed by Wu Hung. See for example, Wu's
introductory essay in Lynne Seear ed., *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, exhibition
catalogue (Queensland, Queensland Art Gallery, 2002); *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the
End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1999); *Chinese Art at the Crossroads:
Between Past and Future, Between East and West* (Hong Kong: New Media Art, 2001). See also Gao
Minglu, ed., *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998). Details and
examples of such practices will be suggested in the third chapter of this thesis.

construct a new state image by the new regime, re-consideration of the city as a

habitat of the people, and pragmatic crises from persistent commemorations of June

Fourth and different public campaigns for people's rights to the 1 July rally in 2003.

Unprecedented concerns for a Hong Kong "public" have developed. Growing interest

in the public is reflected in increased social events involving different forms of public

space and by an anthology called *Identity and Public Culture*, edited by Stephen C. K.

Chan, published in 1997. Comprising both theoretical discussions and critical analysis

of different empirical situations, the book suggests how the subject has gained

importance in local academic studies.[18] While the book interrogates the general

subject of the public, a contextual situation concerning local spatial experiences in the

historical moment of change is spotted by Ackbar Abbas. In *Hong Kong: Culture and

the Politics of Disappearance*, Abbas argues that, during the handover period, local

social space has been ambiguously abstract and the visual has become a more

dominant mode as it gives forms to indefinite experiences.[19] Abbas's theory could be

cross-read for the situation of the evolving local public and increased use of the visual

in public space.

From an art historical perspective, the intimate relationship between local art and

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[18] Stephen C.K. Chan 陳清僑, ed., *Identity and Public Culture*身份認同與公共文化 (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1997).

[19] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1997), pp. 9-10

the contextual situation of decolonization is suggested by David Clarke in *Hong Kong*

Art. Art's particular suggestiveness in the public is pinpointed by Clarke in a chapter

called "Sculpting Public Space," which discusses artworks' representation of public

ideological contestation during the handover period. Like Abbas, Clarke also argues

for the special significance of visual display in the local context. While Abbas

associates the particular importance of public spectacles to the uncertain spatial

experiences during the historical change, Clarke contextualizes it with the absence of

a truly democratic political system.[20]

These studies, together with the socio-historical situation that drove them,

provide a context for the inquiry into local public art. With such a context, the inquiry

has additional meaningfulness in terms of the connection between art and society: not

only is the subject itself an interface between art and public life, its art historical study

is also relevant to broader social history. It is with such a vision that this thesis

embarks to look into the development of local public art since the significant point of

the mid-1990s and examine its implications for the growing attention to the public

during the handover years and in the post-handover period.

Along with increased practice, public art has become a topic of growing interest

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[20] Clarke, "Sculpting Public Space," *Hong Kong Art* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2001), pp. 100-150. Until 2003, the Hong Kong government is not run on a truly democratic basis. The Chief Executive is elected by an exclusive committee and major government officials are appointed. The general citizens can only vote for regional councilors and representatives at the Legislative Council.

in recent years. Writings and discussions on the topic have been contributed by many

artists, curators, critics and art administrators. Yet except for the aforementioned book

by Clarke,[21] there is no other academic study on the subject. The accumulated body of

literature consists primarily of two major official research projects – a very general

one done in 1997 and a further one on institutionalization that has just come out in

2003 – and sporadic articles in which writers explore the concepts of public art,

advocate ideas, and review and critique individual cases.[22] While these writings are

useful materials in approaching local public art, there is a notable lack of

documentation of local works and fuller surveys which would allow a more

comprehensive picture of the local situation. In addition, as most of these discussions

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Selected references for local writings on public art: the two official research projects are Annie Leung, *Project: Promotion of Public Art in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Arts Development Council, 1997) and another one submitted to the Arts Development Council by Desmond Hui in 2003 and released in February 2004 (six months after the submission of this thesis for examination); writers' conceptual exploration: He Luan 何鑾, "Ni heyi wei gonggong yishu xia dingyi" 你可以為「公共藝術」下定義 (You can define "public art"), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 26 November 1997; Oscar Ho 何慶基,"Gonggong yishu wei shui zuo gongzhong yihuo yishujia" 公共藝術為誰而作 公眾抑或藝術家？(Public art is made for whom? The public or Artists?), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 25 October 1998, internet edition; *Ming Pao* reporter, "Hewei gonggong yishu" 何謂公共藝術？ (What is public art?), *Ming Pao*, 28 May 2000, D03; advocacies and critique: Danny Yung 榮念曾, "Gonggong yishu yu gonggong hongjian" 公共藝術與公共空間 (Public art and public space), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 29 May 1998, "Zhongyang zhengce zu wenhua yantaohui huiyin fayangao gonggong yishu yu gonggong hongjian" 中央政策組文化研討會──回應發言稿公共藝術與公共空間 (Central Policy Unity cultural symposium, response to speech, public art and public space), in Zuni Icosahedron, *Cultural Policies Studies* [Online] (cited 20 October 2001). (cited 20 October 2001). Accessed throught World Wide Web: (http://www.zuni.org.hk).; *Tai Kung Pao* reporter, "Xianggang yishuguan guanchang Deng Haichao gonggong yishu ying yu huanjing ronghe" 香港藝術館館長鄧海超：公共藝術應與環境融和 (Hong Kong Museum of Art Curator Tang Hoi-chiu: public art should merge with environment), *Tai Kung Pao*, 5 November 1998, internet edition; critique not exactly on the category of public art but related issues: Liang Wendao 梁文道, "Yu gongzhong jianli qiyue" 與公眾建立契約 (Establish contracts with the public), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 28 January 1997; He Zhengdao 何正道, *Yishu ziyou yu gonggong hongjian meixue*藝術自由與公共空間美學 (Artistic freedom and aesthetics of public space), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 22 June 2000, internet edition. Further writings concerning individual public art cases will be cited specifically for discussion of examples in the following chapters.

are general rather than context-specific, they are also limited in bridging the subject of public art to concurrent interests in local public culture and social history. This research thus attempts to fill these gaps. Two basic objectives drive this project: first, to document in detail a number of selected local cases; second, to analyze how these examples reflect the relationship between public and art in different ways.

In the following chapters, the relationship between public and art will be examined in three directions. The first chapter will deal with the close relationship between public art and the evolving local public. Two major questions will be approached in the chapter. At the onset, the discussion will try, through reviewing works that were tightly connected to public events during the intensely political period of the mid-1990s, to clarify the vague idea of the "public" in more precise terms and analyze its structure and features. Having arrived at a clearer picture of the local public, the chapter will also consider why art was used in such a public and the implications of such use. With its clarification of the idea of the public and the special place of art in it, this first chapter will build a background for the following ones.

While works in the first chapter were not exactly formulated as "public art," the second chapter, building on the framework drawn up by the first, will focus on works that have been programmatically conceptualized as "public art" since the late 1990s. The chapter will discuss a number of models formulated by different public art

makers. A variety of approaches will show how the idea of public art was conceived, tried out, and received differently in local practices. As discussion in the chapter will reveal, the methodological variety was highly comparable to tendencies in global practices of public art. However, a strong inclination towards the local was present in all the projects and the examples will show how these international traits were contextualized with local characteristics. Reviewing the plurality of practices with the local context in mind, the chapter will propose to understand public art in a more flexible way – that instead of being strictly defined by any physical qualities, the category can be conceived as an orientation towards heightened public-art relations.

In such a light the thesis will proceed to the final chapter, which will look into art in public places in general art practice. Examples in the chapter will show that concern for the relationship between art and the public is not a monopoly of public art. As artists executed their works in public space in various ways, the examples illustrate different modes of artist-public correlations. Evaluation of these correlations is reflective of how art is generally positioned in society, and how artists can redefine such a position through varied creative methodologies. This evaluation is thus relevant to both the category of public art and the general question of the relationship between art and society.

As the topic of public art features a heightened relationship between art and

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society, this research on public art is involved with issues on both sides. Besides examining visual qualities of the artworks, data in this project was gathered through observing works and happenings in public places, looking for information from the popular press, and learning from artists, curators, critics and members of the public in interviews on their involvement in art in public places – not just from a perspective of art but also one that contains all sorts of everyday pragmatics. With these materials, a variety of methodological treatments is used in this thesis. In the following chapters, the arguments will be brought forth through visual analysis of individual artworks, evaluation of presentation and curatorial strategies, contextualization with social history, and assessment of perception, interpretation and reaction, together with borrowing of theoretical frameworks which are helpful for explaining particular situations. By presenting the topic from such a wide range of perspectives with empirical details from public life, the study registers a very dynamic and substantial interface between art and public experience.

Understanding of the interface between art and public experience is becoming increasingly important for Hong Kong. As the image of the 1 July parade vividly registers the growing eminence of visual expression in public life, recent advocacies for the development of creative industries as well as the precise form of public art all imply that the relationship between art and society will go through notable evolutions.

At such a moment, this thesis looks into the subject of public art. By surveying and

analyzing the intensely socially-related development of local public art since the

mid-1990s, it is hoped that this thesis can contribute to the understanding of the

evolving relationship between art and society in Hong Kong.

Chapter One

Public Art and the Evolving Hong Kong Public in the Mid-1990s

Introduction

The mid-1990s was a critical moment for Hong Kong public art. After decades of ornamental outdoor commissions, the period registered for the first time the appearance of art in public space with heightened public motivations. The background for these publicly-geared appearances was the evolution of the local public. During the colonial period, Hong Kong was largely a bourgeois, commercially governed, private city. Public identities were not particularly fashioned by the colonial government. The word "public", instead of implying any sense of solidarity or collective identity, was more likely associated to common utilities under the care of the municipality, like public playgrounds, public swimming pools or public toilets. Yet the transfer of sovereignty in 1997 provoked a critical change. While a new regime was to begin with the end of the old one by the deadline of 1997, different social constituencies got into intense ideological contestations and interests in the public grew more and more acute.

This fermenting public was the context for the highlighted works of public art in

this chapter, namely the *Pun Sing-lui Incident,[23]* the *Pillar of Shame*, the *Forever Blooming Bauhinia,*the *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China* and the *Hong Kong Tripod*. These works were all formerly discussed by David Clarke in an essay called "Sculpting Public Space," which examines how art objects were employed in public ideological contestations during the handover period.[24] While Clarke has suggested how these works represent the different social constituencies' perspectives in the heated struggle for public meanings, this chapter reviews them with an emphasis on their suggestiveness to the structure and features of local public space. From these empirical examples, this chapter will try to elucidate the vague idea of the local public in more substantial terms. It will discuss how the public, rather than just a general collective of people, is a special formation. Details of the works, including their manners of display, presentation and society's reception, will also help to outline features of the local public. Having reached a clearer picture of the public context, the discussion will re-direct its attention back to the subject of art and see how it played a particular role in the public sphere.

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[23] The incident, as discussed in detail in the following paragraphs, refers to a performance done by Pun Sing-lui 〔潘星磊〕 on 16 September 1996 at Victoria Park. The title "Pun Sing-lui Incident" was suggested by the artist himself in an artist's statement, "Chaoyue xingwei" 超越行爲 (Over action) printed in *Hong Kong Economic Journal* on 10 October 1996.

[24] Clarke, "Sculpting Public Space," *Hong Kong Art* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2001), pp. 100-150.

Overview: the *Pun Sing-lui Incident*

A general overview of the Hong Kong public could be learned from an unprecedentedly publicly provoking case, namely the *Pun Sing-lui Incident* [Image 1]. The case uncannily points out the anomaly of the notion of the public. While the work was basically art made by a person in the public, it was extremely problematic as a work of public art. The incident was a peculiar yet calculated performance. It was done on 16 September 1996, by Pun himself at Victoria Park. Each of these elements was loaded with symbolic undertones like settings in a play. Victoria Park is a fetishistic site in Hong Kong, capturing both colonial history[25] and public memories.[26] 16 September was not any particular date, but 1996 was a critical year – as the last days before the handover, the period was understandably the most uptight moment for considering issues related to Hong Kong's return to China. At this time the artist posed as a special character. Though he migrated to Hong Kong in 1992, Pun had assertively put on a Mainland identity. This assertion implied a different interpretation of the critical issue of the transfer of sovereignty: rather than a handover, it was essentially a re-claim. It was, thus, with such a stance, at such a place in such a time

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[25] The park was named after a statue of Queen Victoria, which was moved to the park from an original location at Royal Square (now renamed Statue Square) in 1957.

[26] Victoria Park is primarily a leisure venue, frequented by daily visitors and large-scale programmes ranging from ball-matches and carnivals to other occasional events over weekends. It is also the most popular site for public assemblies and demonstrations. Most notably, it has been the location of the annual June Fourth candlelight vigil since the incident happened in 1989.

that Pun dramatically did his action – he splashed red paint over the Queen Victoria statue in the park and knocked her nose flat.[27]

This dramatic action sparked off enormous controversy. In due course, an extreme divergence took place between the artist and the "public". The divergence between Pun and the public, this individual action in public space and approved "public art," was due primarily to differences in conceiving the work. According to an artist's statement published three weeks after the incident, Pun's justification for his defacement of the Victoria statue was his criticism against colonialism, which he saw as the culprit for the lack of cultural integrity in Hong Kong.[28] In a later interview, Pun further explained that his anti-monument gesture was an attempt to turn the colonial symbol, a representation of "Chinese people's humiliation," into a "more meaningful piece of art."[29] By splashing red paint over the statue, Pun urged awareness for a cultural reunification with "red" China.

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[27] The action was reported in the news. For example, a detailed description, as discussed in the upcoming section, *Ming Pao* reporter, "Nanzi gao xingwei yishu, hui dachui po hongqi, Weiyuan tongxiang bi ta xie peishen" 男子搞行爲藝術，揮大錘潑紅漆，維園銅像鼻塌「血」披身 (Victoria statue nose dented and covered with "blood". Man stirred action, swung hammer, splashed red paint) , *Ming Pao*, 17 September 1996, p. 1. Pun's arrest and the defaced statue were photographed by the press. A further series of pictures, which clearly documented Pun's action, was reproduced in a later publication by the artist, Pun Sing-lui, ed., *Pun Sing-lui's Art File 1988-1999* 潘星磊藝術檔案 1988-1998, op. cit. The photographer is not acknowledged, and at Pun's arrest it was maintained that the action was his sole responsibility. Nonetheless the documentary pictures obviously show that a pre-arranged photographer was present.

[28] See Pun, "Chaoyue xingwei," op. cit., *Pun Sing-lui's Art File 1988–1999*, op. cit.

[29] Joanne Shen, "Why does this man see red? A conversation with Pun Sing-lui," *HK Magazine*, 14 February 1997, pp. 6–11.

The idea of confronting Hong Kong with red was not exclusive to this single

piece of work. Indeed, the colour – with all its implications – was central to quite a

number of earlier works by Pun. Among an oeuvre in red-painted sculptures and

objects, a prototype to the incident was another performance titled *Red Action* which

Pun executed in 1995. This performance, less explosive than the 1996 one, was a

more elaborate one. In three hours, it proceeded from Pun's own "reddening"

(washing himself with red paint, dressing all in red, drinking mainland red wine,

eating red steamed buns, conversing and taking pictures with his red sculptures) to his

visits, himself in red, to a number of ideologically-loaded local landmarks including

the Bank of China, the Chater Garden, Statue Square, etc. A photograph taken in this

performance was almost an immediate precedent to the 1996 work [Image 2]. The

photo shows the back of a person in a hooded red raincoat with five stars, obviously a

visual allusion to the national flag of China, standing in front of the Queen Victoria

statue. The two sovereignties, together with their cultural implications, were directly

juxtaposed. A confronting relationship seems to be dwelling between two, yet the

China man, with his larger size in the foreground, meeting top and bottom in the

composition, in oppressive bright red and as a mobile being, apparently appears to be

more prominent than the stagnant, dark statue receding at the back. The direction of

the China man, which faces the Queen, could also be a reminder of the coming of

China towards the colonial seat. Another work of similar nature, moving a step closer to actual life, took the form of a Putonghua lesson/event at the Fringe Club gallery in the same year.[30] The event was attended by a few local artists, plus some twenty audience members. Social and cultural implications related to the handover outwardly suggested in the teaching contents: the audience is taught to pronounce in Putonghua three abstracts, literally "it is absolutely necessary for the Hong Kong people to know the Basic Law thoroughly, or they abandon their own rights," "'*keeping the status quo unchanged for 50 years'* means keeping the original system and lifestyle unchanged," and finally "how to address Hong Kong in the future? *Zhongguo Xianggang*."[31] At the time of these red projects, Pun was very much discontented with the colonial culture and he thought these creative exercises could prompt rethinking for the current cultural situations, and while a transfer of sovereignty was due soon, urge for a reunification in the cultural paradigm as well.[32] With such ideas at its background, the 1996 incident broke into public space in an extremely dramatic, violent way.

Pun's conceptions were nonetheless not shared by his receiving public. While his intentions were voiced at much later dates, when Pun's work broke into the public

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[30] The Fringe Club is a non-government arts and culture venue in Hong Kong. Consisting of two studio theatres and two exhibition galleries, the venue is frequently visited by local artists and exhibition goers.

[31] Information of these two works sources from Pun, ed., *Pre'97 Special Art Zone*前九七藝術特區 (Hong Kong: 1996), pp. 5 & 84; Pun, ed., *Qianfeng Jiuwu*前鋒九五(Avant-garde '95) (Hong Kong: 1996), pp. 62–63.

[32]   See Pun, ed., *Pre'97 Special Art Zone*, op. cit., p. 1.

scene, it was perceived as a very curious act. Enormous attention was stirred up among the press. Yet rather than evaluating Pun's work as art, the accounts construed it with an everyday mentality. A remarkably detailed printed description of Pun's work appeared the following day in one of the most widely-read local newspapers, *Ming Pao*, at a very prominent position occupying one-third of the front page:

> At half past twelve noon, passers-by saw a man climbing up the statue on a wooden ladder. First scattering leaflets titled "Red Notice" and red plastic flowers all over, he gave the statue's face a good punch with a hammer. He then placed the hammer at its bosom, making it even more eye-catching than the sceptre in its hand. He hanged the ladder on the statue, and poured red paint over himself and the statue. This "artist", after finishing his "masterpiece", sat on the spot for ten odd minutes.
>
> A witness said he was not paying much attention as he thought that the statue was under renovation, and the man was part of the statue. It was only when the man started drinking a can of soft drink that he realized it was a living man and thus called the security. When the police arrived, the man, following police instructions, climbed down from the statue and went on his own to sit under a tree nearby. Some time later the police arrested the man, and because the paint on his body was not yet dried, they

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had to lay newspaper on the police vehicle before letting him in.[33]

In contrast to Pun's serious conceptions, this elaborate account introduced the incident to its readers as almost farcical, particularly with quite a sniggering subtitle: "Man stirred action art."[34] Such a ridiculing air also prevailed in other press reports. The major English newspaper *South China Morning Post* also put the case on its front page. The story was less animated, but its title equally vivid: "Red menace put her majesty's nose out of joint."[35] Days after, a review came up in the general news of *The Hong Kong Economic Journal*. In colloquial language it commented: "his [Pun's] record-breaking act was awe-striking, unfathomable."[36] Accounts like these well introduced the incident to the public as an idiosyncratic farce.

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[33] See *Ming Pao* reporter, "Nanzi gao xingwei yishu, hui dachui po hongqi, Weiyuan tongxiang bi ta xie peishen," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 昨日中午十二時半，有途人看見一名男子用木梯爬上銅像，先將寫有題爲「紅色通告」的傳單及紅色塑膠花撒向四周的地上，然後用大鐵鎚打 銅像原本輪廓分明的臉，再將該大鐵鎚放在銅像的懷裡，令它比銅像手執的權杖更搶眼，繼而將木梯往銅像身上一掛，再向自己的身體及銅像淋上紅漆油。該名「藝術家」完成其「傑作」後，便坐在銅像上達十多分鐘。/有目擊者說，當時以爲銅像正進行維修工程，又以爲該男子是銅像的一部分，因此沒加理會。直至該男子拿起一罐汽水來喝時，始知他是活人，於是便立刻通知公園管理員報警。警方到場後，該名男子聽從警員的勸喻自銅像爬下來，然後自行到附近一棵樹旁坐下，沒有作出任何反抗。稍後警員將該名男子拘捕，由於該男子身上的油漆未乾，故此需要在警車上舖上報紙才讓他登車。

[34] The mockery with this subtitle was discussed by columnist Xu Yongxuan 徐詠琁, "Yin yishu zhi ming" 因藝術之名 (In the name of Art), *Hong Kong Economic Times*, 18 September 1996. "Action art" is a direct translation from Chinese – which, it could be said, has entered the local vocabulary because of this incident. Its meaning is as literal, and refers generally to artistic practices of performance, events, and happenings. Issues related to this 'unusual' (in the local context) art form and Pun's use of it have provoked keen debates among art critics in cultural pages. People outside the 'art' circle tended to conceive the term very differently. For many, this alien category was almost a synonym of artistic idiosyncrasy. This issue will be further discussed in coming paragraphs.

[35] Clifford Lo, "Red menace put her majesty's nose out of joint," *South China Morning Post*, 17 September 1996, General News, p.1.

[36] Du Tingtao 杜挺濤, "'Yishujia' kongpa hui re guanfei"「藝術家」恐怕會惹官非 ("Artist" may get into legal troubles), *Hong Kong Economic Times* , 18 September 1996. The quotation in Chinese: 佢日前的壯舉，令人咋舌，難以領悟。

Pun was severely criticized, and disregarding his claimed intentions, his work was not quite perceived as art. A very first popular reception of the incident was simply: madness.[37] At the onset, Pun was not charged when he was caught literally red handed because the police "(understood) he (was) mentally challenged" and he was sent to Eastern Hospital for a psychiatric examination.[38] Since then, the ambivalent relationship between "artist" and insanity, together with the popular stereotyping of artists like van Gogh, became an undertone in many reports. Keeping readers up with the news that Pun was under clinical observation, *Ming Pao* fairly cited a clinical psychologist's remark on the lack of scientific evidence for a higher tendency towards insanity among artists, but it was reminded that "some artists' 'artistic temperaments,' eccentric character or behavior may cause people to mistake them for having mental problems."[39] Likewise, a previously mentioned article in *The Hong Kong Economic Times* also discussed the waywardness, eccentric outrageousness of artists past and present and questioned "isn't it just a slight difference between art, politics and strange mentality/behaviour?"[40] Another

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[37] Considering Pun "mad" as a first popular reaction for incident was observed by Liu Shijiang 陸世將, "Xianggang wenhua guancha: shenjian, yishu yu hongweibing yaoling – Pan Xinglei yitong hongyou pachu sanzhou fanying 香港文化觀察：神經、藝術與紅衛兵幽靈 — 潘星磊一桶紅油潑出三種反應 (Hong Kong cultural observation: madness, art & haunting Red Guards, three reactions to Pun Sing-lui's bucket of red paint), *Ming Pao*, 1 October 1996.

[38] See Lo, "Red menace put her majesty's nose out of joint," op. cit.

[39] *Ming Pao* reporter, "Houxiang mengwu, zenyang zhuijiu" 后像蒙污，怎樣追究？(Queen statue ruined. Who is to be blamed?), *Ming Pao*, 18 September 1996, A03.

columnist, professionally a medical doctor, also joined the discussion. "Diagnosing" Pun satirically, he suggested that the latter's uncontrolled, violent behaviour was a result of a specific neurological defect at the frontal lobe.[41]

Besides associating – seriously or mockingly – Pun with mental disorder, another major point in discussions was vandalism. Columnist Xu Yongxuan criticized Pun with legal perspectives provided by a barrister, and insisted, even though Pun disliked the statue himself, he had no right to damage a commonly-owned object.[42] For other writers, Pun's offence was even more severe as it was not only committed against a statue, but local cultural meanings attached to it. Cultural critic Liang Wendao argued that the statue was a locus of public memory (of the unjust colonial experience, and of private reminiscences) and Pun's act was thus damaging to collective meanings.[43] Art critic Lau Sheung-yeung stressed that the statue was a cultural relic and its presence had historical significance (an example Lau repeatedly used was the engraved patterns on the Queen's throne, which reflected the influence of the Victorian style in Hong Kong).[44] In whatever sense, Pun's "artistic action" towards the statue was not

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[40] Du, op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 藝術、政治、精神行為怪異，係唔係只係一線之差。

[41] Qu Wenhai 區聞海, "Eye sunhuai di yishu" 額葉損壞的藝術 (Art of defective frontal lobe), *Ming Pao*, 25 September 1996.

[42] Xu, "Xiahu ni" 嚇唬你！(Threaten you!), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 25 September 1996, p.30.

[43] Liang Wendao , "Shuishi Xianggongren, shuishi yishujia" 誰是香港人？誰是藝術家？(Who are Hong Kong people? Who are artists?'), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 26 September 1996.

[44] Lau Sheung-yeung 劉霜陽, "Yishu hongweibing youling zai Gang piaodang" 藝術紅衛兵幽靈在

welcome, and the mix of art and vandalism was strictly denounced. Lau referred to a

column article "Pun a hit, Art a thrill" and regretted that the incident would likely

mislead local citizens who were not familiar with contemporary art.[45] Xu reiterated a

pointed statement: "to threaten Hong Kong people, who know nothing about art, with

'art' is the most shameful deed!"[46]

Pun's action was disapproved by people "knowing little about art." Among

people who did know about art, it was not popular either. After Pun's arrest, his only

die-hard supporter was critic and writer Ma Jian, who, like Pun, was also a recent

immigrant from the Mainland and shared the latter's discontent with the local culture.

For Ma, Pun's deed was almost heroic: "in five minutes, he flattened the Queen's

pointed nose to that of a Chinese's – alarming citizens for a consciousness to cultural

reunification."[47] However, except Ma, hardly any other critics gave Pun high regard.

Many rejected the theory of cultural awakening and considered Pun's choice of the

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港飄盪 (Art Red Guard haunts Hong Kong), *Ming Pao*, 20 October 1996. Pun's vandalistic act was also regretted by many other art practitioners like Leung Po-shan, Oscar Ho, Yuan Kwok-chung. See Leung Po-shan 梁寶珊, "Gonggong kongjian yu yishu kongjian jiexian weiming" 公共空間與藝術空間界線未明，潘星磊事件引發爭論 (Unclear boundary between public and art space, Pun Sing-lui incident provoked debates), *Ming Pao*, 18 September 1996.

[45] Lau's perspective expressed in an interview on RTHK, later published in *Ming Pao*, Chen Shaoxiong 陳少雄, "Cong Pan Xinglei shijian sikao xingwei yishu" 從潘星磊事件思考行爲藝術" (Reflection on action art from Pun ing-lui Incident), *Ming Pao*, 27 September 1996, D9.

[46] Xu, "Xiahu ni," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 用藝術二字去嚇唬不懂藝術的香港人，最是可鄙！

[47] Ma Jian 馬建, cited by Liang Wendao and *Ming Pao* reporters as an aside to Lau, "Yishu hongweibing youling zai Gang piaodang," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 只消五分鐘，便將英女皇的高鼻子打得跟中國人一樣，警醒了市民對文化回歸的意識。

Victoria statue as inappropriate. Hong Kong Arts Centre exhibition director Oscar Ho questioned the meaningfulness of attacking a "nineteenth-century granny" at a time when colonialism was already coming to its end.[48] Similarly, journalist Zhao Laifa also regarded the statue as an outdated object – "a tombstone of colonialism," and counter-proposed The *Xinhua* News Agency or the future Chief executive's automobile as more valid symbols of power.[49] While his symbolism was unrecognized, Pun's critical use of the statue backed down to the most straight-forward, demystified state as a condemned act of public property destruction. In addition to disagreeing with Pun's choice of symbol, critics were also against his manner of execution. His use of red paint, striking with a hammer were seen by Lau Sheung-yeung as reminiscent of the Red Guards.[50] Liang Wendao reiterated his disapproval for vandalism and proposed a counter strategy of just covering the statue with a Mao model.[51] Leung Po-shan, a news reporter as well as critic of the incident, also accused Pun's radical gestures as self-marginalizing, in discord with popular opinions and the concurrent cultural atmosphere.[52] At a very late stage of all controversies, the discordance between Pun against local opinions was polarized by Lau Sheung-yeung

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[48] Cited by Leung, "Gonggong kongjian yu yishu kongjian jiexian weiming," op. cit.

[49] See Lau, "Yishu hongweibing youling zai Gang piaodang," op. cit.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Liang, "Shuishi Xianggongren, shuishi yishujia," op. cit.

[52] See Chen, "Cong Pan Xinglei shijian sikao xingwei yishu," op. cit.

into an ideological difference between "Hong Kong people" and "Mainlanders in Hong Kong." He disregarded the attack on Hong Kong culture by Pun and other new immigrant artists, claiming that they had no thorough understanding of the society and such actions were nothing but resentfulness amidst failure in coping with the environment.[53]

The discordance between Pun and other members of the society reveals several conditions of the local public. At the onset, it is clear that the concept of public is not just a neutral collective of individuals. Disputes over Pun's action underlined that the public was not at all a unified collective, but segregated with different views. The public, rather than an objective category of the people, was more closely linked to ideological formations among social members. This way of conceptualizing the public relates to the classical model of the public sphere as theorized by Habermas.[54] According to Habermas, the public sphere refers to a discursive paradigm in which social members, particularly the bourgeois in his inquiry into nineteenth-century Europe, come together for discussions over common matters. This theory is seminal in studies related to the public, and has been frequently adopted by writers discussing

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989). Habermas's theory of the public sphere has been frequently cited in local discussions on the public, see *Identity and Public Culture*, Stephen C. K. Chan, ed., op. cit.

the local situation. Habermas's model is useful in terms of its highlight on the

discursive and dialogic nature of the public sphere. Yet some of its details are not

exactly valid in the local case. A first point to note is an assumption that the people are

uncoerced and their discussion would positively come to a certain consensus of

common good. This assumption is obviously idealistic and the case of Pun vividly

shows that people, coerced or not, are inevitably arguing from varied perspectives and

a consensus might not be necessarily achieved. It is heterogeneity rather than

homogeneity that characterizes the public discourse. Thus Habermas's idealistic

model could be modified by a later revision by Nancy Fraser, who suggests the idea

of multiple publics – that the public is not a singular collective but a conglomeration

of different groups of publics.[55] Discussion in the public sphere, according to Fraser,

is not totally unified but probably contestatory among the varied groups, and the

motivation is not "common" good but different interests. Reviewing the case of Pun,

this model does seem an appropriate description.

A further point to note in the case of Pun, concerning the concept of the public, is

the prominence of the media in the public discourse. The above "public" views over

Pun were indeed essentially a media discourse, and the wider public was virtually

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[55] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing
Democracy," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, Bruce Robbins, ed. (Minneapolis, University of
Minnesota, 1993), pp. 23–27.

absent. This is of course a practical result of archival research, but at the same time it is also an important factor for considering the public sphere. The media discourse has an extreme stronghold in the public discourse as it represents and conditions it. This observation is suggestive of the specific eminence of the media, and simultaneously reflective of another structural characteristic of the public. A theoretical model could be borrowed from art history, with Thomas Crow's thesis on the public of the nineteenth-century French salon.[56] Crow argues that, while people talked of "public applause," "public disapprovals," "public tastes" and the like during the salons, the so-called "public" ideas were inevitably from individual critics, curators and artists, and the public was very likely just an image constructed by whoever was in power of a discourse. In the present case, the "public" idea about Pun was also essentially guided by empowered discourses. The verdict of the act's illegality and Pun's probable insanity was first sentenced by the police (the official power in law enforcement and social order), and reinforced by the media (the generally accepted spokesperson of "mass" opinion). Idea formation in the public sphere is largely conditioned and organized by such discourse-controlling powers.[57]

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[56] Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London, Yale, 1985).

[57] The particular prominence of the media in the local public sphere is suggested by Tan Wanji 譚萬基, "Yuyue, gonggong lingyu yu "Xianggang" shenfen 愉悅、公共領域與「香港」身份 (Entertainment, Public Sphere and "Hong Kong' Identity"), in *Identity and Public Culture*, Stephen C.K. Chan, ed., op. cit., pp. 184-148. The essay specifically discusses a television series on ATV called *Lung Man Zhen* [龍門陣], which was very popular in Hong Kong in 1994, and argues that public identities are keenly affected by media discourse. Tan's arguments could be cross-referenced for the present case of Pun.

The notions of power and organization bridge to a third point in considering the local public. This point again departs from Habermas. To a large extent, the Habermasian model of the public sphere was contextualized within salon culture, in which, though not actually participating in politics, the bourgeois formed a discursive public sphere as they discussed issues of "common good" in salon meetings. This marks a drastic difference from the case of Hong Kong. There is obviously no salon here, and other ready platforms for a public sphere are also lacking. The so-called public spaces are practically municipal-owned open space, or left out space in between corporate ownerships. Pun's site, Victoria Park, is already a most frequented site for "public" events yet it is still officially policed. The lack of ready platforms is an important condition for the public sphere in Hong Kong. It implies that the projection of any public discourse is unavoidably related to power confrontation and special organization, and because physical space is so limited the public sphere also tends to find room in other forms of space.

The above elucidation of the local public, that it is discursive, heterogeneous, empowered and organized, and concerned with the annexation of limited space for public expression, could be given a glimpse by the case of Pun, which suggests each of these condition in a sketchy way. In the following discussion, these observations will be addressed with two more detailed examples that came up at a slightly later

date. To start with, the organized nature of the public will be accounted with the case

of the *Pillar of Shame*.

Organization of Public Experience: the *Pillar of Shame*

The *Pillar of Shame* course of events sparked off in May 1997 when Danish

sculptor Jens Galshiot sent Hong Kong a *Pillar of Shame* – an eight-foot tall,

obelisk-like sculpture covered with distorted bodies in agony [Image 3]. On an even

more remarkable scale than the case of Pun, the *Pillar* became a locus of public

debate. Initially a sculpture by an overseas sculptor, the work was subsequently

appropriated into a public prop, which in turn became a principle directive in a series

of public experiences. The following discussion will examine the course of the *Pillar*,

and analyze how its "public" life was related to programmed organization.

The immediate subject of the *Pillar of Shame* was the Tiananmen Massacre. Yet

further to this specific reference, the work was related to a project of a larger scale.

According to the artist, the project, conceptualized as "art in defence of human

rights," was to be realized through installations of *Pillars of Shame* in different sites

over the globe where "humanistic principles are abandoned or human rights

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offended."[58] In more precise terms, the project's target was to erect monuments at

places where blood had been shed during violent suppression of human rights

movements. *The Pillar of Shame* was to remind people of atrocities which the artist

pleaded "should never reoccur." The sculpture, whose artistic merit was frequently

questioned during its consequential course of struggles in Hong Kong, was suggested

by the artist as intentionally ugly. Visual unpleasantness is a cue to the ugliness of the

atrocities, the torn and twisted bodies are suggested by the artist to be symbols of

"degradation, devaluation and lack of respect for individuals," and the dark colour

denotes grief and loss. In Galshiot's programming, every one or two years, a *Pillar*

would be set up. It would be simultaneously generic as a general criticism towards

violence, as well as a site-specific attack on an event that happened at each particular

place. This two-fold reference thus ties the individual monuments, and the incidents

they represent, into a global network against human rights infringement.[59]

Concerns for the oppressed have been frequent in Galshiot's art: an earlier

cross-cities project titled *My Inner Beast* was done in 1993, in which sculptures of a

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[58] Jens Galshiot, Artist's statement for the *Pillar of Shame* project.[Online] (cited 13 November 2001). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.aidoh.dk.).

[59] A second *Pillar of Shame* was set up in Mexico on 18 April 1999 (the International Day against Impunity, commemorating the slaughter of indigenous people in the village of Acteal by the authorities in December 1997); a third one was set up in Northern Brazil in 2000 (again marking the International Day against Impunity, commemorating a local massacre of landless peasants); a fourth one was be erected in Berlin in 2002. See *Pillar of Shame* web-page, op. cit.

pig in human clothes were placed in twenty European cities as a critical remark on increasing racism and intolerance; during the United Nations's 1995 social summit in Copenhagen, another accordingly-named project *UN – happening* criticized the hypocrisy of the West towards problems of the poor countries through fettering 750 figures of young children dying of hunger and medical lack onto different places in the city. In these prototypes, Galshiot showed his emphasis on the creation of massive social spectacles rather than fine individual aesthetic objects, and this has remained as the principle strategy of the *Pillar of Shame* project. From the very beginning, the *Pillar of Shame* was to be understood as a happening intruding into real life rather than a sculptural object, and this mode of expression was publicized to world-wide internet users on the *Pillar*'s web-page as a "theatre of Reality":

> His (Galshiot's) happenings function as gigantic theatrical events. His sculptures set the scene. Suddenly they (the sculptures) turn up in the street and the play starts. Politicians, the media and the public are brought up as actors. They adopt their role with ease as the symbolism of the happening is open for interpretation. No matter what they do, they contribute to the dynamics of the happening by constantly creating new symbols.[60]

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[60] Ibid.

Such a conception that a sculpture in a public place targets social stimulation more than individual aesthetic goals is akin to what Joseph Beuys formulated as "social sculpture/social architecture."[61] Explaining such a use of public sculpture, Michael North pinpoints the concept as a shift from the aesthetic object to the experience it provokes, so that actions and reactions of the public *become* the sculpture.[62] In other words, the provocation, or rather the cue for public experiences, was the primary objective of the work.

Adopting Galshiot's own metaphor of theatre, the *Pillar* was used as a central prop for its provocation of public experience. As it entered public space, subsequent happenings were not exactly controlled, nonetheless very much directed. Set within the social climate during the last days before the handover, the background for the *Pillar* was questions like whether Hong Kong could still enjoy freedom and democracy after its return to Communist China, have political rights to express oppositional voices, or whether the "one-country two-systems" promise would really be kept. Paralleling all these was a call by some democrats for vindicating the 1989 pro-democracy movement – a strike both aiming at the specific event and pressing the

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[61] Joseph Beuys, "I am Searching for a Field Character," first published in English translation by Caroline Tisdall in the exhibition catalogue of *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974), p. 48; reprinted in *Art in Theory,* Charles Harrison & Paul Wood , eds. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992, 1998), pp. 902–903.

[62] Michael North, "The Public as Sculpture," in *Art and the Public Sphere,* op. cit., p. 10.

government to show its stance towards democracy.[63] This was the background behind

the introduction of the *Pillar* to Hong Kong. Galshiot's sculpture has not just come as

a humanitarian art object. Its coming was facilitated by the Hong Kong Alliance in

Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. The alliance is a local political

group in strong opposition against the Communist regime and was the major

organizer of supporting activities for the 1989 movement, and its involvement

outwardly sharpened the *Pillar*'s political status. Galshiot's general humanitarian

objectives were far less prominently presented than the immediate critique to June

Fourth, and the *Pillar* was turned into a fetish of political struggle by the

pro-democratic agency. From the start, the seeming displacement of the *Pillar* in

Hong Kong, instead of Tiananmen, was politically strategic. Tiananmen was

apparently the most appropriate site for the work. However, it was actually an

impossible site as the Chinese communist government would surely have prohibited

the erection of such an object. On the other hand, though Hong Kong is situated far

away from Beijing, the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong provided an extremely

favourable opportunity. The plot involved a scheduled play of time: in June the *Pillar*

found its way into British colony Hong Kong, on 1 July it automatically stood on

China's soil. Annexation of this critical time has two further implications: first, the

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[63] See for example, Fung Wai-kong, "Motion vindicates 1989 democracy movement," *South China Morning Post*, 22 May 1997, General News, p. 8.

difficult situation thus created for the pre-handover government; second, and intensifying the situation, the amount of global attention as the handover was intensely watched by international media. Thus in the guise of an innocent work of art, the *Pillar* was nonetheless an object annexed for a highly political discourse, touching upon sensitive issues like the official stance towards democracy and the critical rivalry between freedom of expression and official sanction.

Contests between freedom of expression and official sanction indeed started even before the *Pillar*'s physical appearance. On 12 May, Galshiot seized public attention from more than 700 press agencies from over 100 countries through a press release, announcing the start of "a global art happening." The language of the statement is worth mentioning. An imagery of war prevailed: the sculpture was described as an "art missile" and Galshiot anticipated that it would be viewed by some as "a terror act."[64] On 14 May, the Urban Council, responding to a submitted request for public display, declined the *Pillar*'s exhibition with a neutral-sounding reason that the proposed exhibition period from June to September was too long.[65] Two days later,

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[64] Galshiot, Press release for the *Pillar of Shame* [Online] (cited 13 November 2001). Accessed through the World Wide Web: (http://www.aidoh.dk.).

. The press release was sent to over 700 world-wide newspapers, radio- and TV-stations in a specially designed envelope, on which notices (in English and Chinese) saying "*the old cannot kill the young forever*" made its target and stance obvious. Sources from the *Pillar of Shame* web-page, op. cit
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[65] Quinton Chan, "Memorials to Tiananmen cold-shouldered by Council," *South China Morning Post*, 15 May 1997, General News, p.3.

the artist sent an open letter to the Council, reasserting that the sculpture represented the struggle for human rights and was indeed in line with decolonization.[66] Nonetheless this did not alter the Council's decision, and on 20 May the issue provoked an overtly political event – the walkout of 11 democrat councilors, donning surgical masks with the words "political censorship," from the Council meeting when the ban was confirmed with eighteen votes to thirteen. The artist once again responded through a press release, denouncing the ban as a "grotesque example of self-censorship" and accusing the Council of "(selling) itself like a sack of rice to the old men's regime in Beijing." On 29 May, a further ban on public display (in the New Territories) was confirmed by the Regional Council, followed again by another press statement by the artist blaming the authorities for "another shameful example of self-censorship."

Remarkable attention was thus already stirred up before the society even saw the *Pillar*. Despite the ban on its exhibition, the *Pillar* managed to be temporarily erected in Victoria Park on June Fourth as a prop in the candlelight vigil. This vigil was of special historical importance. Not only was it the eighth anniversary of the crackdown, it was also, more importantly, the date for the last remembrance candlelight vigil

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[66] Galshiot, Open letter to the Urban Council [Online] (cited 13 November 2001). Accessed through the World Wide Web: (http://www.aidoh.dk.).

before Chinese rule. At this sensitive moment, the *Pillar* was presented as an object that meant to provoke public empathy. As the artist repeatedly stressed, it did become quite a focal point at the vigil. The *Pillar* was erected by the Alliance in the centre of the football pitches, beside another prominent totem, a replica of the *Memorial Monument of the People's Heroes*. The press reported that the sculpture had been a great attraction to many, and the organizers had to repeatedly ask participants not to linger around it.[67]

Empathy provoked by the sculpture became the source of a series of subsequent public events. As its temporal permit for display ended after the vigil, the *Pillar* had to resort to another place of residence. Prior arrangement was made since the ban of public exhibition was announced in May. Local tertiary institutions were approached by the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, and with agreement from the student union of the University of Hong Kong, it was decided that the *Pillar* would be transported to the University and erected at a podium managed by the union. However, upon its arrival, the *Pillar* was rejected by the University's estates office for "safety" reasons. A reactive solidarity was thus immediately stirred up among hundreds of involved students, supporting parties from the alliance and other vigil participants, who then got into a heated contestation with

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[67] Chris Yeung, "World watches uncertain future," *South China Morning Post*, 5 June 1997, General News, p. 3.

the University's estates staff and the police (thus called up). At the end of the day,

supporters of the *Pillar* managed to overcome official blocks and got the sculpture

onto campus. The incident, centred on the *Pillar*, prompted an imaginative replay of

history: the Hong Kong participants got into identification with the Beijing students

fighting for their symbolic *Goddess of Freedom*. Popular 1989 slogans like "long live

people's power" were triumphantly reiterated by the *Pillar*'s supporters.[68] In a later

essay Liang Wendao recorded what he overheard during the contest:

> Some very young students said with excitement, "submerged impressions
>
> like June Fourth should evoke some degree of mimicry, reminding us that,
>
> no matter how we evaluate June Fourth that year, the format will become a
>
> model of continuous appropriation."[69]

Following the dramatic night, the *Pillar* rivalry continued with a subtle shift in

context from Tiananmen to democracy in Hong Kong. Repeated official declines for

public display were contested by persistent attempts to bring the *Pillar* up to the

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[68] Liang, "Zhewan Gangda yau yichang zhanzheng – renmin liliang wansui" 這晚港大有一場戰爭 – 人民力量萬歲 (There was a war at the University of Hong Kong – "Long Live People's Power"), *Ming Pao*, 12 June 1997; later collected in *Pillar of Shame Anthology*國殤之柱文集(Hong Kong, Student Union, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1997), p. 11. The quotation in Chinese: 人民力量萬歲。

[69] Liang, "Zhewan Gangda yau yichang zhanzheng – yizhong chengwei sheyi di jiyi" 這晚港大有一場戰爭 – 一種成爲失憶的記憶 (There was a war at the University of Hong Kong- "an Amnesia that Becomes Memory), in *Pillar of Shame Anthology*, op. cit. The quotation in Chinese:一些很年輕的學生有點興奮地說:「好似六四這種印象潛存大概會喚起某程度的模仿行爲,提醒我們不論如何評價當年六四,其形象已經成爲日後將會不斷被挪用的圖式。」

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public. An agency called "Frontier in defence of freedom of speech on campus," organized by students from the seven local tertiary institutes, became the host of the *Pillar*'s struggles thereafter. In the following year, the *Pillar* toured the seven institutions, and finally managed to have its residency confirmed at the University of Hong Kong after a general polling by its students. In the course of struggles, the *Pillar* was a keen signifier of freedom and democracy in Hong Kong as much as its initial signification of Tiananmen. It was charged, in memory of the history of 1989, with political claims for its present. A manifesto of the Frontier articulates:

> Succeeding the fearless revolutionary spirit of the 89 people's movement, and the initiative of the night of the "*Pillar* protection movement," we students from different institutions hope, with the Frontier in defence of freedom of speech in campus as our base, to oppose strongly any form of political censorship, fight to maintain a lively, multifarious, democratic campus where opinions can be freely expressed, and contribute to the development of an autonomous, accommodating society.[70]

The succession of public events, political struggles and popular attention sparked

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[70] Hanwei xianyuan yanlui ziyou zhenxian捍衛校園言論自由陣線, "Hanwei xiaoyuan yanlui ziyou xuanyan" 捍衛校園言論自由宣言 ('Declaration of the Frontier in defence of freedom of speech in campus'), 3 July 1997, collected in *Pillar of Shame Anthology*, op.cit., p. 48. The quotation in Chinese: 承繼八九民運不畏強權的抗爭精神，以及「護柱行動」當晚自發的群眾力量，我們來自不同院校的同學，希望以《捍衛校園言論自由陣線》為基礎，凝聚團結學界的進步力量。

off by the *Pillar* confirmed its potency as a public object. Compared to the earlier case of Pun, the *Pillar* seized a lot more public concern and went through an active public life together with other social co-players. Public experiences of the *Pillar* were interactive, but they were not exactly spontaneous. Prior programming by the artist, and more importantly the Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China and later the Frontier in defence of freedom of speech on campus, had conditioned popular reception. Public supporters of the *Pillar* were inevitably influenced by these directing bodies, and the public discourse in which they took part was simultaneously led.

The argument that the public was led could be cross-referenced to Gramsci's theory on social organization. Revising the classical Marxists' view which considers social cohesion, particularly that by the state, as cohesive, Gramsci sees an element of consent: social ideologies are initiated by certain leaders, and consequently people adopt them in hegemony.[71] Gramsci pinpoints such leaders as the state and intellectuals, by which he means people in the social position of directing ideas – applied to the examples, the political leaders, the media and other eminent people in the discourse. While social ideologies were directed by these leading forces, as with the above empirical cases, the public was more precisely organized sectors rather than

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[71] See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections for Cultural Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

a neutral collection of individual citizens. In the case of the *Pillar*, public empathy was very much prompted through the agencies' tactful presentation of the object. The emphasis on the sensitive and provoking issues of June Fourth and freedom, instead of the more neutral aspects of humanitarianism and art, heightened the work's criticalness during that particular moment. The label of art, though not emphasized, shielded politics with a seeming innocence and positioned the work in a place that ought to be defended. Presented in such a manner, it was most understandable that the *Pillar* attracted such popular support, particularly as its arguments and concurrent social urges were in resonance. The case of the *Pillar* illustrates how a work absorbed the public through tactful organization. As the *Pillar* tried to annex public space for oppositional meanings, around the critical moment of the handover a similar quest was also pursued by the authorities to establish affirmative public meanings.

Creation of a Public Image: the *Forever Blooming Bauhinia*[72] &

the Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China

The use of public art for state ideologies, which was inactive for a long time during the colonial era, regained importance at the establishment of the SAR. Two prominent works, *the Forever Blooming Bauhinia*, set up upon the occasion of the handover in 1997, and the *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*, erected in 1999 after a decision to build it in 1996, were employed by the government to fashion a state image among the public. As a counterpoint to the oppositional *Pillar of Shame*, these two works illustrate how the authorities tried to project state narratives and organized an official public image in public space.

The *Forever Blooming Bauhinia* [Image 4] was originally a gift which came to Hong Kong together with thirty-one other gifts from different provinces in China. Physically, it is a gold plated sculpture, cast in a claimed bauhinia shape, six metres in height together with a red granite pedestal. It was commissioned by the Chinese Central Government, made by anonymous Beijing sculptors, and given to the SAR upon the occasion of its establishment.[73] The sculpture, seemingly specific to Hong

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[72] The *Forever Blooming Bauhinia* is also called as *Forever Blossoming Bauhinia*. The former name, as engraved on an official plaque next to the sculpture, is used in this discussion.

[73] Information gathered from the government's administration department in a telephone enquiry on 22 July 2002.

Kong in its bauhinia form, is nonetheless very comparable to another gift, a golden lotus in exactly the same style, given by the Central Government to Macau upon the latter's handover in 1999. As a pair, these two sculptures materially assert China's reunification of the two places. Political potency of the *Bauhinia* is first registered in its occupancy of a most politically eminent site: it is installed at the plaza (later named after the sculpture as "Golden Bauhinia Plaza") of the Extension of the Convention and Exhibition Centre, a historical site where the handover ceremony was conducted.[74] Occupying such an eminent location, the sculpture's political importance was reinforced by an official presentation ceremony. Although it did not exactly play a part during the handover ceremony, a plaque which was subsequently set up by its side suggests that there was an official presentation ceremony, officiated by China's Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs Qian Qichen and Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa of the new SAR in the morning of the critical date on 1 July 1997.[75] Such official attention clearly suggested that, beyond a gift or a sculpture, the work was an object loaded with power implications.

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[74] As for other gifts received upon the occasion, after the handover, a selection was exhibited in the new Hong Kong Museum of History and in an exhibition titled *More than Gifts* at Shatin Town Hall, opened on 13 June 1998 (See Clarke, *Hong Kong Art*, op. cit., p. 140); after the exhibitions a number of works resided in places like the Convention Centre, railway stations or the Airport as memorable, nonetheless decorative, souvenirs.

[75] Information engraved on a plaque erected next to the *Bauhinia*. The text on the plaque states: "the Vice Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, Qian Qichen and the Chief Executive of the HKSAR, Tung Chee-hwa, co-officiated at the ceremony for the unveiling and presentation of the sculpture on the morning of 1 July 1997." The status as an official object is reinforced by further official events conducted with the sculpture as a centre of focus; see p. 85 and footnote 132.

Besides its eminent location and official status, the sculpture's iconography is also suggestive of power. Its adjacent plaque suggests that the "red granite pedestal, which is cylindrical in the upper part and takes the shape of a pyramid in the lower part, represent Chinese territory. The rendering of the Great Wall on the pedestal symbolizes the greatness of the motherland."[76] This iconographic reference is addressed by Oscar Ho in an essay titled "City of Make Believe," which discusses a few attempts in constructing public beliefs through art during the handover period. Ho also discusses the work's more central iconography of the bauhinia. The flower, which has been the state flower since 1965 and remains as an acceptable icon for Hong Kong because of its neutrality vis-à-vis other outwardly British emblems like the crown, unicorn or lion, is nonetheless not void of colonial reference with its name Bauhinia Blakeana, after Governor Sir Henry Blake, whose office from 1889 to 1903 was arguably a most brutal part of Hong Kong's colonial history. To this unavoidable colonial memory, Ho remarks those "who think they have found an emblem free from colonial recollection will be disappointed"[77] – but perhaps they would not, because this present bauhinia is not only a found object, but a reconstruction transforming old references into new ones. In a document concerning the treatment of the names of

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[76] Engraved text on official plaque set up by the *Forever Blooming Bauhinia*.

[77] Ho, "City of Make Believe," *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 25, 2000, pp. 46–49.

public agencies, emblems, flags and stamps from a meeting of the Preliminary Working Committee of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the first treatment principle goes as follows: "fulfilling the spirit of "one country two systems," names of public agencies, emblems, flags and stamps that do not reflect colonial rule could be continually used."[78] Under such terms, to keep the Bauhinia as the state emblem of Hong Kong is appropriate in two ways: first, as Ho suggests, it is comparatively neutral; second, to keep an old symbol is favorable for both the obsessive "unchanged for 50 years" and "one country two systems" slogans. In addition, the bauhinia is a very suitable input for transforming a familiar motif into a signifier for China: in the official SAR emblem, the five-petal magenta flower (and former Urban Council symbol) is subtly transformed into a five-point star in red.[79] Paralleling the figurative transformation, the symbol's name is also altered: not only was "Blakeana" missing from the English title, the Chinese name virtually changed from "foreign Bauhinia"(*yang zijin* 洋紫荊) to "Gold Bauhinia" (*jin zijin* 金紫荊) from a no longer probable reference to foreignness to

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[78] *Preliminary Working Committee of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* (Beijing, 1995), p. 168.

[79] A public competition was originally organized to call for public entries for the emblem's design. However, after receiving 2658 proposals, the selection committee decided to appoint three renowned local personages (Van Lau, Hon Bin-wah and Ho To, whose design was eventually chosen). In all three designs there were the bauhinia and hints for the star. The two motifs were recognized as representation of Hong Kong and Chinese reigns respectively in a television documentary broadcasted in China, *Hong Kong: Television Documentary Xiangqang cangsang: dianshi jilupian*香港滄桑, 電視紀錄片 (Hong Kong years: a television documentary) (Beijing, China International TV Corp., 1997), vol. 6.

the colour denoting Chinese imperial feel.

The new symbol, replacing its pre-handover meaning with new political suggestiveness, is involved with a kind of symbolic dethroning of the British crown. The new bauhinia has replaced the crown as the new state emblem, and the present sculpture has also symbolically supplanted the Queen Victoria statue. As a public manifestation of ruling power, the new sovereign symbol has a lot of similarities with the earlier statue: in terms of location, the Victoria statue was first installed in the Royal Plaza (now Statue Square), an important institutional venue with a full view of the harbour, while *Bauhinia* annexed a new site of similar political significance; in terms of presentation, the Victoria Statue was enthroned in an elaborate canopy and the *Bauhinia* is elevated by the Great Wall-like pedestal. The *Bauhinia* is comparable to the Victoria statue when it was at its prime, but the latter, which has long receded to a more marginal site at Victoria Park and lost its majestic canopy, is now hardly comparable to the *Bauhinia* as an object of power. As a political symbol, the *Bauhinia* has overthrown the statue, and interestingly, its form bears a likeness to another symbol of power the bauhinia motif replaces, the crown. With its context shifted, like the bauhinia itself, this crown is no longer referential to British colonialism, but serves as an archetypal sign of reign with the red castle as its base.

The *Forever Blooming Bauhinia* represents the assertion of the ruling power of

the new regime. A further reasserting object was the *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China* [Image 5]. The *Monument*, among all above examples discussed in this chapter, is the only one commissioned by the local government. Like the *Bauhinia*, its objective is also affirmation of reunification. The decision to build the monument was made in 1996, and in 1998 a special committee was appointed by the Chief Executive for steering its construction.[80] An open competition was held, and according to the winning design by architect Tang Kang-wah the monument was completed by the government's architectural department in 1999.[81] Sited also at the Golden Bauhinia Plaza, the *Monument* was inaugurated on 1st July 1999, the second anniversary of the establishment of the SAR.

As the first official public sculpture of the new SAR, the *Monument* attempts to monumentalize the whole of Hong Kong as a state. Representation of Hong Kong,

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[80] The committee was a Working Group on the Reunification Monument and Government House Renaming. As its name suggests, the committee was responsible for the two post-handover tasks.

[81] For information concerning the open competition and construction of the *Monument*, see for example: "Open invitation for Reunification Monument and name for former Government House" [Online] (posted on 26 June 1998, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/199806/26/062618.htm); "Teshou weichu gongzuo xiaozu choujian jinianbei" 特首委出工作小組籌建紀念碑 (Chief Executive commissioned committee for construction monument), *Wen Hui Bao*, 27 June 1998; "Huigui jinianbei sheji yu beiwen" 回歸紀念碑徵設計及碑文 (Reunification monument invites design and inscription), *Wen Hui Bao*, 29 September 1998; "Huigui jinianbei sheji yu beiwen shengfu yao shimin tigong jianyi tongshi zhengqiu qian zongdufu xian zhongyingwen mingchen" 回歸紀念碑設計與碑文政府邀市民提供建議同時徵求前總督府新中英文名稱 (Government invites citizens to suggest Reunification Monument's design and inscription simultaneously asks for new Chinese and English names for former Government House), *Ta Kung Pao*, 29 September 1998. "Huigui jinianbei ji qian dufu gongkai zhengqiu sheji ji xinming" 回歸紀念碑及前督府公開徵求設計及新名 (Open invitation for Reunification Monument's design and former Government House's new name), *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 29 September 1999. Circumstances of the competition were also more critically documented in a feature of television series *Shiju zongheng* 時局縱橫 (News in perspective) broadcasted on 4 July 1999 (Hong Kong, Television Broadcasts Ltd).

particularly the historical part of its return to China as the title pinpoints, is an omnipotent subtext in every stylistic feature. The monument is built with granite, a most common mineral building up most of the land in the territory. This reference to the territory's land is synthesized into the monument's narrative of time: 206 stone rings are piled up into a horizontal timeline with each ring representing a year from 1842, year of the Nanjing Treaty, to 2047, the final year of the unchanged for 50-year policy. The ring for 1842, together with five others representing 1860 (the Beijing Convention), 1989 (the Treaty of Beijing), 1982 (the beginning of discussion on Hong Kong's future between Beijing and former British Primer Minister Margaret Thatcher), 1984 (the signing of the Joint Declaration) and 1990 (the announcement of the Basic Law in Beijing), are of a lighter colour to highlight the historical significance of these dates.[82] The most prominent ring is without doubt that of 1997, which is inlayed with luminous materials to stress the historical importance of the return of Hong Kong to China. To approximate the situation of the handover and construct an image linking Hong Kong and its motherland, the general style is a symbolic intermingling of modernism and Chinese traditions: the abstract, geometric form of a vertical pole with a crafted capital is nonetheless reminiscent of the Chinese *huobiao*〔華表〕. Chinese implications behind the modernist appearance could also be registered with the

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[82] Historical references of these dates are not specified in the *Monument*'s publicity materials. Information on this part is provided by the government's administration department, in an email reply dated 28 January 2003.

nation's President Jiang Zemin's calligraphy on the façade, which calls upon similar assertive use of the ruler's handwriting commonly practised since the dynasties till present time. [83] Extended inscriptions on the pedestal about the monument's commission are akin to the Chinese legacy of having history engraved in stone slabs, ritual and monumental objects. As these Chinese signs exist in harmony with the modernist style, the whole form is suggestive of the room for coexistence of the two systems. While the monument serves as an "all-rounded" representation of Hong Kong at this historical point, it fashions an impression of unified hope: the promise till 2047, above which, as the monument's publicity brochure advocates, "forged from copper and with an oxidized surface, the capital is long-lasting, symbolizing that Hong Kong continues to prosper after its return to the motherland."[84] This apparent collective vision for the future, together with the aforementioned references to the place, completes the monument as an object of the state.

If the *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China* serves as a representation of the state, a critical question against it would be whether this is a state of institutions or a state of the people. A sense of democracy was fostered when the government announced that the design would be chosen from an

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[83] See Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power. Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991).

[84] *Information on the monument in commemoration of the return of Hong Kong to China* (Hong Kong, Information Services Department, 1999).

open competition. However, the extent of this democracy is questionable. It the first place, the designer, to whom acknowledgment would be inevitable if "from the people" was a key rationale in the commission, was neither mentioned on the work nor the publicity brochure. Rather, the work's attribution is outwardly stated as "erected by the Government of Hong Kong" in its inscription and its printed information. This attribution is accurate considering the monument's construction: the "democratic" open competition was conducted by a special committee as appointed by the Chief Executive, the Working Group on the Reunification Monument and Government House Renaming, which as its name suggests, was responsible for the two important official tasks of configuring the new state. Conducted officially, the initiative for building the monument was also from the government rather than from the people. In the government's invitation for design entries in June 1998, it was announced at the very beginning that construction of the monument was confirmed by the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in a meeting on 25 May 1996,[85] and was proposed on an even earlier date in the 6th meeting of the Preliminary Working Committee of the Preparatory Committee in 1995.[86] Decisions to build the monument long before the commemorated event even

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[85] "Open invitation for Reunification Monument and new name for former Government House," [Online] (posted on 26 June 1998, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through the World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/199806/26/062618.htm)

[86] *Preliminary Working Committee of the Preparatory Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*, op. cit., p. 168.

took place underlines its official pre-determinacy. The work's official determinacy was discussed by Chan Yuk-keung, local artist and professor of Fine Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Chan referred to rumours about how the design was confirmed:

> There are sayings that the final proof of the design, besides the designer's own "intentions", also included quite many adjudicators' opinions. That is, the designer only provided a pillar-form "model", and then people-in-charge "inscribed" on it their "contents". In this way, the *Monument* is basically a residue of all kinds of meanings; the pillar just provided space for displaying these meanings.[87]

Whether the rumours are true or not, Chan reasonably points out that the *Monument*'s meaning was to a large extent dictated by the inscriptions, undeniably officially drafted, and its form was unavoidably a platform for such official contents.

Assertion of an official work is all the more potent with the aforementioned calligraphy of Jiang Zemin. Further than a cultural reference to China, the presence of Jiang's handwriting was interpreted by local art critic Oscar Ho as a mere

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[87] Chan Yuk-keung 陳育強, "Chenchong di huigui jinianbei" 沉重的回歸紀念碑 (Heavy Reunification Monument), *Xpressions*, 6 May 1999, p. 5. The quotation in Chinese: 聞說這次設計的最後定案，除了設計師本人的「原意」外，更滲入了好些評審專家的意見，即設計師只提供了一種柱式「典範」，然後讓主事人在柱上「紋上」他們的「內容」。如此看來，「紀念碑」基本上是各種意義的澱積物；柱身不過是提供空間讓這些意義作鋪陳之用。

power-establishing gesture: Jiang is not known for his calligraphic skills and his calligraphic endorsement could only be understood as an adoption of the ancient imperial tradition.[88] The purpose of the monument as a piece of official rhetoric was reinforced by a highly rhetorical inauguration speech by Vice President Hu Jintao. Stating five main points of his speech, Hu said,

> The *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*, is a monument recording the striving history of Chinese sons and daughters' defense for country unity and sovereignty integrity……
>
> The *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*, is a monument acclaiming the grand realization of "one country two systems"……
>
> The *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*, is a monument signaling the making of a new milieu for Hong Kong, with Hong Kong people as master……
>
> The *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*, is a monument inscribing Chinese citizens' contribution towards the peaceful progression of humanity……

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[88] Ho, "City of Make-believe," op. cit.

The *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with*

China, shall stand constantly in the heart of every Chinese……[89]

Hu's rhetoric clearly shows that the *Monument* was essentially an object for the

projection of political ideologies. Its magnification of the official stance to grand

narratives obviously exposed its intention in indoctrinating and absorbing the public.

Both the *Bauhinia* and the *Monument* were keenly employed by the authority for

projecting state ideologies in the public. Their success, in terms of their capacity in

establishing a valid public narrative, is nonetheless hard to gauge. Unlike the

attention-catching cases of Pun and the *Pillar*, the *Bauhinia* and the *Monument* did not

spark off much discussion despite their eminence as such representational objects at

such a critical time. The scarcity of responses might be due to the bluntness of their

status as state propaganda, that it was too straightforward, too plain for controversy.

While public responses were rare, objectively the two works, no matter how

rhetorically linked to the people, were also not quite related to the local citizens. The

Bauhinia, considering its source, contents and style, more likely shows the presence

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[89] Government Information Services, "National Vice President's speech on the Reunification Monument's unveiling ceremony" [Online] (posted on 1 July 1997, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/199907/01/0701086.htm) The quotation in Chinese :

香港回歸祖國紀念碑，是一座記載中華兒女維護國家統一、領土完整的奮鬥歷史的豐碑……
香港回歸祖國紀念碑，是一座謳歌『一國兩制』偉大實踐的豐碑……
香港回歸祖國紀念碑，是一座標誌港人作主、開始了建設香港新里程的豐碑……
香港回歸祖國紀念碑，是一座銘刻中國人民對人類和平進步事業作出重大貢獻的豐碑……
香港回歸祖國紀念碑，是一座轟立在每個中國人心中的不朽豐碑……

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of the central government rather than that of the people of Hong Kong. The *Monument*, in spite of the state image it fashions, is nonetheless questioned for its legitimacy as a representation of the people. Its symbols were directly rejected by Ho as "totally meaningless to the public,"[90] and the history that it inscribes was criticized by politician Szeto Wah as only telling a selected part of the story.[91] A question aroused here is thus: how exactly do people feel about these two public sculptures?

While no surveys on reception are available from the related departments,[92] a very brief field exercise was done at the site in this research.[93] Forty visitors were interviewed by the author shortly after the flag raising ceremony on 8 June, 2002. The qualitative interviews were centered on the visitors' feelings towards the two works. The sample is obviously too small for any statistical conclusion, yet some answers are very suggestive of how the works posed for the actual public. Among the group of local interviewees, the impression towards the works was mostly general and fair, that

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[90] Ho, "City of Make-believe," op. cit.

[91] *Shiju zongheng*, 4 July 1999 (Hong Kong, Television Broadcasts Ltd).
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[92] A number of government departments have been involved with the *Bauhinia* and *Monument*. The Administration Wing of the Chief Executive's Office was responsible for receiving the *Bauhinia* from the Chinese Central Government and the commission of the *Monument*. Installation of the works was assisted by the Architectural Department, and the works are now under the hands of the Trade Development Council, which has to take care of the works because it is responsible for the management of the Gold Bauhinia Plaza. In the process of this research, all of the above departments responded that they were responsible only for particular aspects of the works and none of them had conducted any surveys on them after their installation.

[93] The interviews were done at Golden Bauhinia Plaza on 8 June 2002. Forty visitors, comprising twenty tourists and twenty local citizens, were interviewed on a random basis. The interviews were open-ended, and interviewees were invited to express their personal perception towards the *Golden Bauhinia* and *Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China*.

they represented the handover but did not bring much personal association. A few special comments could be noted. A member of the ceremonial band saw the works as ornaments at the site, with nothing special and did not really match with the environment. A driver saw them as monuments. Their presence did not bother him but he did not quite like their looks, especially that the *Bauhinia* was not blossoming. An art teacher disliked the *Bauhinia* because he thought it was not a bauhinia. Another teacher had no opinion towards both works, but thought them meaningless and a waste of money. These opinions are of course not totally reflective of the full picture of local citizens' perception of the works, yet they evidence how the state narrative was not bought by members of the public. However, responses were different from another group of interviewees, tourists from the Mainland or other Asian countries who make up the majority of visitors at the place most of the time. Most Mainland tourists had learned about the two objects either from Mainland television programmes[94] or from their tour guides. Almost all interviewees expressed positive feelings and a few suggested that they felt proud of the works because they affirmed Hong Kong's return to China. A further response worth-mentioning is from a

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[94] See for example *Xiangqang cangsang: dianshi jilupian*, op. cit. A comparable gift, a golden lotus in a very similar style was later sent to Macau upon its handover in 1999. Mainland tourists' interests in the sculpture could also be reflected by a news article on *Ming Pao*, which reported on basketball star Yao Ming's visit to Hong Kong on 6 August 2003. The article suggested that when the basketball star visited the Gold Bauhinia Plaza, he did not attracted much attention and the visitors were more interested in the *Forever Blooming Bauhinia* sculpture. See Zhou Zhiyu 周芷鈺, "Jinzijingxiang 'fengtou' sheng Yao Ming" 金紫荊像「風頭」勝姚明 (Golden Bauhinia more attractive than Yao Ming), *Ming Pao,* 6 August, A10.

Malaysian tourist who worked as a researcher in sociology. Also feeling positive about the sculpture, she suggested she would introduce the *Bauhinia* to her friends and relatives as a symbol of Hong Kong – yet the golden floral form was (mis)recognized as an orchid. The positive readings of the two works by tourists, as opposed to the less enthusiastic responses from local citizens, suggest that though the works might not have been thoroughly successful in fostering a state solidarity, they did manage to fashion a certain state appeal.

The *Bauhinia* and the *Monument*'s path to establishing publicness was the creation of a state appeal. Unlike the case of Pun, whose public meaning was largely determined by society's perception of and reaction to it, and the *Pillar*, which was used as a prop for collective identification, these two monumental works are rather just one-way projections of the official discourse. These two forms of art-public relations are best articulated with the local vocabulary for "public." There are two Chinese words for "public": *gongzong* [公眾], referring to the masses and relating to case of Pun which involves the mass's response; and *gonggong* [公共], public with official implications, as in the case of the *Bauhinia* and the *Monument*. This variety, further than featuring the different constituents of the public, also shows that the public can be constructed in plural ways. Plurality is an important notion in the public sphere, in the above two senses as well as a third sense that will be illustrated with the

last example of this chapter, the case of the *Hong Kong Tripod*, highlighting the

plurality of public "space."

Plurality in Public Space: *Hong Kong Tripod*

Throughout a series of events between 1997 and 1999, the *Tripod* was highly

reflective of many aforementioned issues and fits well as a wrap up for this

investigation of local public space. In addition, it highlights a point regarding the

plurality of public space. It was engaged in an interesting co-existence of discourses: a

seemingly affirmative one manifested as it appeared in physical public space, a

discursive one among in media space, and a further one of popular imagination,

partially captured by the media. These plural discourses concerted with one another

over the *Tripod*'s appearance in the public, and made it an intriguing object with

ambivalent public meanings. The following discussion will account for the various

public perception and reaction to the *Tripod* and analyse the notion of plurality – of

opinions as well as of the forms of space – in the local public.

The 5-tonne, bronze *Hong Kong Tripod* [Image 6] was commissioned by the

Association of All Sectors on Hong Kong Island for the Celebration of the Handover,

a body formed by various non-government constituencies for organizing celebratory

events during the handover period, and intended as a gift for the new Special Administrative Region. It was designed by local sculptor Van Lau, who considers the work more of a tailored artifact for the occasion than a part of his own artistic pursuit.[95] Ideological implications behind *Tripod* are direct and obvious. Even to an audience who is unfamiliar with specifics of Chinese culture, the *Tripod*, following the form of the classical Chinese bronze vessel, is an affirmative object of the Chinese legacy. A sense of monumentality is highlighted with its size and weight, particularly as the *Tripod* is elevated above a pedestal, whose triangular form echoes with the tripod's geometry of three. Relating the work to its context, three SAR bauhinia emblems are cast on the surface of the tripod. An extract of the Basic Law is inscribed on the inside, mimicking traditional inscription practice in historical bronze wears. On the sides of the pedestal are inscriptions of the commissioning history and the Chief Executive's calligraphy. A tribute to the handover and to the return to Chinese tradition is projected without reserve.

On top of its general significations, the *Tripod* is loaded with specific cultural meanings. A rich cultural metaphor was acknowledged in reception of the *Tripod*. Writers pointed out that a tripod was related to dynastic power and ruling legitimacy.[96]

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[95] Suggested by the artist in an interview by the author on 4 September 2002 in the artist's home.

[96] See for example Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Ancient Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 1-15, on historical codes of tripods; *Zhongguo wenwu jianshang baoding zhu wangquan*中國文物鑒賞寶鼎鑄王權 (Connoisseurship on Chinese cultural objects,

The historical tripod was always considered in the collective form as *liqi* 〔禮器〕 –

ritual objects so significant in the ruling system during the feudal period from *Xia*

〔夏〕 to the Three Dynasties 〔三國〕. More than objects, *liqi* were symbols and

metaphors: a euphemism for the throne, virtuous ruling and heavenly mandate.[97]

These cultural codes were ideologically favourable for those who saw Hong Kong's

handover as a return to a legitimate ruler, whose reign, as compared to the

"illegitimate" colonial rule, was more proximate to "virtue" and "heavenly

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Tripods cast royal power), *Wen Hui Bao*, 18 June 1998, internet edition; a condensed account of similar references from local press; Clarke, *Hong Kong Art*, op. cit., p. 133, an art historical reading of the present *Tripod*; further readings on the *Tripod* and related ideas will be introduced in later parts of the essay.

[97] See *Zuozhuan*右傳 (Master Zuo's Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annuals): in the late years of *Zhou* [周], the *Zhou* king had lost much of its power to feudal lords and had been reduced to a puppet status. In 605 B.C., the power lord of Chu [*Chu Zhuangwang*楚莊王] made a suggestive gesture and went on an expedition near the capital of *Luoyang* [洛陽]. In the face of this apparent challenge, the *Zhou* king sent *Wangsun Man* [王孫滿]to bring "greeting gifts" to the lord of Chu. The ambitious lord asked *Wangsun Man* about the weight of the Nine Tripods. In a *Zhou* context, Chu was obviously not only asking *about* the Tripods but also implicitly asking *for* them. *Zhou*'s minister *Wangsun Man* made use of the occasion and articulated his famous speech on Tripods and virtue: 'The Tripods do not matter; virtue does. In the past when the Xia dynasty was distinguished for its virtue the distant regions put their *things* [*wu*] into pictures the nine provinces sent in copper as tribute. The Tripods were cast to present those things. One hundred different *things* were presented, so the people could distinguish divine from evil……Hereby a harmony was secured between the high and the low, and all enjoyed the blessing of Heaven. When the virtue of *Jie* [the last king of *Xia*] was all-obscured, the Tripods were transferred to the Shang dynasty, and for six hundred years of Shang enjoyed its ruling status. Finally King *Zhou* of the *Shang* proved cruel and oppressive, and the Tripods were transferred to the *Zhou* dynasty. When virtue is commendable and brilliant, those (tripods) which are small will be heavy; when things come to be crafty and decrepit, those which are large will be light Heaven blessed intelligent virtue, and on this its favour rests. King *Cheng* fixed the Tripods in the *Zhou* capital and divined that the *Zhou* dynasty should last for thirty reigns, over seven hundred years. This is the *Zhou*'s mandate from Heaven. Though now the *Zhou* has lost its past glory, the decree of Heaven is not yet changed. The weight of the tripods cannot yet be inquired about!' 〔在德不在鼎。昔夏之方有德也，遠方圖物，貢金九牧，鑄鼎萬物，百物而爲之備，使民知神奸……莫能逢之，用能協於上下，以承天休。桀有昏德，鼎遷於商，載祀六百。商紂暴虐，鼎遷於周。德之休明，雖小，重也。其奸回昏亂，雖大，輕也。天祚明德，有所底止。成王定鼎於郟鄏，卜世三十，卜年七百，天所命也。周德雖衰，天命未改，鼎之輕重，未可問也。〕Giving an implicit warning for Chu's ambitions (that *Zhou* is still ruling on Heavenly mandate and Chu would better not ask about (for) the Tripods/throne), *Wangsun Man* maintained that the Tripods were essentially associated with the legitimate and virtuous ruler as decreed by Heaven. This reading is suggested by Wu, *Monumentality in Ancient Chinese Art and Architecture*, op. cit., p. 6.

mandate" – or in less mythical language, simply the right thing. Legitimacy was not

the only implication of tripods. In terms of sovereignty, the idea of unification was

perhaps even more important. During the three dynasties the tripods were used to

contain tributes from distant regions, a symbolic gesture of submission to a central

power.[98] This idea of centralised power was fundamental for tripods. In the historical

classic *Shi Ji Feng Chan Shu*〔史記封禪書〕, Si Maqian〔司馬遷〕discusses the

archetypal Tripods in ancient Chinese history:

> In the old times *Taidi* [Emperor Tai] built one divine tripod – one for
>
> the unification of the million things between heaven and earth.
>
> *Huangdi* [Emperor Huang] made three precious tripods, symbolizing
>
> heaven, earth and man.[99]

Taidi's creation of a single tripod was self explanatory for the idea of unifying and

centralizing. Yet the making of three tripods by *Huangdi* was even more reflective of

the Chinese metaphysics of utmost union, in which heaven, earth and man joined into

one collective. A further historical legend that reinforces the notion of unification is

associated with the *Qin* First Emperor's unification of the country in the third-century

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[98] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 聞昔泰帝興神鼎一，一者壹統天地萬物所繫終也。黃帝
作寶鼎三，象天、地、人.

[99] Extract cited from Xu Shaohua 余少華, "Fengjian liqi yu shijimo chongxian di yiyi" 封建禮器於
世紀末重現的意義 (The meaning of the reappearance of feudal *liqi* at the end of the millennium), in
*Lezai diancu zhong*樂在顛錯中 (Rhapsody in a time of confusion) (Hong Kong, Oxford University
Press, 2001), pp. 2 -16.

B.C., upon which the then disappeared Nine Tripods, mystical fetishes of reign since the Three Dynasty, suddenly re-appeared in a river.[100]

To the present example, unification to a central power was of course a most crucial idea, particularly as the *Tripod* was not at all an individual object in Hong Kong. The *Tripod* was related to a series of *liqi* sculptures, all commissioned in commemoration of certain important historical moments for China: for the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, a rectangular *Ding* (the Chinese term of tripod, not essentially three-legged) called *Shenghe Baoding* (Prosperous and Peace Precious Ding)〔盛和寶鼎〕was presented by various parties from Hong Kong and placed at the *Yuanmingyuan*〔圓明園〕at Beijing, and another monster tripod called *Hong Kong Tripod*〔香港寶鼎〕(whose Chinese title differs from that of the Tripod, literally "reunification precious tripod;" to save confusion, this literal translation is used in the following paragraphs when the *Tripod* is addressed in Chinese sources) was given to Hong Kong as a gift from Shanghai; two years later, upon Macau's handover in 1999, a *Macau Tripod*, a replica of *Hong Kong Tripod*, was given to the new SAR and a set of *Tianlai Baozhong* (Heavenly Sounds Precious Bells)〔天籟寶鐘〕was placed at Macau's China Foreign Relations Ministry Building; in Beijing as the seat of the central government, a set of *Zhonghua Hezhong* (Chinese Harmonic Bells)〔中華和

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[100] See Wu, *Monumentality*, op. cit., p. 11.

鐘〕and a *Xin Jie* (New Jie)〔新爵〕were installed at the Tai Temple〔太廟〕 of the Laodong Renmin Wenhuakong〔勞動人民文化宮〕(next to Tiananmen) and the East Gate respectively for celebration of the millennium. This ubiquitous installation of new *liqi*, especially with its parallelism with the two handovers, created a prominent visual spectacle for China's restoration of its sovereignty and unification of its soil.

Despite all these affirmative ideologies, reception of the *Tripod* was nonetheless not quite positive. The *Tripod*'s most immediate association to the feudal system was critically scrutinized. The feudal system is a rather ambivalent subject for Chinese history. On the surface, it is reminiscent of the power and culture of ancient China, hence a superficial image of heritage and tradition. However, in the present context, contents of the system – dictatorship, veto control and strict social disciplining through rituals – make it an odd and ominous match for the handover. Thus when the *Tripod* was first opened to the public at Victoria Park on 7 July 1997, a number of artists went for a "pilgrimage": performing stereotypical "superstitious" rites – playing Taoist music, holding joss sticks, kneeling thrice in every nine steps, attempting to put on the *Tripod* the "first incense" – the group aimed to point out that the *Tripod* was not at all an innocent sculpture but loaded with power symbolism.[101]

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[101] The performance was done by Leung Po-shan, Lai Kin-keung and some other artists. For news coverage of the performance, see Liang Weiling 梁慧玲, "Baoding shiyue zaizhan jianghu" 寶鼎十

The same subject was also picked up by columnists. Columnist Dai Tian discussed at length dictatorial implications. Dai compared current circumstances with the aforementioned argument on heavenly mandate in *Zuochuan*:

> The so-called decree from heaven is actually in the same logic of today's arguments like "the necessary choice of history" and self-granted legitimacy. I am afraid that "one country, two systems," "unchanged for fifty years" are also products of the same line of thought. There is a heavenly order, a pre-determined constant…..[102]

Tai's language was highly rhetorical. Although his stance was imprecise, his rhetoric clearly articulated a not too optimistic picture for the SAR's automony (as fetishized by the slogans of "one country two systems" and "unchanged for fifty years"). Xu Shaohua, columnist and professor of music in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, considered the *Tripod* collectively with other *liqi* and the use of *liyu*〔禮樂〕in the handover and millennium ceremonies. This whole *liqi* programme was seen by him as full of political implications:

月再戰江湖 (*Tripod* Returns in October), *Hong Kong Economic Journal,* 7 July 1997, p. 24. The quotation in Chinese: 所謂受命於天,有其定數,其實與今日以「歷史的必然抉擇」,即自許爲合法統治的「思想」,如出一轍,古今輝映……「一國兩制」、「五十年不變」,也恐怕是同一「思想」與「邏輯」的產物,即有一個「天命」,有一個「定數」。

[102] Dai Tian 戴天, "Ye cong ding shou qi" 也從鼎說起 (Also Speaking on Tripods), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 29 July 1997.

The Chinese government's deliberate use of these power manifesting

liqi, without avoiding their feudal associations, directly shows its

intent in unifying the nation.[103]

The author went on to associate the practice with politics:

It is unknown whether Taiwan is in the blueprint. But conclusively, the

phenomenon with this whole lot of feudal *liqi* could not be taken

casually. This is not simply a random choice of celebratory sculptures.

The appearance of these ancient feudal symbols at the turn of the

centuries is revelatory of the mind of the Chinese leading stratum.[104]

Amidst general suspicions, the *Tripod* also had the ill fate to run into a number of

mishaps that further undermined its aura. The most immediate one was the breaking

of one of its legs, which took place as it was unloaded at the China Merchants'

Godown on 16 June 1997. Its commissioning agency was quick to make up for its

physical damage before its debut in 6 July, a purportedly "auspicious" date in the

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[103] Xu Shaohua, "Bianzhong qiaoxiang shiji zhi sheng" 編鐘敲響世紀之聲 (Bells ring sounds of the millennium), *Ming Pao*, 3 January 2000, C06. The quotation in Chinese: 中國政府刻意選用宣示治權的舊禮器，更不避忌這些禮器所帶出的封建聯想，一統江山，旨在於斯！

[104] Xu Shaohua, 'The meaning of the reappearance of feudal *liqi* at the end of the millennium', op. cit., pp. 2-16. The quotation in Chinese: 是否有把台灣放在藍圖內則不得而知，但總而言之，對這甚多封建禮器的現象不能等閒視之，其並非隨意的慶典雕塑這麼簡單。這些中國古代的封建符號及形象於二十與二十一世紀交接之際不斷出現，中國領導層的心態或可窺一二。

week after the handover,[105] but the intended auspiciousness was hard to replenish. The

not too auspicious anecdote of breaking a leg right at the beginning, dramatized by the

coincidence of a plausibly symbolic downpour, soon became headlines on the press:

"*Reunification Tripod* conjured a tempest" [106]

"*Reunification Tripod* fell and broke its leg amidst gongs and drums" [107]

"Rushing for opening in rainstorms, *Reunification Tripod* broke a leg"[108]

"Bad break for handover heavyweight"[109]

Adding to the drama, the specific situation of a tripod breaking a leg was spotted by

many as a very ominous omen from the classical *I-Ching*. For example, the reference

was suggested in a mixed-media caricature called *The Crippled Ding* by Oscar Ho.

The work was subsequently printed in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*. Beneath the

image of the fallen tripod, in a handwriting mimicking the typical style of Tsang

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[105] See Clarke, *Hong Kong Art*, op. cit., p. 133.

[106] Leung Po-shan, "Huiguibaoding hufenghuanyu" (回歸寶鼎呼風喚雨) (*Reunification Tripod* conjured a tempest), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 17 June 1997.

[107] *Ming Pao* reporter, "Huiguibaoding luogushen zhong zhuide zhezu" 回歸寶鼎鑼鼓聲中墜地折足 (*Reunification Tripod* fell and broke its leg amidst gongs and drums), *Ming Pao,* 16 June 1997.

[108] Zhu Hanjiang 朱漢強, "Dafeng dayu gan kaiguang 'Huiguibaoding' shuaiduanjiao" 大風大雨趕開光「回歸寶鼎」摔斷腳 (Rushing for opening in rainstorm, *Reunification Tripod* broke a leg), *Sing Tao Daily*, 17 June 1997.

[109] Shirley Kwok, "Bad break for handover heavyweight," *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 1997, General News, p. 1.

Tsou-choi, the artist wrote: "fortune tellers say this is a bad omen, the worst sign in

I-Ching".[110] The ominous sign Ho refers to is probably:

A tripod breaks its leg. Precious contents spill out in a messy shape.[111]

The physical signs of a tripod becoming imbalanced as it lost a leg were metaphorical

of the ill impacts caused by a major error. Thus the explanation of the omen,

according to *I-ching*, refers to a negation of official credits: "precious contents spill

out. How could it be trusted?"[112] This belief is possibly related to classical

conceptions of tripods as animated objects – that they could tell vice and virtue and

would respond in physical terms.[113] The suggestion of the *I-Ching* sign was more

likely a ridicule than serious superstition. Yet people's perception and attitude towards

the *Tripod* was clearly not positive. Less mythically, there were also other

interpretative responses suggesting unfavourable reception of the *Tripod*. Two days

after the leg-breaking incident, the mishap was picked up in a gossipy article on the

South China Morning Post business page:

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[110] Oscar Ho, *The Crippled Ding*, 1997. The quotation in Chinese:命理佬講依**個**係凶兆，係易經中最哀的掛象。Beside this image, the reference to *I-Ching* was suggested by many. For example, it was mentioned by Clarke in "Sculpting Public Space," *Hong Kong Art*, op. cit., in which Ho's image was also cited. The specific citation of *I-Ching* in this discussion was suggested by Lai Kin-keung.

[111] Zhong Taide 鍾泰德, *Yijing tongshi*易經通釋 (I-ching Explanations) (Taipei, Zheng zhong shu ju, 1999), p. 771. The quotation in Chinese: 鼎折足。覆公餗。其形渥。

[112] Zhong, *Yijing tongsh*, op. cit., p. 772. The quotation in Chinese: 覆公餗。如何信也。

[113] See Wu, *Monumentality*, op. cit., p.11.

No one who has followed recent news in Hong Kong could have read

the story about the giant ceremonial tripod losing its leg without being

amazed of the implications. For newcomers: Chinese officials

originally wanted Hong Kong's fate to be decided in Beijing and

London – the two-legged stool scenario. London and Hong Kong

wanted people in the territory to have more of a say – the three-stool

method. The two-legged stool prevailed. And one leg breaks off the

tripod.[114]

Leg-breaking became an imagery for many possible political metaphors. A week after

the *Tripod*'s public display, the imagery was picked up by Zunzi in a caricature against

government imbalance [Image 7]. [115] The legislature, the judiciary and the

executive/administration[116] – the three major constituencies that supposedly support a

balanced government – were assigned to the three legs of the *Tripod*. Each of these

legs was depicted with its own problem. One, naturally for the case, was broken and

that was the leg of the legislature – a real irony as the *Tripod* physically carried

inscriptions of the Basic Laws. A small leg of the judiciary remained on the *Tripod*,

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[114] *South China Morning Post* reporter, "Dogged reformers hit image problem," *South China Morning Post*, 18 June 1997, Business News, p. 12.

[115] Zunzi 尊子, "Huiguibaoding" 回歸寶鼎 (*Reunification Tripod*), *Apple Daily,* 19 July 1997.

[116] The three specifications are written in Chinese as *lifa* [立法], *sifa* [司法] and *xingzheng* [行政]. *Xingzhen* is translated as 'the executive/administration' because the Chinese word is used for both meanings.

but it was off the ground as the *Tripod* was lifted by a pathetically oversized leg of the executive/administration – with a whole lot of easy associations to the name of the Special Administrative Region, the Chief *Executive*, not to mention the frequently criticized government emphasis on administrative procedures. With this abnormally gigantic leg, the *Tripod,* though missing one leg, was still capable of standing. Yet it was obviously handicapped as witnessed by a few impressionless, possibly stunned, beholders it at its base. The caricature, like earlier interpretations, clearly showed how the *Tripod* was transformed by public imagination into an appropriated object for critiques against larger socio-political issues.

Imagination provoked by the *Tripod* continued to last after its explosive appearance. After a temporary residency in Victoria Park, the *Tripod* disappeared from the public. Yet like the legendary *Tripods*, the unseen *Tripod* continued to exist in another kind of public space, of popular imagination and discourse. However, rather than being any affirmative symbols, with its leg-breaking history it was mostly an object of ridicule and almost a fetish, seriously or mockingly, for everything wrong in the SAR. Two newspapers, for example, reported:

> Chinese are particularly serious about auspicious signs and omens.
> These could be seen as something psychological, but sometimes they
> are really unfathomable. For example with Hong Kong 97, many

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inauspicious omens have happened. A western lady got killed as a coach crashed during the New Year parade, and the coach was exactly the one of the Better Hong Kong Foundation. Then snakes came out from their dens, a *fungshui* tree in the New Territories got burnt, the *Reunification Tripod* broke its leg, the famous horse "Smooth 97" died suddenly after a race, a handover fireworks vessel caught on fire, the Jardine New Year canon went out of order. As a result, in three months after Hong Kong's handover, plagues and economic storms happened. The impact has lasted till the present. Even people who are least superstitious have to admit that it was too haunting.[117]

The Hong Kong Reunification Tripod fell during delivery and immediately broke a leg. Since then, Hong Kong's property prices, the Hang Seng Index and even Tung Chee-hwa's popularity fell all the way down. Only the unemployment rate and discontents rose.[118]

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[117] *Apple Daily* reporter, "Yishou ye you fuzhou zhibing" 醫書也有符咒治病 (Medical books contain curing spells), *Apple Daily*, 7 March 1999, E09. The quotation in Chinese: 中國人特別講究意頭與預兆，雖可視爲一種心理作用，但有時也真不可思議，例如香港九七回歸，便發生了許多不吉利的凶兆，過年煙花巡遊發生翻車壓死西婦，失事花車又偏偏是「香港明天會更好」基金會的那一輛。跟住陸續有來是大蛇紛紛出洞、新界風水樹起火焚毀、回歸寶鼎折腳、名駒「順利九七」賽後暴斃、回歸煙花船起火、怡和元旦禮炮失靈不響，結果香港回歸只僅三個月，便發生疫症和經濟風暴，一直影響至今，連最不迷信的人也不得不承認太邪門了。

[118] *Oriental Daily* reporter, "Dong Jianhua shangchang, Xianggang baishi ai" 董建華上場香港百事哀 (Tung Chee-wah's appearance, Hong Kong's sorrow), *Oriental Daily*, 12

A further article practically termed the *Tripod* as "Hong Kong-killing stove":

"once after this object set its foot on the SAR, it stayed with bad luck."[119]

In January 1999, one and a half year after its first appearance, the *Tripod* was given by its commissioning body, the Association of All Sectors on Hong Kong Island for the Celebration of the Handover, to Po Lin Monastery, the territory's largest Buddhist venue with the renowned tourist attraction of the Big Buddha. Despite the claim that both the *Tripod* and the Big Buddha could be scenic spots,[120] the placement of the former, a celebratory object for the socio-political event of the handover, at the site was inevitably suspicious. This curious placement has not been explained by any official statements, but there were rumours that the *Tripod* was too inauspicious so it had to be kept under the Big Buddha's spell. Moved to a new site, the *Tripod* itself also went through an interesting transformation. Firstly, the monument, previously

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October 2001, internet edition. The quotation in Chinese:「香港回歸寶鼎」在運送期間仆倒，即時斷掉一腳，香港的樓價、恆生指數以至董建華的民望自此便不斷下滑，一跌不起，飆升的只有失業率及民怨。

[119] *Apple Daily* reporter, "Wangganglu" 亡港爐 (Hong Kong-killing stove), *Apple Daily*, 22 January 1999, E12. The quotation in Chinese: 此物一踏上特別行政區便與噩運沒離棄過。

[120] Similar ideas were expressed by Betty Tung, wife of the Chief Executive, upon the *Tripod*'s inauguration ceremony; see *Tai Kung Pao* reporter, "Huiguibaoding changban Tiantandafo" 回歸寶鼎常伴天壇大佛 (*Reunification Tripod* accompanies Big Buddha), *Tai Kung Pao,* 31 December 1998, internet edition: 'She was pleased to say that Po Lin Monastery was not only a Buddhist venue, but also a scenic spot for local tourism. The *Reunification Tripod*, donated by the Association of All Sectors on Hong Kong Island for the Celebration of the Handover, made the temple even more solemn and added an auspicious air. This also enhanced the tourist spot. The gift optimized both the sculpture and the site.' 〔她稱譖寶蓮寺不單是是佛教道場，也是香港的旅遊勝地，由港島各界人士慶祝回歸委員會贈送予寺方的回歸寶鼎，令寶利更顯莊嚴雄偉，增添瑞祥之氣，也爲旅遊勝地再添一景，正是相得益彰的好回饋。〕

stressed as nothing related to superstition or religious rituals, turned into a religious

vessel. Three gigantic joss sticks, with auspicious motifs and characters like "ever

shining light of the Buddha"〔佛光普照〕, were put inside the *Tripod* – apparently

transforming it into an incense burner [Image 8]. The placement of such a vessel at

the feet of the Buddha was also reminiscent of a religious layout – among a few

reports of the inauguration (done mostly by pro-China newspapers), *The Hong Kong*

Commercial Daily described the scene as "Tripod serves in front of the Big

Buddha."[121] Together with its function, the symbolisms of the *Tripod* also changed.

References to earlier dynasties and ruling power were no longer its chief subject. The

new meaning was simply good fortune. *Ta Kung Pao* cited the Monastery

Secretary-General's introduction: "meaning that post-handover Hong Kong is like the

return of spring, everything is blooming, full of life."[122] Similarly, the *Tripod*'s

symbolism was explained in *Wen Wei Bao*: "carrying meanings of a warm spring on

the island, the tripod brings good luck. Wishing the Mainland and Hong Kong

everlasting prosperity."[123] Nonetheless, this new version of the *Tripod* did not erase its

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[121] *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* reporter, "Dafo kaiguang zhounian shuiliu xizai fahui Baoliansi yao Dong Jianhua furen zhuli" 大佛開光周年水陸息災法會寶蓮寺邀董建華夫人主禮 (Big Buddha inauguration, annual service for disasters, Po Lin Monastery invited Mrs Tung Chee-hwa as guest-of-honour), *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 31 December 1998, B02. The quotation in Chinese: 寶鼎則於天壇大佛座前供奉。

[122] *Tai Hung Pao* reporter, "Huiguibaoding changban Tiantandafo," op.cits. The quotation in Chinese: 寓意香港回歸後如春回大地，萬物欣欣向榮，充滿生機。

[123] *Wen Hui Bao* reporter, "Baolinsi dafo kaiguang wuzhounian" 寶蓮寺大佛開光五週年 (5th Anniversary for the Inauguration of the Po Lin Monastery Big Buddha), *Wen Hui Bao*, 31 December 1998, internet edition. The quotation in Chinese: 有香島春暖、寶鼎呈祥之意義，祈求祖國及香港

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history. For many, the *Tripod* was no less, if not more, problematic. Writings like the following underline that, still overshadowed by the earlier mishaps, the transformation was viewed with skepticism:

> The lame tripod and the Buddha stay together ever after, allowing worshipers to put on incense as they like. The lame tripod peacefully evolved into a torn incense burner. The secrets within could not be told.[124]

In December 2002, the "secret" of the *Tripod*'s transformation into an incense burner under the Big Buddha was seemingly explained by the Monastery – as a response to the Association of All Sectors on Hong Kong Island for the Celebration of the Handover, which only discovered the joss sticks after months of presence. The Association was severely irritated, and scorned that to turn the *Tripod* into an incense burner was "an insult to the historical meaning of the reunification."[125] The Monastery thus responded:

> Reunification Tripod is a "tripod of controversies." To put three

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永遠鼎盛繁榮。

[124] *Apple Daily* reporter, "Wangganglu", op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 跛足鼎從此與大佛共嬋娟，讓善信上香任插，跛鼎和平演變成破爐，箇中秘錄外人不得與聞。

[125] *Oriental Daily* reporter, "Huiguibaoding bian xianglu xian zhengzhi" 回歸寶鼎變香爐掀爭執 (*Reunification Tripod* turned into incense burner and evoked disputes), *Oriental Daily*, 26 December 2002, internet edition. The quotation in Chinese: 有辱回歸的歷史意義。

joss sticks in it makes it an incense burner serving the Big

Buddha, thus it receives the Big Buddha's counsel. This could

turn violence into peacefulness, and is good for Hong Kong.[126]

At this point, the *Tripod* was no longer just a physical work of art. These

interpretations have turned it into a fetish of various half-critical, half-fanciful

discourses, contending ideas from different sectors of the public. These varied

discourses, coexisting with the physical manifestation of the *Tripod*, illustrate two

kinds of plurality. Most straightforwardly, the cluster of all these different discourses,

reflecting different perspectives from a multiplicity of publics, reinforces an earlier

suggestion that the public is plural and varied rather than singular and unified, thus

the public meaning of something (in this case, the *Tripod*) is also plural, containing

contesting meanings. A further kind of plurality as illustrated by this case is that of the

forms of public space. The public sphere generated by the *Tripod* involved physical,

discursive as well as imaginative spaces. The simultaneous presence of these spaces is

also a factor in the other examples, yet the case of the *Tripod* was particularly

revealing. The former works' public meanings are more straightforwardly related to

their access to or expulsion from physical public space: the state-fashioning discourse

of the *Bauhinia* and the *Monument* owed to their physical access in public display; the

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[126] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 回歸寶鼎屬「是非之鼎」，在鼎內插上三支香寓意為供奉大佛的一個香案，受大佛感化，可以化戾氣為祥和，對本港有利。

critical narratives against Pun and those for the *Pillar* related very much to their rejected presence in physical public space. In the case of the *Tripod*, the situation is a bit more intriguing. While it did have the chance to communicate a more affirmative meaning as it physically stood in public space, further discourses that extended and appropriated it to other meanings problematized it as an object with multiple, and contesting, implications. In short, it registered an occasion when competing narratives complicated the meaning of a public object in different kinds of public spaces – a condition to note for the local public. As raised in the beginning, there is a lack of public platforms in Hong Kong and physical public space is inevitably policed and controlled. Under such a condition, the presence of alternative public spaces is particularly crucial as it counterbalanced controlled physical space and allowed the public sphere to outgrow control over physical space. The plural public discourse of the *Tripod* was exactly enabled by such a condition.

The above five cases show how public art has played a revealing part in the evolving sphere during the handover period. They registered various attempts to establish public meanings, and at the same time reflected conditions of the public sphere. Reiterating previously acknowledged points, the public, notably indicated by the case of Pun, is not at all any empirical social body but a construction as different social parties try to establish common meanings in the public space. Such

constructions could be realized as organized public experiences, as in the case of the

Pillar, or the creation of public ideals as in the case of the *Bauhinia* and the

Monument. As different parties project different ideologies into the public space (in

the case of public art, as the commissioning bodies produce the works and the public

audience receive and react to them), their varied narratives join into a contesting

public sphere. This public sphere, as testified by the multiple narratives involved in all

examples, is not a unified collective but an assembly of differences, taking place in

different forms of public space.

Public Art in the Local Public

Having reached a clearer picture of the local public, the next question for this

beginning chapter is about art. While art in Hong Kong had never been so close to

mainstream public life, the above examples raise new questions for art in public space.

The first question is what has enabled art to get into the public arena and become an

eminent medium for public expression. As art gets into a new paradigm, the next

question is how this new placement changes art – or more precisely, our

understanding and evaluation of it.

Art's emergence as an eminent medium for public expression is related to a few

privileged features. The first of these privileged features is ironically its habitual marginality. Art in Hong Kong has always been in a relatively marginal position but such marginality, seemingly subaltern, is indeed endowed with subversive political advantages. While art is commonly considered something belonging to a paradigm away from "real life," its touch on sensitive issues is frequently less "alarming". The shield of "artistic freedom" is also critical. The notion sublimates debatable political arguments to the transcendental ideal of freedom of expression, thus evokes more sympathy than scrutiny. Such advantages were obviously seized by the *Pillar of Shame*. As the sculpture coated politics with an innocent guise of art, it softened the political argument, transformed it to art and made its manifestation more defensible. Slogans of "artistic freedom" and "freedom of expression" effectively helped in its course – it stimulated popular sympathy and powerfully forced the authorities to react with more consideration.

Another strength of wrapping socio-political ideologies up in art relates to semiotics. Roland Barthes theorizes ideological hailing as a kind of Myth: ideologies are mythologized – indirectly signified – through obscure signs.[127] Thus while people might react in a more critical manner if the ideologies are overt, indirect Myths prompt people to consume ideologies with less suspicions. Such mythologizing can be

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[127] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Barthes: Selected Writings*, Susan Sontag, ed., (Oxford, the University Press, 1983), pp. 93-149; essay translated from French original in *Mythologies* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1957).

found in all of the above examples; among them *the Forever Blooming Bauhinia* marks an epitome. While outward manifestation of its intense political content might provoke counterreactions, a promising flower conceals its propaganda under a seemingly neutral guise.

Besides its transgressive and mythologizing capacities, art's visuality is also an important quality for fostering public ideologies. In the classical *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord discusses the eminence of visual images in informing people in an age of late capitalism.[128] While Debord's discussion highlights the power of visuality over the contemporary mode of perception, the effectiveness of using the visual for public manifestation was spotted far before Debord's analysis. The earlier discussed *Hong Kong Tripod* cued a review of the Chinese historical practice of power display: a public exhibition of a tripod actually involved two modes of historical practice. The traditional manner of displaying a tripod, a quintessential object of ruling power, in the Three Dynasties was essentially private. Tripods must be obscurely hidden, as ruling power must be kept away from public access. As in the conversation between the lord of Chu and *Wangsum Man* in *Zuochuan*, the tripods only existed in verbal accounts and as a symbol of reign they functioned mostly with

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[128] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York : Zone Books, 1995).

discourse and collective imagination. Thus public display of the *Hong Kong Tripod* and other related *liqi* was actually against the grain of traditional feudal practice. The *Tripod*'s manner of public display was more related to another form of power expression, a later mode adopted since Han, in which power is monumentalized with spectacular forms.[129] To many, seeing is believing. Visibility has a strength in presenting ideas to the mass, particularly with the modern mass media. The televised and printed image of the *Goddess of Freedom*, which brought momentum in Tiananmen Square all over the globe, was the utmost example for how a visual image could be an effective object for public statements in contemporary society.[130]

Annexing all these strengths, visual objects, as examples discussed in this chaper, give shape to ideological discourses. Images provide a physical figure for ideas and facilitate both expression and reception. The visual mediate ideas from the makers to the receivers, and because of the open-endedness of images (as opposed to language) it always foster imaginative appropriation: the *Pillar of Shame* provided a visual cue for its local supporters' identification with participants of the 1989 movement; the *Monument* and the *Bauhinia* visualized the principally vague concept of the state; the *Tripod* physically brought up the numerous implications of legacy. Imagination cued

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[129] See Wu, *Monumentality in Ancient Chinese Art and Architecture*, op. cit., p.11.

[130] Publicity fostered by electronic media, epitomized by the case of the *Goddess of Freedom*, is pinpointed by Mitchell, op. cit., p. 2.

by these images was socially important, because it was reflective of people's existing ideological currents. The transference brought upon by the *Pillar of Shame* registered people's political anxiety towards a feared end of freedom and their fixation on 4th June. A later magazine's mockery associating the *Monument* with a phallus and a teasing title "stand-up comedy" reflected skepticism on authoritarian power.[131] Against the *Tripod*, criticisms against feudalism and the "bad omens" of its broken leg showed a displacement of people's skepticisms against the Communist regime and the new government. Configured by the works, discursive forces at particular historical moments became vivid appearances.

As the works were to last in the public space, they did not only configure particular historical moments but events over time. The *Bauhinia* and the *Monument* continued to be loci of symbolic events related to the state. Political potency of the *Bauhinia* was reinforced by a daily flag raising ceremony at the site, implemented by the Hong Kong police force since October 2001. The ceremony has three implications: it is a ritual of power, it is a pragmatic realization of power, and it brings together the sculpture and its ideologies into a public event for public consumption.[132]

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[131] See Qi Baitong 齊百通, "Yangju huiguibei fangxi" 陽具回歸碑防襲 (Phallic Reunification Monument prevents attack), *Next Magazine*, 9 July 1999, pp. 117, 119.

[132] A number of Government notices were put up informing the public of the commencement of the ceremonies, inviting feedback and suggestions, and updating them for latest arrangements, see for example: "Invitation for suggestions for flag raising ceremony at the Gold Bauhinia Plaza" [Online] (posted on 3 November 2001, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200111/03/1103229.htm); "Arrangement for flag raising ceremony

Simultaneously, the site also became a frequented venue for protests. The *Pillar* became an indispensable figure for discussions about freedom in the public space – both for political politics and art.[133] Pun's incident had faded out from public attention. However, in July 2001 when former councilor Cheng Jienan, then accused of corruption, was unexpectedly whipped by a man as he walked out of court, some reporters misidentified the attacker as Pun and the misidentification was mentioned by a few press articles with titles like "people look alike."[134] While perpetuation of

at the Gold Bauhinia Plaza" [Online] (posted on 28 December 2001, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/police/aa-home/chinese/200112/011228-.1htm); "Arrangement for flag raising ceremony at the Gold Bauhinia Plaza" [Online] (posted on 2 January 2002, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/police/aa-home/chinese/200201.020102-1.htm); "Arrangement for flag raising ceremony at the Gold Bauhinia Plaza" [Online] (posted on 2 January 2002, cited on 8 July 2002). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200201/02/0102202.htm); "Arrangement for flag raising ceremony at the Gold Bauhinia Plaza" [Online] (posted on 21 March 2002, cited on 8 July 2002). Acessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200203/21/0321167.htm). In November 2002, officers from the Liberation Army, who are responsible for the flag raising ceremony at Tiananmen Square, were invited to perform the ceremony with the local police force. The co-operation was considered a public event. See press coverage in *Ming Pao*, 29 November 2002.

[133] See for example, Lai Kin-keung 黎健強, "Dui jizuan gonggong diaosu di yiwen" 對幾尊公共雕塑的疑問 (Questions for a few sculptures in the public space), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 20 September 2000; Leung Po-shan, "Xunzhao Xianggang di gonggong kongjian – yuan Guoshangzhishu yu Huiguibaoding gongcun" 尋找香港的公共空間──願國殤之柱與回歸寶鼎共存 (In search for Hong Kong public space – may the *Pillar of Shame* and the *Reunification Tripod* exist together), *Ming Pao*, 2 June 1999; Danny Yung, "Gonggong yishu yu gonggong kongjian" 公共藝術與公共空間 (Public Art and Public Space), Speech for International Public Art Seminar in Kaohsiung, 19 June 1998; published in *Hong Kong Economic Journal,* 29 May 1999; Mathias Woo 胡恩威, "Bimenzaoju pan Guoshangzhizhu cixing" 閉門造車判國殤之柱死刑 (Close-door trial dooms *Pillar of Shame*'s to death sentence), "Xianggang wenhua yishu biaoda ziyou di weiji 香港文化藝術表達自由的危機 (Crisis in expression freedom for culture and art in Hong Kong), in Zuni Icosahedron, *Cultural Policies Studies* [Online] (cited 20 October 2001). Accessed through World Wide Web: (http://www.zuni.org.hk). The *Pillar of Shame* case was also reiterated during the scandals over the Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong in 2000.

[134] *Ming Pao* reporter, "Renyouxiangsi" 人有相似 (People look alike), *Ming Pao*, 28 July 2001, internet edition. Further reports suggestion misidentification of the offender with Pun, see for example: *Xin Bao* reporter, "Kuanghan tengtian nuchou 'chengjie' nan" 狂漢籐條怒抽「懲戒」南 (Mad man whipped Nam), *Xin Bao*, 28 July 2001, internet edition; *Apple Daily* reporter, "She lanyong sixing guaike re guanfei, xinli xiaozhe: aizhishen zezhiqie" 涉濫用私刑怪客惹官非心理學者：愛之深責之切 (Suspect of private torture. Psychology experts: the more one cares, the more severely one accuses), *Apple Daily,* 28 July 2001, internet edition.

the above works was sporadic, the continual, albeit constantly evolving, interpretative

reception of the *Tripod* as discussed previously illustrates a full account of the

growing history with a public artwork. These accounts, the extended one of the

Tripod in particular, illustrate how the meaning of public art, with all the previously

discussed complexities, could grow in close relations to socio-historical developments.

Indeed, the meaning of all art grows overtime but public art has a special intensity

because, without retreating to isolated collection space, its interplay with social forces

is continuous as it gets into social pragmatics from day to day.

Conclusion

The mix of art and life, while asserting a new social importance of public art, is

also problematic. Supposedly original meanings of the works were at times

overthrown by interferences from surrounding ideological discourses as art got mixed

up with everyday life. For example, Pun's artistic transgression was mistaken by the

medical, legal and social paradigms: his original artistic intentions were almost

entirely disregarded and his work was practically considered as a case of clinical

madness, criminal vandalism and social deviance. In the case of the *Pillar of Shame*, a

very intriguing point was that amidst all the attacks for the sculpture's artistic value, the Alliance had not pointed out that the art of the work was not only in the physical appearance of the sculpture, but in its concept as a happening. This discretion could have been a strategic decision: while the only well-known happening in the territory was previously Pun's notorious episode, to maintain the *Pillar* as a more comprehensible and physically substantial form, as opposed to some possibly obscure happening, would be more appropriate if it was to be used as an object for protest. The failure to address the work's real artistic status was not a failure for such practical application. Contextualizing accusations of the *Pillar*'s mediocrity with the public space, Lai Kin-keung argues that "exhibiting sculptures in the public space is a 100% power game, artistic quality is hardly relevant."[135] Lai's argument may have ruled out situations when art does matter, but it is certainly right that at most occasions public art is also determined by factors other than aesthetics. Besides Pun's incident and the *Pillar*, the previously discussed examples all demonstrate the subjection of art to larger social paradigms. A question here is: were these works really meant to be art, or were they something else? Or precisely, as Nina Felshin titles her book on Activist Art, "*But is it art?*"[136]

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[135] Lai Kin-keung, op. cit.

[136] Nina Felshin, ed., *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle, Bay Press, 1995).

Before answering these questions, it is important to understand that art has always been subjected to larger social conditions – the market, economic structures and socio-political atmosphere. The only difference is art's attitude towards such conditions. Art for art's sake is principally a construction of modernism. Art's re-orientation to society in the present cases is a decline of modernist isolation and rekindles art with a social potency as it had at the time when David did *Death of Marat*, Delacroix did *Liberty Leading the People* and Daumier did his caricatures. Yet of course, with the drastic changes in social structure and historical conditions for art, the situations are very different and the differences carry historical significance. Returning to the question of "but is it art?," Felshin offers a revealing answer:

> Together, they [different forms of public and activist art] are creatively expanding art's boundaries and audience and redefining the role of the artist. In the process, they seem to suggest that the proper answer to the question posed by the ironic title *But is it Art?* Is: "But does it matter?"[137]

It does matter. While the first part of Felshin's statement is self-explanatory that public art promotes a renewed social orientation, its implication is that we are up to a new way of conceiving art. The question for public art is not whether such works *are* art or not, but whether they are *conceived* as art, with a different set of criteria for

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[137] Felshin, op. cit., p. 13.

evaluating artistic merit. This is a critical question: in a general sense, it relates to our changing conception of art; more specifically, to the subject of public art, it questions how we are to acknowledge aesthetics and public meanings in both its consumption and production. This issue, latent in all the above examples, shall be a critical one for the following chapter. Examples in the following chapter, unlike the more incidental ones discussed here, were intentionally formulated as "public art." Their varied approaches will show how public art-makers tried to make a socially meaningful form of art within the local public conditions, and how, in the process, they negotiate between aesthetics and social meanings.

Chapter Two

Public Art Experiments since the Late 1990s

Introduction

The examples in the previous chapter show how art became "public" as the works were involved with political struggles during the mid 1990s. Although interlocked with public experiences, such art was basically a medium employed for making public statements and did not aim to connect art and the public. Yet since the late 1990s, public art became an end in itself. Unlike the earlier cases, works in public space were no longer incidental appearances, but specially devised as a particular mode of practice called "public art." An increased number of such projects, together with discussions among art agencies and the press, and municipal efforts in promoting and researching public art, registered growing interest in the emerging subject.[138]

At this beginning stage, society's conception of public art was quite uncertain. Writers were in search of definitions. Scanning through articles on the subject, one

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[138] Public art projects and discussions suggested here will be discussed in greater details in the upcoming examples. Municipal promotion and research on public art refer to the setting up of the Public Art Team, its commissioned projects and two research projects (by Annie Leung, 1997; Desmond Hui, 2004) commissioned by the Arts Development Council. These will also be discussed in greater length in the following sections.

sees questions like "what is public art?"[139] and statements like "to Hong Kong, public art is an unfamiliar subject. Few citizens could get in touch with it, and there are not many participating artists either."[140] Beside these reassertions of society's uncertainty towards the subject, a frequently adopted definition was simply art in public places. For example, the definition was officially adopted by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department Public Art Team and the two municipal public art research projects; and by Danny Yung, a very prominent figure in the Hong Kong art scene, who, in a speech for the International Public Art Seminar in Kaohsiung in 1998, suggested that "public art, as the name suggests, is art that appears in public venues for everyone."[141] This general definition, if compared to the body of critical literature in the global public art discourse, may seem overly simplistic. Nonetheless this simple definition was somehow valid to the beginning of public art in Hong Kong. While Hong Kong public art had just begun to take shape, it was too soon to assume that it would get into the same problems and experiences as its foreign prototypes and relate it to the complexities of the overseas discourses. To conceptualize public art as art in

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[139] *Ming Pao* reporter, "Hewei gonggong yishu" 何謂公共藝術 (What is public art?), op. cit.: 何謂公共藝術？問十個人，恐怕得出十一個答案。(What is public art? If you ask ten person, I am afraid you may get eleven answers)

[140] *Ming Pao* Reporter, "Gonggong diaosuzhan" 公共雕塑展 (Public sculpture exhibition), *Ming Pao,* 7 July 1999, internet edition: 對於香來說，公共藝術是一個陌生的課題，市民可接觸到的少，可以參與的藝術家亦不多。(To Hong Kong, public art is an unfamiliar subject. Few citizens could get in touch with it, and they are not many participating artists either.

[141] Danny Yung, "Gonggong yishu yu gonggong kongjian," op. cit.: 共公藝術顧名思義，就是在公眾場地出現，提供給普羅大眾的藝術作品。(Public art, as the name suggests, is art that appears in public venues for everyone.)

public places was a most basic conception, yet in Hong Kong's case this basic

conception was intriguing enough: "public places" was a problematic category – open

venues in the territory were essentially municipal or corporate-owned, and citizens did

not have the habit of conceiving such open space as public platforms.[142] Thus such

quasi-public locations do not endow art with any particular public attributes.

 In addition to the problem of space, material factors for public art in Hong Kong

were also not well developed. Although there has been increasing interest in public art,

Hong Kong is less equipped with favourable conditions as compared to countries

whose development is in a later stage. Institutionalization of public art is still at a very

early stage. An official "Public Art Team" was just set up in 1998. This team, whose

work will be evaluated in the following discussion, is not exactly a centralized agency

for all public art commissions and it was rather set up as a government "incentive" in

promoting public art. Legislation of public art is under research but its schedule is not

yet visible.[143] Training on public art, which is programmed in many overseas

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[142] For previous writings on the lack of genuine public space in Hong Kong, see for example: David Clarke, "Remembrance and Forgetting: Aspects of Art and Public Space in Hong Kong during the Handover Period," *TAASA Review* (The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, VIII / I, March 1999), p. 14; Leung Po-shan, "Xunzhao Xianggang de gonggong hongjian – yuan Guoshangzhizhu yu Huiguibaoding gongcun," op. cit.

[143] Research on public art legislation/institutionalization was commissioned by the Arts Development Council. The research was undertaken by Desmond Hui in 2001. A major agendum in the research is the possibility of "percent-for-art", which requires all constructions to reserve a certain percentage of their construction costs for art. The research refers to examples in the United States, Taiwan (where 'percent-for-art' was legislated) and Japan (where the incentive is carried out on a voluntary basis) and proposes voluntary adoption of the scheme. The report was submitted to the Arts Development Council in 2003 and released in February 2004, six months after the submission of this thesis for examination. See footnotes 307 for related activities after the report's release.

countries as a specialized curriculum,[144] is not conducted in any local institution.

Archive materials are also very limited and local cases are scarcely documented.[145] In

addition, there is a troubling lack of studio space and very limited facilities for art

making. Thus the production of public art is constrained by a lot of practical

difficulties. With all these limitations, evaluation of local public art requires a lot more

consideration.

Having considered the pragmatic difficulties in making public art in Hong Kong,

this chapter will approach the subject without adhering to any pre-existing models. It

sees public art as art that is related to the public space in different ways. Under this

interpretation, observation could be cross-referenced to the global discourse of public

art, which has been briefly presented in the general introduction. From outdoor

sculptures, site-specific works, community art to "new genre public art," various

approaches towards public art have evolved in a trajectory over the past decades.

Public art in Hong Kong, started at a much later date than its overseas prototypes, has

been opened to all these various tendencies. Among projects that have experimented

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[144] Programmes in public art are run in many overseas tertiary institutions. For example, in the United States courses are held by the University of Southern California (Graduate programme) and University of Seattle (Undergraduate and graduate programme). For courses in the United Kingdom, the university course finder in the British Council's official website indicated that there are totally 165 degree programmes in public art. (Information gathered on 23 August 2003 from World Wide Web (http://www.britishcouncil.org).

[145] See general introduction. Two former research projects on public art were commissioned by the Arts Development Council. To a large extent the two projects are surveys of overseas cases. Articles are also sporadically published by local writers, but instead of really documenting cases the articles are more frequently criticisms.

with possible methods during the beginning of local public art since the late 1990s, almost all the above approaches, which have characterized the global trajectory at succeeding periods of time, were tried out simultaneously by different local public art makers. This plurality shows that interpretation of "public art" has greatly varied, and different art makers have different views and methodologies for bridging art and the public. The co-existence of numerous approaches, besides suggesting a general diversity in opinions, is also contextually relevant to a few local factors raised in the previous chapter. At the onset, plurality reaffirms that the public is multiple by nature and the varied methodologies can be seen as multiple voices in the discourse of local public art. It also illustrates how, without a standard model, public art makers have strived for different solutions. On top of this, the methodological variety also carries spatial implications. The different methodologies are governed by different interpretations of public space, and this can be contextualized with the local lack of ready platforms and the consequential situation that public expression has to annex its own space in possible ways.

In this chapter, the above observations will be evidenced with a number of labeled public art projects done by different agencies, from the government, public organizations and art groups to individual curators and artists, during the beginning stage of local public art. These examples will exemplify how art was made to relate to

the public in varied ways. As these examples were more likely a plurality of different attempts rather than any collective development, instead of a chronological flow, a thematic approach is adopted in the following discussion. The examples are grouped into three sections according to their relationship with their public sites: "art installed in public space," "art annexing public space," and "public art away from public venues." Each of these sections will evaluate how its examples tried to establish connections with the public at their particular public sites. As the examples brought art to the public, they have all demonstrated a keen interest in the local. The varied ways through which the works attended to the local will also be examined in the discussion. Addressing all these factors, it is hoped that this chapter could suggest how different public art models were pursued for bringing together art and the public in varied forms of public space, and returning to the question raised in the previous chapter, how these experiences give insight to new relationships between art and society.

Art Installed in Public Space

Among public art projects done during the late 1990s, a most frequently adopted model was the installation of art objects, sculptures, murals or paintings in publicly accessible places. Such a practice had indeed been carried out by the former Urban

Council and large corporations like Hong Kong Land in the 1980s. Yet while the prototypes were not basically ornamental and not exactly commissioned as public art, the recent projects have demonstrated a much heightened intention of making the works something special to the public. Three projects, representing the attempts made by three different initiating agencies from 1999 to 2002, will be examined in this chapter. The three examples include the "Public Art Schemes" by the government official public art agency, the Public Art Team, set up in 1999; the "Art in Stations" programme in the territory's largest public transport system by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation; and a smaller-scale project initiated by independent art agency Artist Commune which tried to turn electricity supply boxes into art. This selection of examples will be evaluated to see how the different agencies made use of their accessed public space for public art, and how they tried to foster links between art and their surrounding public.

The Municipal Public Art Team's *Public Art Schemes*

With its governance over local public space, the municipality has been involved in installation of art works in public places for decades. After decades of prototype commissions, official interest in "public art" became increasing programmatic in the mid 90s. A series of municipal efforts were launched for promoting public art. From

incentives in art policies, officially commissioned research and establishment of an

official public art agency to commissions of public artworks, an official narrative for

public art has developed since the mid 1990s. This official narrative, as the following

discussion will show, is much driven by a motive to create local or region image, yet

not quite conscious of a deeper and more genuine kind of site-specificity.

In the 1995 Arts Development Council 5-year Strategic Plan, a suggestion was

made for the introduction of public art as a means to encourage creation, display,

appreciation and response to art by all sectors of the community.[146] This interest was

subsequently followed by a research project commissioned by the Council which was

completed in 1997. The research, titled *Project: Promotion of Public Art in Hong

Kong*[147], was divided into two parts. The first was a data-file documenting the general

information (image, title, artist, location and brief description) of over two hundred

odd foreign public sculptures. A more detailed study of five local and overseas cases

made up the second part of the research. In this part, examples of public art were

divided into three main aspects: "art in public space," with reference to the local

example of "Sculpture Walk" (Kowloon Park)[148], public works at Broadgate, London,

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[146] Hong Kong Arts Development Council, *Hong Kong Arts Development Council: 5-year Strategic Plan* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1995), p. 105. Precisely speaking, the Council is not a government body. However it has a quasi-official status as the agency responsible for developing local art policies and managing related funds.

[147] Annie Leung, *Project: Promotion of Public Art in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Arts Development Council, 1997).

[148] The "Sculpture Walk" in Kowloon Park was a collaboration between the former Urban Council, the Museum of Art, the Hong Kong Sculptor Association and the Jockey Club. Geared by a special

and the renowned case of the *Tilted Arc* in lower Manhattan;[149] "community-based art," exemplified with the use of art for outreach purposes at Breakthrough Youth Village in Shatin; and "commissioning agency," discussed with an Australian example of institutional practices in Adelaide. Like the data-collection part, discussion in this second part was also more factual than critical. It did not particularly address the local context except in an appendix presenting a survey, sampled on 250 local citizens, on "public opinions towards public art." Together with several general recommendations made in the second part such as that public art should be promoted to different social parties, the importance of preliminary planning for integrating public art into urban designs, advocacy for improving connections with artists and community organizations, and the need of documentation, etc., the report finished with a few more suggestions generated from the survey: reaffirmation of the value of public art, preference for participation and the cultivation of local distinctiveness which was recommended as helpful for promoting a sense of belonging among community.

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committee formed in 1987, the project was conceptualized as a "rolling exhibition" involving public display and resale of works. Three works by internationally renowned artists, namely Eduardo Paolozzi's *Concept of Newton*, Ray Arnatt's *Centre-Piece,* David Watkins's Pool Pavilion, and a further twelve works by young local artists were commissioned on a permanent basis. Another eight works by more established local artists were chosen for resale. The scheme was not too successful. Among the eight works, only four were bought by the organizers themselves. (the Jockey Club and the Government)There was a proposal for a "Sculpture Court" in a proposed Contemporary Museum to be set up in the park. Yet both the court and the museum are still not yet built till the present.

[149] Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* was commissioned in 1979 and installed in 1981 at the New York City's Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. The lead sculpture, a 10-foot-high, 120-foot-long self-rusting steel curved wall which obliquely blocked the space of plaza, was seen as a violation of the space and subsequently removed in 1989. The case provoked a huge amount of controversy over issues like rights, of art, the artist and the public, in the public space and questions like who or what could rule over public art. For documentary and critical essays on the case, see for example: Harriet F. Seine, *The Tilted Arc Controversy* (University of Minnesota, 2001).

The research had a visible impact on later municipal public art. The distinction between public art as art in public spaces and community-based art was picked up in the institutional structure. Two official bodies were set up in 1999 by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department accordingly.[150] A Public Art Team and a Community Art Team were formed under the Arts Promotion Office, restructured from the former Visual Arts Centre. Division of the two teams principally followed the 1997 research's categorization: the Public Art Team was responsible for commissioning art objects in public places, and the Community Art Team was in charge of community-oriented projects. The equation of public art with physical, permanent works in public places, and its differentiation from community art thus pinned down the official definition of public art. According to this official understanding, as the chief official agency[151] the Public Art Team began a series of "Public Art Schemes": installation of sculptures at venues managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

As expected of average municipal projects, these schemes all aimed for a pacifying objective of "enriching the living environment and enhancing art

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[150] The department is responsible for municipal services for leisure and sports venues, libraries and art and cultural facilities such as museums, theatres and archives. The department was restructured from the former Regional Council after an institutional restructuring in 1999.

[151] Besides the two Teams, other government departments or related organizations, such as the Airport Authority (art commissions in the Airport), Highways Department (ornamental designs on highways) and Administration Office (*Forever Blooming Bauhinia* and *Monument in Commutation of Hong Kong Reunification with China*), etc., are also involved in putting "art" in public locations. Addressing such multiple sources of official commission, curators of the Arts Promotion Office suggested, in the second consultation workshop of the Public Art Research (directed by Desmond Hui) on 26 October 2002 at the Graduate School, the University of Hong Kong, that the two teams were not any centralizing agency and that its role was rather to promote and encourage practice of public art among different constituencies.

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appreciation in the neighbourhood."[152] The commissions were still basically ornamental yet there was a strong incentive to promote community feelings through these commissions. Participation and local distinctiveness, as advocated in the 1997 research, were given a high regard. A democratic feel and mass participation was fostered through open competitions for designs. Among selected entries, there was an obvious favour for localness – references to the sites, and quite frequently, styles or contents that suggest certain clichés of Chineseness. For example, in Law Hon-wah's winning mural, *Lanting Preface* [Image 9], for the Tsing Yi Municipal Complex (1999), calligraphic characters of the entitled pastoral poem by Wang Xizhi were engraved onto square clay tablets and assembled together like tiles in a scrabble game. This representation of Chinese poetry and calligraphy with a "modernized" format was suggested by the artist as a reference to the site, where was once a countryside place and now a new town.[153] Similar representation of Chinese stereotypes could be seen in Chu Hon-sun's winning work for Kwai Tsing Theatre, *Life is as on Stage* [Image 10] (1999). At the first place, the title, along with its reference to the theatre site, is a popular Chinese proverb comparing life to drama. The work is an aluminum "paper-cut", another popular Chinese folk craft, image of a Chinese Opera costume.

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[152] Public Art Team promotional brochure (Arts Promotion Office, 1999).

[153] Law Hon-wah's discussion on the work in a seminar titled "Yijian gonggong yishupin di dansheng" 一件公共藝術品的誕生 (The Birth of a Work of Public Art), organized by the Public Art Team on 18 August 2001 at Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre.

The costume contains a silhouette of a body which, with its arms extending, is somewhat reminiscent of the frequently copied image of Leonardo da Vinci's anatomic sketch. Chu's combination of Chinese proverbs, folk traditions, motifs and paper-cutting into metallic sculptures continued to be credited in a series of commissions for a new housing estate in Tung Chung in 2001.

Two further commissioned works were *Working at Dawn* [Image 11] and *Rich Harvest* [Image 12]. Once again the titles are proverbs, referring to the early hours of agricultural labour and an abundant fishery crop respectively. Employment of the paper-cutting technique is even more prominent here. In *Working at Dawn,* the cut-out of a ploughing farmer and its buffalo from its cylindrical base is put right on top; and fish cut out from *Rich Harvest*'s net-shape plate are subsequently placed likewise. Like the two formerly discussed works, there is also an apparent connection to the site, which in this case was conceived as a former agricultural and fishing village. Besides the favour for Chineseness and seeming "site-specify", these three works by Chu also register a new tendency in municipal commissions. Compared to earlier outdoor sculptures by Chu, like a work titled *Untitled* placed at the entrance of the Cultural Centre [Image 13], these new works illustrate a drastic change from an abstract, modernist style to a more figurative one. This change with Chu is echoed with general observation of a turn in stylistic preferences for sculptures commissioned before and

after the founding of labeled municipal public art. Preference for figurative objects could best be illustrated by Lee Chin-fai's bronze buffalo and ducklings, called *Today in Yesterday – Meeting of Minds* [Image 14] and *Mutual Trust* [Image 15]; and to quite an extreme, a work called *Fortune and Auspices* [Image 16] by Poon Siu-wah. Playing on puns of fortune〔富〕and trousers〔褲〕(both Cantonese pronunciations are "*fu*"), and auspices〔吉〕and tangerines〔桔〕(both "*gut*"), the brightly coloured porcelain work holds a lot of gigantic tangerines on a huge pair of trousers. This play of words and visual signifiers is surely auspicious, but the image might well be mistaken as some kitsch promotional icon.

The kitsch appearance of *Fortune and Auspices* raises a few problems with this series of public art commissions. The incentive to make art that would appeal to the general public and the composition of the selection committee, with no fewer administrators than art practitioners[154], might have had an impact on the selection of works. Beside artistic quality, other factors could well be in consideration. Critically, not many of the works are quality fine art[155] and their so-called site-specificity tends to be rather superficial. Their Chineseness was also not profound as a press review

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[154] For example, the selection committee of the Tung Chung housing estate project was made up of four art advisors of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (Kao May-ching, Kwok Chiu-leung, Lee Yun-woon and Wucius Wong) and four administrators (Denis Ho and Ma Kam-chuen from the Housing Department, Law Kam-fai and Cheung Kwok-kwong from the Tung Chung Rural Committee).

[155] The average quality of the works may be partly due to the fact that many of the authors are not professional artists. The fact that public art is frequently not done by artists (but more frequently, architects or designers) again relates to the lack in related training and facilities for artists as raised in the introduction.

criticized: "apart from the use of elements with an oriental flavour, there was no contextual reflection on the 'Chinese culture.'"[156] The critical point about these problems is, if public art is to promote art among the public, how effectively have such works helped to do so? What is their impact on the public's understanding of art?

The average citizens' reactions towards these projects were given a clue by a feature on the Tung Chung project by the *Ming Pao Weekly*. Suggestively titled as "Between beauty and practicality: putting art into austere estate with 50 million,"[157] the feature asks: "has the Housing Authority brought a new scene to the boring estate, or is it just a beautiful illusion in an ivory tower?"[158] The question is answered with a few residents' responses towards such efforts in their habitat:

> [we have] moved in for a half a year already, there is not even a
>
> market. Why spend money on art!
>
> Art? What art? Spending a few million dollars on a piece, better
>
> build another bus stop!
>
> Traveling to the city centre takes a very long time. When do we

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[156] Ye Yincong 葉蔭聰, "Guanbian gonggong yishu, buchi renjian yanhuo" 官辦「公共藝術」不吃人間煙火 (Municipal "Public Art," distant from popular trends), *Ming Pao*, 21 November 1999, C8. The quotation in Chinese: 除了運用了東方韻味的元素外，實在看不到對『中國文化』的本土反省。

[157] Xiao Cao 小草, "Meili yu shiyong di diaogui: wubaiwan yishuhua huangliang gongwu" 美麗與實用的弔詭：五百萬藝術化荒涼公屋 (Dubiety between beauty and practicality: putting art into austere estate with 50 million), *Ming Pao Weekly (Book B),* 5 January 2002, pp. 18–23.

[158] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 到底房署是為呆滯的屋村景觀帶來了新氣象，抑或這只是象牙塔裏營造的美麗幻象？

have time to appreciate these?

I would say the money is better spent on residents' welfare![159]

The responses indicate that residents considered practical utilities more important than art. This priority for material satisfaction was suggested by Van Lau in a sharing of his years of art practice in Hong Kong:

> It was a very difficult time in the 1960s. People were all preoccupied with their livelihood. Nobody had the leisure to care about art. I had to earn my living by doing portraits at the pier. In the 1970s, the economy began to grow, and my works were bought by some friends with the spare money. In the 1980s when the finance and property market made society rich, I started receiving corporate and private commissions.[160]

Van Lau's personal experience witnessed the relationship between economy and society's regard for art. It also reflected a general local mentality that art was always seen as secondary. Thus when these early commissions of public art unfortunately

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[159] Ibid. The quotations in Chinese: 搬來半年了，街市也沒有，淨花錢去做什麼藝術！；藝術？什甚藝術？花幾十萬一件，還不如開多個巴士站！；出去市區的時間好長，邊有時間慢慢欣賞這些東西！；這邊一件、那邊一件，計我話用這些錢來搞多些居民福利更好！

[160] Interview with Van Lau by the author on 4 September 2002 in the artist's home. The artist talked in Chinese: 六十年代的日子很艱難，人們都忙於生計，沒有甚麼人對藝術有興趣。到了七十年代，經濟開始發展了，便有些有點錢的朋友買我的作品。八十年代社會因為金融、地產變得富有，我開始給大機構或者私人做作品。

collided with an economic set-back after the 1997 financial crackdown, there was

apparently an additional difficulty for art to touch the public. Disregard for art at a

time of economic recession was evidenced by comments posted by some anonymous

members of the public when the Public Art Team held an exhibition for its third

commission project in 2002. On a wall inviting public comments, a manuscript rudely

rejected art as wasteful when countless local citizens were impoverished [Image

17]:[161]

> "Art is priceless!"

> Stupid.

> Nonsense.

> So many Hong Kong people are having problems with their
>
> livelihood. So many are people unemployed.

Tighter economic conditions might have left people with less leisure to appreciate art,

but if good art could always touch people, citizens' lack of appreciation might also be

related to the works themselves. Besides total negations of art, among comments

expressed in the aforementioned exhibition, there were certain critical responses

towards the commissions – regrets for some of the works' artistic quality,

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[161] Anonymous comment to Public Art Scheme 2002 exhibition at City Hall, photo taken on 4 September 2002.

unconvincing statements, incomparable standards to public art in other countries, and

doubts towards selection [Image 18].[162]

Without going into the details of individual works, a major limitation of these

municipal commissions was the simplistic equation of public art as outdoor sculpture.

Despite the turn from abstraction to figures and superficial links with sites, the works,

by nature, were not really different from earlier isolated, ornamental sculptures and

real engagement with the community was still lacking. The inadequacy of such a

model has been widely criticized in the global discourse of public art. Its futility is

pointed out by American critic Albert Boime:

> Public art objects exist in their "own dumb actuality" – silent, inert, and
>
> out of context, and public art audiences are expected to accept their mute
>
> but obvious presence.[163]

Observing similar problems, Arlene Raven pointedly states: "Public Art isn't a hero

on a horse anymore."[164] Raven's statement metaphorically underlines that the

conventional equation of public art with any art objects installed in public places is no

longer valid for considering public art today. Along with these general negations for

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[162] Ibid. The manuscript in Chinese: 這次選出的作品，有部份很死板，statement牽強，完全「作」些意思出來，其實和圖書館環境無關，仲有一個人幾件入選，都唔知點選出來，香港Public Art 的水平對比其他國家作品，仲差好大段距離﹝可能同評審水平有關！﹞

[163] Albert Boime, "Waving the Red Flag and Reconstructing Old Glory," *American Art*, no.2, Spring 1990, p. 23.

[164] Raven, op. cit., p. 1.

the model, Patricia Philips discusses in detail a problem which she called the "Public Art Machine."[165] Her context, which could be cross-referenced to the present case, is the full-blown expansion of public art in the United States. By calling public art a "machine", Philips refers to the malpractice in having public art as "bureaucratic procedures codified," thus adopting a "minimal basic standard" and eventually encouraging mediocrity. To this problem, Philips asks:

> Can public art illuminate cultural ideas that other forms
> frequently cannot? What is it that public art could uniquely
> do?[166]

Switching from her critiques and questions over inadequate practices, Philips counter-argues that public art is something more than art in public places:

> A truly public art will derive its "publicness" not from its
> location, but from the nature of its engagement of personal
> interests, collective values, social issues, political events, and
> wider cultural patterns that mark our civic life.

Locally, the need of art, public or not, to be more active in reaching the people

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[165] Patricia Philips, "Out of Order: Public Art Machine," *Artforum*, December 1988, p. 93.

[166] Ibid.

was suggested by David Clarke in a review of *City Vibrance* (1991), an exhibition of contemporary Hong Kong art in which works were also officially selected by curators of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Besides the general direction that art could no longer assume a given audience but exercise initiative in creating one, Clarke gives suggestions for more promising execution: art has to address issues of common concerns, communicate in an understandable language yet without falling into uncritical clichés.[167] Discussing a similar idea in the context of public art during the last consultation workshop of a second Arts Development Council commissioned report on public art in 2002, Christina Chu, curator of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, reasserted that the fundamental criteria for public art to go really public was a "metamorphosis"– that works need a new thoughtfulness to become more legitimate public art.[168]

In the above reformed "Public Art Schemes," there was an attempt in heightening the relationship between the commissions and the public. However, whether the schemes have effectively hit their goals is questionable. The kitsch appearance and superficial site-specificity among many works undermined their effectiveness in connecting art, the sites and the public in the neighbourhood. Not

[167] Clarke, "Museum, Artists, Audiences," *Art and Place: Essays on Art from a Hong Kong Perspective* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), p. 21.

[168] Christina Chu's comments during the second consultation workshop of the Public Art Research (directed by Desmond Hui) on 26 October 2002 at the Graduate School, the University of Hong Kong. She spoke in Chinese: 公共藝術需要的是一種質變.

having any genuine connections with the public, the works were more reflective of a "public" image patronized by the municipal.

The Mass Transit Railway's "Art in Stations"

Concurrent to the municipal "Public Art Schemes," a similar programme was conducted by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation as "Art in Stations." Like the municipal project, it was also basically the commission of art objects, but there was a new element of integrating of art into public utilities. The installation of art in public utilities had been practised overseas for decades with the argument that it situated art within a more intimate everyday context.[169] Locally, the practice was carried out by a number of transport systems which put up art on their premises. Among the few local art-in-transit projects, the "Art in Stations" programme is pinpointed in the following discussion to see how it approached public art at a public utility site.[170] The discussion will give an outline of the project and address a critical problem concerning space ownership and control.

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[169] See for example Finkelpearl, op. cit., p. 32.

[170] Other examples of public art in transport systems project include the installation of sculptures at the Hong Kong International Airport (Chek Lap Kok) by the Airport Authority; and two temporal projects, on buses (2001) and ferries (2002), initiated by the Public Art Team and the First Bus / First Ferry corporations. From these examples, the MTR project is chosen because of its larger scale, longer duration, richer complexities, and as suggested in the text, its potential impact owing to its wider audience reach.

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The "Art in Stations" programme was launched by the Mass Transit Railway since 1998. Comparable with many overseas art-in-transit projects[171], this scheme took the huge number of train passengers as a potential audience. Presenting art to this passenger-audience served two purposes for the corporation: one was principally business – to decorate the environment so as to "upgrade services;" the other, more socially-committed, was to provide venues for promoting Hong Kong and community art.[172] Under this agenda, the scheme was devised with six components: "Airport Express Artwork Programme," "Living Art in Station," "Community Art Gallery," "Open Gallery," "Art in Station Architecture" and "MTR Roving Art." "Airport Express Artwork Programme" started off the whole scheme with the installation of large scale works along the line. Larry Kirkland's *Flight of Fancy* [Image 19 & 20] furnished the lobby of Hong Kong Station with two freestanding, hanging geometric assemblages formed by multicolour glass-fibre tubes. On a wall along the subway to Central station showed Gaylord Chan's *Swift and Safe* [Image 21], a colourful,

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[171] Public art has been integrated in transport systems (mostly the underground) in cities of many countries like the United States and Japan. Examples in the United States are discussed in a special issue on "Public Art in Transit" of the US public art journal *Public Art Review* (Minneapolis: Forecast, Summer / Autumn 1989). Japanese examples are studied in the local Public Art Research by Desmond Hui, commissioned by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. These overseas cases, which involved installation of sculptures, murals, paintings, neon lights, etc., in different locations within the transport system premises, could be seen as prototypes of the present example. References to overseas model are probable in the present project, considering its formulation was assisted by overseas consultants. However, no specific information on reference was provided by the Corporation in its reply to the author's inquiry.

[172] Letter reply from Jeremy Lau, Deputy Corporate Relations Manager of MTRC, 20 August 2002. The original text: "The main objectives of the Initiative are to enhance the traveling environment for MTR passengers, to make MTR journeys even more pleasant and enjoyable, and to provide venues and opportunities for promotion Hong Kong and community art."

roughly figurative image of an aeroplane in flight. Neil Dawson's *Birds of a Feather*, [Image 22] located at Tsing Yi station, is again a hung work, a gigantic white feather placed right under the white ceiling, visible because of its varying light and shade. By nature, these sculptures were ornamental but, like the aforementioned municipal commissions, there was a special highlight to the site as the installed works were all related to the themes of flight, speed and high technology – all affirmative for a new railway to the new airport.

Besides this Airport Express project, other components of the project did not seem to have a clear focus and they apparently just showed any art here and there. 'Living Art in Station' arranged performances in stations. 'Community Art Gallery' put up display panels resembling notice boards for artworks, mostly drawings, by the neighbourhood communities [Image 23]. "Open Gallery" and "Art in Station Architecture" were like the Airport Express project and involved installations of permanent artworks. The former put up blown-up reproductions (whose pixels, unfortunately, were a lot more visible than brushwork) of paintings by local painters. (See for example Raymong Fung's *Hong Kong Mountains Series: Pat Sin Range* in Tai Koo station.[173] [Image 24]) The latter integrated similar works into architectural elements – mosaic wall tiles murals, paintings fitted into window panes, etc. (see for

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[173] The range, distant from the painting's situation in the Eastern district on Hong Kong Island, is in the North District in the New Territories.

example Zhao Haitien's *Recreation of Being* in Fortress Hill station [Image 25] and Mariko Jesse's *Large Paintings Featuring Cups and Teapots* in Cheung Sha Wan station [Image 26]) The last component of the whole programme was 'MTR Roving Art', which was very much a visual version of Living Art in Station and held temporary exhibitions with some gigantic test-tube-like showcases [Image 27].

As a whole, the "Art in Stations" programme has its advantage in the railway's wide reach. However, it is questionable if the works have been something more than ornaments and contributed to any public or communal meaning. The majority of works, other than the Airport Express ones and a community-art prone mural in North Point called *I Love North Point* (a combination of colourful rhythmic patterns and line drawings of the district by children living in the neighborhood [Image 28]) by Tao Ho and children in the district, hardly addresses their sites. The manner of presentation does not demonstrate much consideration in art promotion. Installed murals or sculptures are like ignorable ornaments, and the showcasing method is also not quite welcoming. The test-tube format of MTR Roving Art was criticized by Chan Kai-yin in a review of the scheme:

Those hand-made objects were poorly trapped inside large test-tubes

and looked lifeless. Before appreciating them, the glass tubes stood as

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warnings like "don't touch,", "stay away."[174]

Promotion for the project is also inadequate. Although information of the project could be gathered shortly after contacts with the responsible staff, very little promotional materials are available at the stations for the general public.[175] A brief brochure was printed in Januaury 2003, five years after the project's launching, yet its distribution is uncertain. All these have narrowed the impact of this possibly promising public art project, particularly at a site where advertising imagery is also keenly fighting for attention. Comparing works from "Art in Stations" to a scene in which the mobile phone company Nokia promoted its new multicolour display model with paintings by Cassatt, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Monet (image taken at Kowloon Tong station, 14 March 2003) [Image 29], and another huge reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* by the Bank of Netherlands (image taken at Hong Kong station, 23 April 2003) [Image 30], the latter two obviously grab more attention because of their more eye-catching location, brighter illumination, higher print quality and the inevitable difficulty art had with consumption – that consumer goods are always more popular concern attractive for the passing pedestrian.

A parallel, more critical question arising from this comparison is the status of the

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[174] Chan Kai-yin 陳啓賢, "Ditie maiyi liaoshengyuwu" 地鐵「賣」藝　聊勝於無 (Selling art at MTR, better than nothing), *P/S*, no.12, December 2000, pp. 5-6: 那些手製品，可憐的被困在一支支大試管內，毫無生機，在欣賞它們之前，球璃筒已化成一句句「不可觸摸」、「切勿走近」等警告。

[175] Information on this part was sought through letter inquiry to the corporation's public relation officers.

images. If one assumes the category of public art implies a certain relationship between the public and art, it is very hard to tell how far these supposedly public works of art are closer to the people than their adjacent advertising images. The ornamental nature and irrelevance of these art pieces subject them to the same setback as prototype art commissions in open venues by the government or other corporations: the works are again art in public places, but not necessarily public art.

In addition to these inadequacies, a further problem with this programme could be reflected by a joint venture between the corporation and art body Para/Site Artspace in 2000. The co-operation, an exhibition called *Private Lives* in Sheung Wan station, was not a very smooth one. In due course, the exhibition and publicity contents were intervened by the corporation, and even the featuring artists were changed with the claim of "users' taste."[176] In a later article recalling the experience, Kith Tsang (on behalf of Para/Site Artspace) criticizes:

> The corporate management only thinks that the corporation is liable to protecting the right of its space users (not necessarily passengers). They adopt a policy of censorship (including commercial advertisements) to screen away anything that might provoke users' dissatisfaction. Public art in the stations remain on a decoration level, and misses the important

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[176] See Chan Kai-yin, op. cit., p. 6.

function of influencing the citizens' "public life" in a mass transit

system.[177]

The anecdote raises a problem of public art in owned space. Considering that the

exhibition space essentially belonged to the corporation, it is imaginable that the latter

would have its principal concern on safeguarding its interests, even if that was to

sacrifice art. The space for this seemingly public art project was actually not public at

all, and private ownership subjected it to the interests of its owner. In such a light, the

municipal patronizing of a "public" image in the "Public Art Schemes" can also be

considered with a similar logic. In space subjected to its owner's interest, it is

somehow unavoidable that art and its relation with the people may be overridden by

other criteria. There seems to be a fundamental difficulty with public art installed in

such seemingly public, nonetheless controlled, public space. Under such a condition,

the challenge for public art is thus the negotiation with various interests and seizure of

its site for a more autonomous form of expression.

Artist Commune's Paintings on Electricity Supply Boxes Project

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[177] Kith Tsang 曾德平, "Gonggong jiaotong, gonggong lunyu" 公共交通　公共論域 (Public transport, public sphere) , *Ming Pao*, 23 April 2000. The quotation in Chinese:機構的管理層總是認為,機構有責任保障空間使用者〔不一定是乘客〕的利益。採用的方法是事先審查〔包括商業廣告〕，濾走一切可能引起使用者不滿的東西。但是，車站內的公共藝術只流於美化環境的裝飾層面，而忽略了集體運輸系統影響市民「公共生活」的重要作用。

While the "Public Art Schemes" and "Art in Station" project were inevitably subjected to interests of the space-owners, an initiative in painting electricity supply boxes[178] in Central and Western district by local art body Artist Commune exemplified an attempt at seizing a marginal public site, less controlled by any prominent space owner, for making public art. The project was a collaboration between Artist Commune and the Central Western District Council. Using the "neutral" space of electricity supply boxes along the district's streets, selected because of the least number of government departments involved, the project was focused on promoting art and community feelings. The following discussion will tell how the project tried to bring together art and the public in a community art-prone model, and evaluate its impact on its public site.

Unlike the "Public Art Schemes" and "Art in Stations," Artist Commune's "Paintings on Electricity Supply Boxes" project did not only involve the installation of art objects into public places. Installation of art, precisely the painting of electricity

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[178] A contextual reference for painting on electricity supply boxes is Tsang Tsou-choi, whose calligraphic graffiti has frequented local public utilities, including electricity supply boxes, highway plinths, etc., for decades. Tsang's graffiti has been in debates among the local circle since it was first addressed as art by curators and critics like Lau Sheung-yeung during the handover period. (as opposed to the defacement of public objects by a man who was not formerly considered as an artist)Tsang's proclamation of himself as the "King of Kowloon" and his "territorial rights" in his inscription on properties managed by the colonial government was seen as politically transgressive. In a press article on the present example, it was suggested that the curator had tried to invite Tsang to take part in the project, Zeng Jinwen 曾錦雯, "Dengxiang zuo huabu Zhongqu tian secai" 燈箱作畫布中區添色彩 (Lightboxes as canvas, more colours for Central), *Ming Pao*, 21 June 2002. For further references on Tsang, see for example, Clarke, "Subaltern Writing. Tsang Tsou-choi: the King of Kowloon," *Art Asia Pacific*, no.29, 2001, pp. 68-71; Siu King-chung 蕭競聰, "Nuorong Zeng Zaocai" 挪用曾灶財 (Appropriating Tsang Tsou-choi), *Ming Pao*, 21 September 1999, C8; Lau Sheung-yeung, "Shufa di mole"書法的沒落 "The decline of calligraphy," *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 6 August 1997; Ju Shenyu 朱信餘, "Shufajia: 'shu' yi wu 'fa' qi neng rong" 書法家:「書」而無「法」豈能容 (Calligrapher: how could calligraphy be without standard?), *Sing Tao Daily*, 5 September, 1996.

supply boxes, was overlaid with a propensity towards community art. The mural-form

was a popular format for community art. Works in such a format had been done by

many local groups and put up in public space by the district board.[179] In a similar

format, the paintings in the present project linked to the district through their contents

and manner of execution. A total of 90 boxes in the district were painted in two stages.

The first, involving thirty boxes, started off the project in June 2002 with the help

from thirty local artists. Interests in the local were focused on a district scale, and the

artists painted a façade of light boxes under a general theme of the image of the

district. Representations of the district's image were in different individual styles.[180]

Variety was very much favoured by curator Shum Ching-man from Artist Commune,

thinking that this could cater to different kinds of audience.[181] The practical situation

that the artists had to make art in the street during the daily rustle and hustle was also

seen as an important element. Art-making was witnessed by the pedestrians, so

instead of having art created in some unknown, isolated places, the public was opened

to look at the artist's work in a more intimate way. Community engagement was

substantially integrated in the second part of the project. Community organizations,

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[179] A number of such murals are displayed by the Central Western District Council along the pedestrian fly-over between the Central Market and the mid-level escalators. See for example *Together*, collaborated by two secondary schools in the district and Ricky Yeung. [Image 31]

[180] The paintings were done by the artists with their own materials (with limited subsidies from the organizer). As the works must withstand outdoor conditions, most artists had painted with enamel paints or acrylics.

[181] Interview with Shum Ching-man by the Author on 14 June 2002 in Artist Commune.

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including community centres and art clubs of schools, of the district were invited to participate and, under guidance of artists, paint their own images on a further sixty boxes. Thus this painting programme related art to the community in a number of ways: the works were integrated in the environment, their images were related to the place and their making engaged its people.

As the project made art in the public space in collaboration with the local community, it could be understood as a crossover of public art and community art. Its validity as community art was definite considering its execution process. However, on the side of public art, its effectiveness in enhancing the meaning of its public site was a bit questionable. While the project was more keen on promoting art than making exquisite art (with the considerable difficulty with painting in the streets), the resulting works were not exactly an artistic collection. Critically, there is very little difference if one compared many images in the project, supposedly "art", with other inartistic murals painted by amateur community groups in the district. Indeed, as the works are presented with no title plate, they may well be taken as those other murals rather than art. In addition to problematic aesthetic standards, few works demonstrated in-depth reflection of the specific context. Quite a number of works seemed more decorative than provocative of deeper meanings. For example, an anonymous work facing Chater Road (beside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel) [Image 32]

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roughly relates to the city location with its geometric representation of high-rises and traffic. Another anonymous one facing Des Vouex Road (beside Wheelock House) [Image 33] juxtaposes the painted face of a Chinese Opera character with a scatter of overlapping cubist forms, as if suggestive of the cliché idea of cultural hybridity. In cases when the images did show a stronger sense of site-specificity, the contents were also stereotypical rather than critical. A most illustrative example was Chan Kao-on's *Central* [Image 34], whose title and authorship are known because it was printed on a news report.[182] It depicts a prosperous city scene in dusk, with the tourist attracting Peak at the back and foregrounded by a junk – symbol of the Hong Kong Tourist Board, a stereotypical tourist icon appearing more frequently on tourist merchandise than in real life. Besides the lack of critical inquiry into the place and stimulating images, the conventional mural format did not fully succeed in breaking the ice with the passing pedestrian and promote contact with the viewing public. Thus as a whole, the display of these paintings did serve to beautify and permeate "art" into the environment, but it did not engage art with the site nor its public audience.

Despite its shortcomings, the project was a worthy attempt and its example has two significant implications on public art. The first lies with its attempt in involving the community in the works' production. Compared to the two previous cases which

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[182] Zeng Jinwen, "Dengxiang zuo huabu Zhongqu tian secai," op. cit.

failed to involve the public actively, this project excelled in its fostering of communal participation. This additional element posits as a favourable factor for public art, that instead of just occupying physical public space, public art could also be approached through public participation. Another key achievement of the project was its attempt in opening unusual sites for public art. The use of electricity supply boxes, though not groundbreaking, was remarkable for its sensitivity in annexing a platform that was publicly accessible, yet not severely controlled like other prominent public locations. The ability in annexing such alternative sites opens up new possibilities amidst the limitations of controlled public space. Departing from this trial with electricity supply boxes, two further projects which experimented with alternative public space will be introduced in the coming section.

Art Annexing Public Space

In this section, the discussion will look into two projects in which public art makers, lacking a given public site, creatively seized alternative space for public art. Working on very different terms than examples in the previous section, the two projects, namely *City Space –Mysterious Art Installation in the City* and *Art Windows*, are characterized by their temporary annexation of unusual public sites. These two factors, in contrast to the more expectable locations and permanence with the above cases, had conditioned the present examples into a very different kind of public art.

The difference marked by the two projects was on the works' relationship to their site. Theoretically, the relationship between public art and its public site has been explored by W.J.T. Mitchell, who proposes two kinds of relationships: the utopia and the critical. The utopia, according to Mitchell, "attempts to raise up an ideal public sphere, a nonsite, an imaginary landscape." [183] This is comparable to the above examples in which, largely conditioned by the space owners' interests and communal obligations, public art asserts a pacified ideal and reinforces affirming qualities of their sites. There is nothing essentially wrong with the utopian model, but as setbacks in the above cases reflect, a merely affirmative model could easily fall into clichés and fail to enhance the site with critical reflections. On the other hand, the critical in Mitchell's theorization involves critiques of the site. It "disrupts the image of a pacified, utopian public sphere, that exposes contradictions and adopts an ironic, subversive relation to the public it addresses."[184] Enjoying more liberty with their alternative locations and temporal term, the two projects discussed in this section demonstrated a more critical attitude towards their site. Instead of just being affirmative like the above cases, the projects annexed the room for more in-depth reflection. In such a way, the projects' relationship with the local context is also different. Rather than merely fashioning local images through the works, their

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[183] Mitchell, op. cit., p. 3.

[184] Ibid.

curatorial and presentation strategies represented responses to contextual conditions for presenting art in the public.

City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City

In 2000, *City Space - Mysterious Art Installation in the City* was curated by Kacey Wong in Sheung Wan district. Unlike the formerly discussed examples, the project did not mean to put up permanent art objects in the streets. It was rather, as the curator conceptualized, a spatial experiment investigating people's relationship with public space: "when I do public art I want to make sure that it is different from the Golden Bauhinia or other sculptures by private corporations...... My art would not be a show-off of money or elitist taste…… It is an experiment. The outcome is unknown, but it would contribute to the society, bring about rethinking on the relationship between us and our space."[185] In *City Space*, such a rationale was realized as the works creatively re-examined features of their sites and carried out experiments that disrupted spatial inertia.

The format of the project echoes its rationale. From the beginning, "City Space" was inspired by substantial relationships between the site and its people – residents' habits of drying mandarin peels and clothes in the streets, and other forms of "illegal"

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[185] Interview with Kacey Wong by the author on 28 May 2002 in Queen's Café, Causeway Bay.

occupation of public space in Sheung Wan. Like the residents' annexation of public places, the project mysteriously installed art, contributed by several practicing artists and some architecture undergraduates from a course the curator taught at the University of Hong Kong,[186] in different spots in the neighbourhood around Para/Site Artspace. Instead of the more conventional forms of permanent sculptures or murals, works took the more temporal form of installation. The flexibility allowed by the form gave more room for the works to be spatially specific. Space at the sites was the quintessential subject of the whole project. The emphasis on such site-bound space was turned into an argument through the project's curatorial strategy which involved a symbolic displacement: paralleling these mysterious installations around the neighbourhood, an "exhibition" was held in Para/Site Artspace, showing no works. The gallery-goers, finding no art in the gallery, were rather given an approximate map guiding them to look around for art. The statement was pronounced: the space of art was no longer the institutional setting but the public space, and art-seers were no longer gallery-goers but a public stimulated to re-discover their surrounding environment.

In such a general format, works in the project demonstrated a few tendencies in

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[186] Again, reminiscent of the authorship in the Municipal schemes, public art was not done be artists but architects. The proximity of public art and architecture is indeed reasonable as both disciplines essentially focus on treatment of (public/city) space. The close relationship between public art and architecture is discussed by many, see for example Miles, op. cit.

their approaches towards public space. A common one was to draw audience's attention to existing characteristics of a place. For example, *Pedestrian Traffic Signs* [Image 35 &36] put up two signs in Hollywood Road Park. While the two signs were stylistically very similar to civil road signs, their contents were subtly changed to direct attention to two very fundamental uses of their locations: a sign saying "3 km", the average walking speed of a pedestrian, was posted on a wall along a thoroughfare; another sign with a "P", a well-understood initial for parking, was placed by a resting area where people parked. All at once, the seemingly ordinary activities, nonetheless so central to what the place meant for people, became highlighted objects to observe.

Another work, *Installing real bamboo leafs on fake bamboo* also seized its site in the same park. The work dealt with a physical feature along a short wall around the park. On the wall, ceramic columns with bamboos patterns were used for semi-functional and semi-decorative purposes. The work played with these fake bamboos, and as the title suggests, attached "real" (but actually paper) bamboo leaves on them. The effect was fun and also reflective. Surprised to see these additional leaves, the audience might also be surprised to rediscover the original bamboo motifs, possibly long overlooked. A similar strategy to re-expose features in the environment was adopted in *Gate Patterns* [Image 37]. Patterns on gates were stenciled on the steps of an adjacent staircase. These decorative, painting-like patterns re-directed audience

attention to the hidden decorations, overlooked "paintings" along the sides of the streets. Besides re-exposure of specific spatial qualities at individual spots, there were also reflections on the general spatial experience in the district. The general hilly geography of Sheung Wan was highlighted in *Searching for Level Ground* [Image 38]. Marbles were placed on level grounds along the slopes. Appearance of these marbles seemed casual, as if left from a children's game. Yet as the marbles settled only on level spots, they immediately posed a sharp contrast to the typical hilly relief of the place. Another project looked into geography on the side of landuse: called *A dictionary about foul languages* [Image 39], the work reviewed foul language graffiti. Two dictionaries, one in traditional book form and the other digital, were placed next to foul characters people had formerly written on a wall. Both dictionaries showed the entry for the character. As the two dictionaries were framed like paintings, the work showcased local vulgarity as objects for examination.

Along with the above attempts in drawing attention back to existing, habitual albeit likely overlooked, spatial experiences, another major tendency among the works was the making of extraordinary space. For example, in *Games and chess mark out on the street* [Image 40], a maze was made with colour tapes stuck on the landing of a staircase. The original concrete ground was transformed into a playground, lively tried out by children in the district. A number of other works created surreal pictures.

Hanging green color clothing on the tree [Image 41] recalled people's habit of drying

clothes as it camouflaged a green garment on a tree. Paradoxically, the garment was

both a hidden mystery and a surprise to be discovered – an uncanny picture

reminiscent of the works of Rene Magritte. Comparably surreal, *Spider* [Image 42]

formed spider-like structures with drainage pipes along a narrow street. To a passer-by

suddenly catching the sight of this metamorphosis of the pipes, the vision would be

almost dream-like. Further to these visually surreal pictures, some works went for

more serious rethinking on urban experiences as they fashioned extraordinary appeals.

Installing many bird nests on the street [Image 43] set up colour feathers on

lamp-posts.[187] The unusual, though plausible, appearance of bird nests on the metallic

poles, instead of trees, made a poetic spectacle for conditions in the city: if birds want

to settle in a place, where would there be? Addressing a similar theme of home,

Installing mailbox on the tree [Image 44] explored family relationships in the city.

Chinese characters like "sister", "brother", "aunt" or a number of other relatives were

written on mailboxes hung on a big tree. Coming upon it, the passer-by suddenly

encountered a scene of close relations, particularly reinforced by the implications of a

tree (a family tree, branching out). The scene also likely reminded its audience of the

practice of hanging wish-making packets on trees in the New Territories, where

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[187] While the above examples in *City Space* were students' projects, this work was by professional artist Kam Chi-keung. The bird theme is frequent in the work of Kam. It appears again in a further work discussed in a later part of the discussion, see Kam's *Protector* [Image 49] in *Art Windows*.

family lineage was usually more eminent than it was in the city. Mailboxes were also an ambivalent medium for communication: letters could be very intimate, but mail implies distance.

On top of the above approaches towards city space, a feature present almost in every work was interactivity. A number of works were practically designed to engage its audience. *Installing some fake garbage bins on the street* [Image 45] tried to test whether people would really throw rubbish into fake cardboard garbage bins placed beside a real one. It turned out, in five minutes after its set up, the work did get into the city's operation – a rag-picking old lady soon packed up all the cardboards for resale. The work thus ended up testing another aspect of waste disposal. *Let It Cry* [Image 46] experimented with people's sympathy. A box was placed by the side of a street. It was covered with a piece of paper. A pitiful pledge was written on it in child-like handwriting: a kitten was inside the box, the disposer was sorry that he (or she) could not keep it, it would be a very kind deed if some sympathetic passer-by could adopt it. Whenever people walked past the box, a meow sound would come out from it – not at all made by any kitten but an amplifier connected to an infra-red sensor. The work reminded one of similar set-up in television programmes testing (and usually making fun of) people's impromptu reactions. Yet after all one does come across such situations on the road – the work thus posed as a test for people's

feelings towards the abandoned, beggars and the like left at the margin of our streets.

Indeed, interactivity was a major part for all the works, no matter whether it was an intentional strategy or not. As the works entered the public space – without a fence barring them as untouchable works of art – they automatically got into the mechanisms of everyday life. Their interaction was exceedingly interesting. For example, the fake signs in *Pedestrian Traffic Signs* were so real-looking that caretakers of the park only realized and tore them off after a week. In comparison, the fake rubbish bins, which commanded a bit of market value, were removed a lot sooner than expected. The dictionaries about foul languages were also taken away soon after their appearance, probably because they disturbed near-by residents or some school children found them practically useful. Interaction with social operations was not only limited to removal. While the bird nests hung on lamp-posts were physically too high for people's interference, it got into the street policing system. The artist was closely observed by a policeman when he attempted to install the work, looking exceptionally suspicious with a long ladder. The policeman was gazing so intensely that the artist had to confess that he was making art but attempting burglary. The affectionate mailboxes on the tree also experienced an interesting anecdote. An anonymous passer-by was so attracted by them that he took a picture and sent it to the *Next Magazine*, endorsing it as a sight in the town.

Although works in the project, many of them students' assignments, were all temporal, very ad hoc and not especially aesthetically fine, it was a very reflective public art experiment. Public art in the project departed from conventional formats. Not only were the works site-bound installations rather than sculptures made in a studio, the whole concept of public art was varied as well. Art objects in the project were displayed without any indications of their status as "art". With no frame, no pedestal, no title plates, they permeated into the environment. Rather than posing as aesthetic objects, the works were more likely conceptual strategies facilitating the makers and audience's re-observation and rediscovery of the space. The emphasis was on the experience rather than on any objects as an end. Public art was not understood as artworks in public locations, but the dialogic relationship between the works and their public audience. Works in the project made sense as they prompted people's awareness and relationship with their surrounding environment, and this utilized the public location into a genuine space of interaction. In addition to this open-ended strategy, the project also illustrated a different kind of site-specificity as compared to the formerly discussed projects. While works in the above projects were mostly affirmative of the place, works in *City Space* provided alternative readings and their objective was exactly to challenge routine everyday space and make its point through disrupting habitual spatial patterns.

City Space has further implications on the relationship between public art and local public space. The works' installation was done with a notion of "illegality". The project had an almost conspiratorial feeling: it was titled "mysterious art," and the curator repeatedly acknowledged that the works were "illegal".[188] This pinpoints the awkward position of art within a society where space was regulated and art, if it had to legitimately appear, needed permission from the space owners. Cross-referencing to the aforementioned problem of patronized public space, this intrusive project raises a further question for the space for local public art: while art does not own its own space and the so-called "public" space was not really public, how could public art find its place? *City Space* responded to this problem with its "illegal" approach. Public art in the project, lacking a ready room in the everyday environment, annexed potential space and contested existing inertia through critical treatments. Yet practically, critical art, if it disrupts its environment, could sometimes be problematic. In the global discourse of public art, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* has been a classical case of how disruptive public art, even if it was a commissioned work and not "illegal", could get into all sorts of pragmatic troubles, and eventually get removed from its public location. Locally, the case of Pun Sing-lui illustrated the potential problems of making art at a distance too far away from society's regulations, particularly in Hong Kong where society was not too accustomed to such appearances. The disruption in *City*

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[188] Interview with Kacey Wong by the author on 28 May 2002 at Queen's Café, Causeway Bay.

Space was modest and acceptable. Yet its possible problems prompt a question: if the quest of public art is to establish relationships, is it possible that a critical public art could find its place in society in a less disconcerting manner, so that it could address its issues in a more socially acceptable way?

Art Windows

An example which tried to be critical, but which did not upset public space was *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung. Sited at the commercially owned space of shop windows, the project, rather than outwardly violating everyday space, tried to explore art's room in it.[189] On its promotional handbills, the project was described as "art in public spaces: an exciting series of contemporary art in windows close to you." Shop windows, privately owned yet publicly accessible, were chosen as a site for public art. Works by twenty four artists were installed, on co-operative terms with the retail shops and under the sponsorship from a few donations for the project[190], in shop

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[189] The use of shop windows and similar sites of public display in the urban environment is precedented by works by overseas artists, most notably Barbara Kruger's the uses of posters, billboards and neon signs. The tendency in employing such room, eminent in the urban consumer culture, for public art is discussed by many, see for example Virginia Maksymowicz, "Through the Back Door: Alternative Approaches to Public Art," in Mitchell, ed., op. cit., p. 153.

[190] "Art Windows" was organized by Sabrina Fung Fine Arts, principally sponsored by Annie Wong Art Foundation together with the co-operating retail groups and a few other private corporations. The sponsorship provided the participating artists, who joined on a voluntary basis, with basic material fees. Further support, including set-up and management of the works during display, was provided by retail shops which, as commented by the curator in an interview by the author on 26 February 2003 in the office of Sabrina Fung Fine Arts, had been greatly helpful in the project.

windows over the territory in three phases from 8 August to 30 October 2001. These works illustrated how the artists seized shop windows as possible sites for developing different strategies to reach their public audience.

The concept of *Art Windows* was to promote contemporary art to the public in an effective way. The curator, Sabrina Fung, talked of the situation in Hong Kong:

People in Hong Kong are not familiar with contemporary art. But it is not that we do not have contemporary art. There are many venues showing contemporary art, but they are mostly visited only by a limited circle. So how could art reach a larger audience? Another problem is that people do visit shows of traditional objects like the terracotta warriors, but they do not go to see contemporary art as often. This is because they are not familiar with it. So we decided to present to them contemporary art in their familiar settings, and let the artists explain a bit to them so they could see it is not that difficult and unreachable.[191]

Contemporary art as pinpointed by Fung, differing from the more general notion of "art" in the above projects, was to a large extent contemporary high art. Thus the project involved a fundamental difference from the all the above cases: instead of

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[191] Interview with Sabrina Fung by the author on 26 February 2003 in the office of Sabrina Fung Fine Arts.

trying to produce an art that caters to the public audience, it was more likely an attempt to educate the public of high modern art. This attempt, as suggested by Fung in the above statement, was realized through making art more accessible – both in terms of physical location and presentation methods. Shop windows, which served as publicly-accessible exhibition sites, were chosen by the curator because of several pragmatic factors (comparative ease in establishing co-operation with the space owners, possible back-up, protection of artworks, etc.) and their special significance in the local context. Going shopping is a favourite leisure activity among local citizens, and as the curator suggested it is indeed "part of life."[192] Shop windows were not only favourable sites in terms of physical accessibility, they also nurtured an intimacy with the local way of life. At such locations, the works furthered the quest of the project as they tried out different strategies to attract the public.

Many works were keen in fostering relationships with their public audience. A major strategy, like that in the earlierly discussed projects, was to address the audience with site-specificity. Some artists construed their sites as the whole districts. For example, in *Tuen Mun is an Offspin* [Image 47], Corrin Chan dealt with the past and present of the New Town. The place, whose name literally means a military fort, was historically a fortified garrison. Presently, the place has changed into a New

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[192] Ibid.

Town with a high percentage of family break-ups, delinquency and social problems. Bringing together these two aspects of the place, Chan constructed a fort-like structure which he filled with hallucinatory fluorescent lights and drug injection needles – a collage of the place's past and present and juxtaposition of fortification and offences. In *Art is Frog, Frog is Life* [Image 48], Kwok Mang-ho appropriated his signature assemblage of frog images and calligraphy/graffiti to show his concern for students in Shatin. When he was working in the site, students from the neighbourhood were in the midst of various examinations. This examination theme, though not directly represented, got a place in the work through writings like "Certificate Examination candidate rushed to Police recruitment centre" and the work stood for a certain dialogue between the artist and students in the district.

Besides such district-specificity, some other artists regarded site-specificity as the interface between the location of the shop and the public in the street. With this kind of site specificity, shop windows, simultaneously privately owned and publicly accessible, became as an ambivalent threshold for negotiations between the private and the public. While exhibition space at the shop windows was essentially owned and courteously lent by the stores, works in the project, though having no obligation to promote the stores, were at least not expected to be anything against them. The quest for the artists was thus a critical treatment of the site without outwardly

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disrupting it. This had been achieved by a number of works which started off from certain attributes of their privately owned sites to matters of public concern. In *Protector* [Image 49], sited at Kitterick boutique, Kam Chi-keung created a T-shirt-like structure with bird-cages, a material which he had used for many previous works. His theme was protection, extending from clothes from his site, bird-cages to the symbolic idea of city dwellers' self-protection through dress, shelter and a defensive mentality. Protection in the work was obviously not comfortable and the "shirt" was monstrously over-sized and too hard. With its sharp edges and form, this shirt was also a wall. The hinted idea of barrier was not only directed against the outside. As an embodiment of entrapment, the cages seemed to suggest such expulsion was also trapping one's own self. Thus through the mediation of the form, the work was site-specific both to its physical location as well as the general urban situation, and its content was relevant yet critical to both.

In a comparable way, Freeman Lau addressed the urban themes of consumption, fashion and his site at Episode boutique in *Dream of Desire* [Image 50]. An abstract image was created with fabric, fiber optics and steel: in the middle of a dark mass, a sensual pink body of wrinkled fabric was lifted up by two pieces of illuminated steel, on top of the pink fabric was a bluish, moon-like light circle whose reflection exaggerated the whole chiaroscuro and accelerated the composition's sensuality and

dreaminess. This dream image was associated to urban dwellers' desire for fashion: "human enjoy fashion just like enjoying an illusion and the beauty of a dream."[193] A similar theme was approached by Michael Chan with a more eminent visual language in *Arrow of Desire* [Image 51] at Seibu department store. At his site of a penthouse level window, Chan shaped an arrow with an alignment of multicolour fluorescent tubes. The design, reminiscent of minimalist neon light sculptures by Flavin, had special connotations in the local context. It was an understood sign for prostitution, and one could easily find identical objects in brothel areas, identical in shape and also, a witty use of the penthouse location by the artist, at similar heights off the ground [Image 52]. Recontextualized at the shop window with the name of art, the familiar sign became an object bringing together desire, capitalist consumption (buying and selling in shopping and prostitution) and spectacle. Formal qualities of the sign regained meanings: the multicolour tubes were banal, nonetheless alluring, electrifying and so much a part of the city's scene. As Debord theorizes spectacle as the visual manifestation of capitalism, the image visualizes desire for materialistic pleasure and capitalist consumption. The arrow, pointing to no specific locations, could be broadly indexical to the city as an epitome of high capitalism: a shoppers' paradise internationally renowned for its lights at night.

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[193] Freeman Lau, Artist's statement on *Dream of Desire*, in *Art Windows*, .Postcard collection (Hong Kong, 2001).

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Another aspect of urban life was represented by Chu Hing-wah in *Night (2)* [Image 53] at Body Shop in Pacific Place. Instead of pointing to any specific component of modern experience, Chu's subject was more generic. The work showed an alignment of multicolour, cut-out plexiglass figures, placed in front of a painted canvas. The canvas was checkered in blue and grey and illuminated by vertical fluorescent tubes at the back. As all these visual components overlapped, the image assimilated a picture of urban dwellers walking in town (the regular chequer patterns in the background looked like windows on high-rises, the fluorescent lighting was reminiscent of local night scenes) at night. A general moody feel was prompted by the prominent use of cool colours (blue and grey) at the background, and a sense of alienation dwelt in the image as the cut-out figures were all isolated, in different colours and physically separated from one another, and anonymous as silhouetted shades. Apart from its sentimental representation of urban experiences, the work is also worth mentioning in stylistic terms. Titled *Night (2)*, the work was an extension from a painting in ink and colour called *Night (1)* [Image 54], done in the same year. Visually similar to the installation work, the painting shows six vertical brush marks, abstract yet assimilating human figures with dotted tops (like heads), elongated centres (bodies) and feet-looking ends. The figures are also put in front of a blue and grey chequered background. Strips of white also overlay the background, but instead

of illuminating verticals they appear as horizontal white lines painted between the background and the figures. While painting was the habitual working media of Chu, his transformation of his painting into an installation version suggested how he had responded to the particular site. From a painting to an object in a shop window, the work was an obvious experiment on space. The flat overlapping of different layers of paints became a recession of different materials in three-dimension space. Difference of the receding spatial plains was notably marked by the distinctive materials of the reflective plexiglass and matt canvas. However, these spaces were simultaneously connected together as they are both translucent, particularly when lit up by the fluorescent tubes, changed from the painted lines in the two-dimensional version. This element of whiteness remained as a connective in both works, yet in very different forms. While the white lines in the painting mediate the top layer of paints and the background as they was painted in between, the fluorescent light in the installation united the whole work as it lit up and permeated its overlapping layers. These conscious spatial treatments showed that the artist, originally a painter, had been very susceptible to the fact that he was no longer working on a flat canvas but a shop window existing in everyday space. Besides responding generally to three-dimensionality, Chu's changes also seized advantages of the mixed-media form. The use of materials made the image more pronounced: light highlighted the notion

of night, and the representation of human figures with plexiglass reinforced the notion of impersonality. The example of Chu's *Night (2)* illustrates an alternative mode of site-specificity: instead of the content-wise one adopted in the above cases, its site-specificity was a special stylistic treatment developed from sensitivity towards the nature of the site.

The stylistic site-specificity tried out in *Night (2)* was also developed in a number of other works. Yet further to Chu's experimentation on space and materials, these works dealt with the particular site of shop windows. Two most illustrative examples of this site-specific strategy were Kacey Wong's *When Exactly is the Moment Dreams Become Reality?* [Image 55 & 56] and Alan Chan's *A Bowl of Rice Fits People of All Kinds* [Image 57]. Consciously dealing with the shop window sites, the two works demonstrated special appeals for a pedestrian audience. Unlike visitors to galleries or museums who make a deliberate trip to see art, pedestrians pass by and encounter art in the street mostly unexpectedly. Understandably, not every passer-by would stop to contemplate as gallery visitors do. Thus art in the street, for effective communication with its passing-by audience, would have to speak in a very different language as opposed to that of art displayed in conventional exhibition venues. The preference for large, direct, holistic and attractive visual images, instead of details, could be seen in many of the above works. Such styles were conceivably favourable

for catching the eye and communicating with an audience whom were not prepared to examine art, just passing in the street or seeing the works across the road. The situation was almost like creating an advertisement, which was appropriate in the case as the shop window sites were functionally so. That fact that shop windows are more commonly understood as a site for promoting commercial products rather than a site for art is a critical factor behind the whole "Art Windows" project. While many of the works communicated through attention grabbing images, as practiced in product promotion or graphic design,[194] as an art project, the question was thus how these images, contained also in shop windows, were different from their commercial counterparts. In the works of Wong and Chan, it could be seen how such attention catching strategies were matched with additional details, which enhanced the attraction with further meanings.

Kacey Wong's *When Exactly is the Moment Dreams Become Reality?*, located at the shop window of Joyce boutique, was a progression of yellow houses, growing in size (or the opposite, depending on the direction of the walk). The form was extremely simple, and passers-by could easily see the whole of it just with a casual glance. The artist spoke of his visual strategy: "it had to be a form that could be

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[194] A point to note here is that many of the participating artists were not from a Fine Arts background but other disciplines like design (Alan Chan, Freeman Lau, Jonathan Wong), advertising (Stanley Wong), architecture (Corrin Chan, Michael Chan, Kacey Wong). With these varied backgrounds, visual communication might have been done in different methodologies.

comprehended in thirty seconds."[195] As viewers experienced a change of size of the

house as they walked pass the window, their feet non-stop, the work dealt with a

contextual dream: many local people strived for an ideal home – and that was

frequently equated with an ideal house, growing larger and larger in size. When

viewers entered the shop, the work could be seen from another perspective. At the

parlor of boutique, the window display was opened on its side. From this other

viewing angle where the larger houses were in front of the smaller ones, viewers saw

a regression of space through a series of doorways. The doors, shrinking in size,

formed a view of diminishing rectangular frames and created an intriguing

perspective. Space was apparently zooming in but the zoomed in spot was physically

unreachable. Such a spatial relationship made the work's title a true question: when

exactly could dreams be reached?

Comparatively, Alan Chan's *A Bowl of Rice Fits People of All Kinds*, sited inside

Seibu department store, also adopted a similar strategy which caught attention,

allowed quick understanding and provided details. A bowl of rice, represented with

two intersecting white bowl-shape wooden panels, was obliquely placed on a round

mirror pedestal with scattered red chopsticks. The set-up was denotative of its titled

proverb, a bowl of rice matched, as symbolized by the chopsticks, people of all kinds.

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[195] Interview with Kacey Wong by the author on 28 May 2002 in Queen's Café, Causeway Bay.

The proverb/message was culturally site-specific as it illustrated the folklore saying (symbolic of the diversity of people's characters) and the subject of eating which is essential to the Chinese way of living: "to the Chinese people, 'eating' is an extremely important aspect of their life. Their respect for food similar [*sic*] to their esteem for the sacred Heaven."[196] Representing these household-known ideas in an easy to grasp image, the work was very much "viewer-friendly." When the viewer went for a closer look, different angles of the freestanding form and the mirror, which reflected different light and shade on the work, the surroundings and the viewer himself, provided additional details for further reading. The complexity in such viewing experiences – which involved arrests of attention, quick comprehension and the room for further, deeper contemplation – heightened the importance of reception and perception. Emphasis on the re/perceptive experience thus assured that the works, rather than isolated art objects in the streets, were keenly oriented towards interaction with its perceiving audience.

The strategic styles of the above works and the publicity tactic behind the whole *Art Windows* project have telling implications on the situation and possibility for public art in Hong Kong. While the lack of a ready audience and private space ownership are existential factors, public art has to seize its own place. Seizure can be

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[196] Alan Chan, Artist's statement on *A Bowl of Rice Fits People of All Kinds*, in *Art Windows*, Postcard collection (Hong Kong, 2001).

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intrusive, as the illegal installations in *City Space*; yet it can also be simultaneously pacifying and strategic as *Art Windows*'s transformation of privately owned space into potential space for public dialogues. Shop windows were utilized in the project as a threshold where privately owned space and public space met in an interface. Such thresholds provide appropriate sites for public art in a society of private land ownership. Sensitive employment of such spaces and creative invention of strategic presentation methods is thus a way for art to establish contacts with its audience.

Public Art away from Public Venues

Creative seizures of public space open up more possibilities of making public art. Limitations in physical public locations could sometimes be remedied by creative strategies, and effective strategies could expand public space to alternative forms. The concept that public space is not necessarily confined to physical settings was a guiding principle behind the two examples in the following sections. The projects, namely *Home Affairs* (curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999) and *Landscape* (curated by Young Hay, 1999) declined rigid adhesion to public location (which as argued before, did not guarantee public art) and tried to make public art at sites which were not commonly considered public. In formats similar to overseas practice of "new genre public art," the works attended to the local as they examined

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elements of the local public. "Home Affairs" approached the public through the domestic environment of homes. *Landscape* showcased readings of public space in institutional exhibition venues. Unlike all the above examples, neither project was done as installation of art in a public place. Rather, they absorbed the public as a subject of inquiry, and their status as public art was registered in their creative investigation. Public space, rather than construed in physical terms, was understood as a functional threshold and the public was not a location but the context for art. Such a methodology emphasizes the works' relevance to public issues and interactive processes. The following discussion will see how this alternative approach applied in the two projects, with emphasis on different aspects of local public culture.

Home Affairs

In 1999, *Home Affairs* was curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, who conceptualized the project and executed it with funding from the former Provisional Region Council under its "Cultural Ambassador Scheme."[197] The project approached the public through investigation in the private domain of the home.[198] In execution, sixteen households in the New Territories, the area managed by the Provisional Region Council, were recruited through invitation leaflets distributed at the Town Halls and private connections.[199] Each of the households was paired to an artist and collaborated in art set up in their individual homes and an ending show. This ending show was ideally an open house of each of the homes. However, this ideal was not met as most households were reserved about their privacy. At the end only four homes

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[197] The project started as an initiative by the two co-curators, who presented a proposal (with both an art and communal appeal) to the Provisional Region Council, agency for official leisure and cultural venues and activities in the New Territories. The Council, with a budget for sponsoring arts and cultural activities in the region and ran a 'Cultural Ambassador Scheme,' accepted the proposal and supported the project as it granted it sponsorship, provided an exhibition venue and helped in liaison with the local residents.

[198] 'Home' has been a keen interest of Siu and Chan. Under the umbrella of art agency 1a Space, to which the curators are affiliated, a number of home-related projects were subsequently pursued after *Home Affairs*. In 2002, in collaboration with a few other local art (of different media) agencies, namely Artist Commune, On & On Theatre Workshop and Zuni Icosahedron, a project called *Our Museum of Home* (conceived by Howard Chan and May Fung) was done as a series of workshops for teenagers, who then put up an exhibition presenting 'home' in different ways in the gallery of 1a Space. In the same year, *Chinese Lucky Estate* showcased Korean artist Yeondoo Jung's Hong Kong version of a photography project (taking pictures of people in their homes) he formerly did in Korea as *Evergreen Tower*. A further note for *Home Affairs* is the title's literal reference to the 'Home Affairs Bureau', the official body responsible for policies on arts, culture and sports; building management; community and youth development.

[199] The project was funded by the Provisional Regional Council so it was primarily promoted within the New Territories (area managed by the Council). Participating households were recruited through leaflets, titling *Would you allow a stranger in your house?*, distributed at the Provisional Region Council Town Halls in the territory. Response was rare, so the curators and participating artists had to approach their friends. At the end sixteen households, whose members were not directly related to the art community, were recruited, but the number was already a remarkable cut-down from the initial proposal of fifty.

were opened to two arranged tours and the conclusive show resulted as a displacement of the home-works at Sam Tung Uk Museum, a historical home presently transformed into an exhibition venue.[200]

The displacement of a public art project into the private setting of home was a critical action against local mainstream public art, which was seen by the curators as ineffective and improper in a number of ways. The first criticism was against the naïve equation of art (sculptures) in public places and public art. Siu King-chung outwardly criticized in an interview:

> The present format of making public art is to make a public sculpture. This
>
> is cheating, or a traditional model. It assumes that a public sculpture
>
> attracts people, and as it attracts people a public space comes into being.
>
> But all these are assumptions.[201]

The inadequacy of such a format was elaborated by Siu as a lack of genuine interaction:

> The mainstream model exhibits works and the public goes to have a look,

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[200] Specific dates of the project: 19 February to 19 March, recruitment of households; 20 March, first meeting of curators and participating artists; 27 March, first meeting of curators, participating artists and households; 28 March to 10 April, home visits by artists; April to June, execution and documentation of works; 6 June, open house for the press; 18 June to 12 July, exhibition at Sam Tung Uk Museum and weekend guided tours for public; 20 June and 27 June, seminars.

[201] Interview with Siu King-chung by the author on 12 August 2002 in the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

at most there are some workshops or education programmes as interface.

Public participation is indirect rather than direct.[202]

This lack of genuine participation, interaction, communication and understanding relates

to a fundamental barrier between art and the public:

The public always claims that art is too sophisticated and

incomprehensible, as if it is assumed that "the incomprehensible is art."

Incomprehensible objects placed in public places are "public artworks"

or "public sculptures." The public does not care about them.[203]

While Siu pointed out the pragmatic problems with existing public art practice,

another curator Howard Chan addressed the problem from the perspective of political

structures. The conventional conception of the relationship between artists and the

public as that between "hosts" and "guests" was seen as an imbalanced binary

opposition. On the contrary, *Home Affairs* was embarked on as a project to overthrow

this imbalanced relationship:

When we first conceptualized *Home Affairs*, we rejected that it is an

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[202] Ibid.

[203] Siu King-chung, "Jiashi yeshi gonggong yishu" 家事也是公共藝術 (Home Affairs is also public art), in *Home Affairs exhibition catalogue*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds. (Hong Kong, 1999). The quotation in Chinese: 公眾人士往往說藝術高深莫測，似乎一開始便認定了「看不懂的就是藝術」。擺放在公眾地方的一尊尊看不懂的東西就是「公共藝術品」或稱「公共雕塑」。公眾對之不太在乎，亦無所在乎。

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education and community service programme in a narrow-minded way.

There is a clear host/guest distinction with education and services – who

educates whom? Who serves whom? – if the distinction between artists

and public is solely determined by mainstream institutions, who is there to

determine who is the host and who is the guest? People always say, "Bring

art to the community." We could not reject the good intentions of being

people-oriented, but we are more concerned whether artists and the public

could understand one another on an equal ground, and then rationally

consolidate their experiences, and make mutual adjustments.[204]

With all the above thorough reflections on public art and the problems with

existing practice, Siu and Chan formulated *Home Affairs* as an alternate approach to

public art. Instead of "attracting' the public with works centred at certain spots, Siu

articulated the project as "a model that pushes outwards – our public is around us, so

we go to their place."[205] The public was construed with people, rather than with

geographical locations.[206] Home was selected as a specific unit for the public[207], and

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[204] Howard Chan 陳沛浩, "Qiechen buqiechen, du bushi wenti" 切橙，不切橙，都不是問題 (Serve an orange, doesn't serve one, both aren't problems), *Home Affairs exhibition catalogue*, op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 從一開始構思「家事計劃的時候，我們便否定這是狹義的教育和社會服務活動。「教育」與「服務」都有明顯的主客之別 – 誰教育誰？誰爲誰服務？– 如果「藝術家」和「公眾」的分野只是因循主流的藝術機制介定的話，誰去斷定主與客的身份？常說「將藝術帶入社群」，我們不能否定當中從人文角度出發的美意，但我們更關心的是藝術工作者和「公眾」在活動中是否能在平等的基礎上互相了解，之後理性地歸納經驗，互相調節。

[205] Interview with Siu King-chung by the author on 12 August 2002 in the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

[206] Siu King-chung, "Jiashi yeshi gonggong yi shu," op. cit. The author wrote in Chinese:公共藝術的主要介面應該是「公眾」而不單是公眾場所。

this choice brought the artists and the public into a new relationship:

> Home is the extreme opposite of public exhibition venues. In the most
> private space of home, the household participants are the host, artists are
> guests. We stress this partnership in the creative collaboration, and hope to
> deepen and personalize interaction. The public is no longer anonymous.[208]

Contextualizing the vague idea of the public with home, the project aimed to interrogate the public in a more specific and substantial manner. The curators set out their themes of investigation as the "internalized publicness"[209] in the domestic sphere. The public and the private were no longer conceived as oppositions, but rather mutually constructive and definitive.

Works set up in the homes were principally devised with the households' own characteristics. A number works highlighted the sense of homeliness through pinpointing the house-owners' favourite activity in their home settings. In *My Little Garden* [Image 58], the Choi Family's fondness of scenery from their roof stimulated Connie Lam's simulation of a roof garden with a square patch of fenced lawn, fake

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[207] Interview with Siu King-chung by the author 12 August 2002 in the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

[208] Howard Chan, "Qiechen buqiechen, du bushi wenti," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 選擇家居作爲「實驗場」，是因爲「家」是公共展覽場地相反的極端。在「家」這個最私人的空間內，家居是參與者是主，藝術家是客。我們強調這個創作組合的夥伴關係，希望深化及私人化 (personalize)兩者的互動，「公眾」不再是無名氏。

[209] Siu King-chung, "Jiashi yeshi gonggong yishu," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 內化公共性。

sunflowers, a chair and a table. The "audience" could sit in the set, share the favourite

view of the Chois and watch a video about the family through a video-player,

specially designed like a pair of sunglasses. The work was intimate to the family as

the artist sentimentally wrote for her statement: "A little wish. A short piece about

memories. A piece that is neither real nor fake."[210] A similar approach in pulling

together domestic habits and architectural feature was shared by Sara Wong and the

Tam family in *Star Watching in the Front Yard at Home* [Image 59]. The Tams'

enjoyment in star watching was visualized with fluorescent plastic stars on an

alignment of trees in the front yard of the house. The above two works are comparable

in a number of ways. Both involved simple set-up of ready-mades and their effects

were almost like home decoration. To the families, these simple set-ups created new

physical spaces which brought them to new, or perhaps highlighted versions of

existing experiences of home: the Chois could gather at their roof-garden; the Tams

could count "stars" in the front yard. Both experiences fashioned a certain dream

home vision with materials that were outwardly fake. This lack of authenticity could

be read with Sara Wong's statement which discussed her work in relation to the

context of Hong Kong: "Land in Hong Kong is very expensive and living space a

luxury. With the tiny living space and limited resources in changing this, Hong Kong

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[210] Connie Lam, Artist's statement on *My Little Garden*, "Artists' Statements," *Home Affairs*, Siu
King-chung, Howard Chan, eds. [unpublished] (Hong Kong, 1999).

people try to improve interior space and shut themselves out from the external environment…It would be nice if I am able to watch the stars in my own garden, to see the place that is almost too far to be seen."[211] In this way, the installation at the Tams' home conveyed double meanings. On one hand, it created a very pleasing scene in the household. On the other, its fakeness suggested a critical point that such a pleasant environment was hard to find in this context where, as Wong suggested, living space was generally small and confined.

While the above collaborations were tightly tied to architectural aspects of habitats, a few other works were more concerned with the inhabitants. The inhabitants in focus in Wu Wing Yee and the Yue household's *Dog Proof* [Image 60] were, as the titled suggests, the house-owner's dogs. When the artist first visited Yue's home, she was frightened by the two dogs and it seemed to her that the entire house was their territory. Thus she made three hundred odd cocoon-shaped ceramic sculptures and placed them all along the main passages in the house. Her suggestion for the act was "to cultivate an alternative consciousness"[212]: the dogs, who had frightened her before, were then scared in return when they hit the sounding ceramics as they ran along their daily routes. Other than the dog, the work also made a difference to the owner. Yue

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[211] Sara Wong, Artist's statement on *Star Watching in the Front Yard at Home*, "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

[212] Wu Wing–yee, Artist's statement on *Dog Proof,* "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

told visiting reporters that he would like to keep the sculptures in his place:

I also want to know what will happen if some impractical things are put in

the house for a longer time.[213]

Like *Dog Proof*, Craig Au-yeung and the Liu household's *Life is a File* [Image 61]

was also a work inspired by interaction between the artist and an habitant in the house,

only there was no dog this time and the interacting member was the owner herself.

The collaborators' joint statement tells the background of the work:

An artist who has been writing and drawing for more than 10 years. A

fresh journalism graduate. The both thought that there were [*sic*] too much

information around them, creating too many problems. They tried to digest

the information, though knowing this was impossible. The information

that failed to be digested accumulated and itself created new problems.

They tried their best to categorize these problems, only to find that life is a

collection of files – and a messy one.[214]

Their work turned out to be an installation with classical black office box files, neatly

aligned in different spots in the house. The extreme contrast of the black box files and

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[213] Zheng Wei 鄭維, "Shiliuwei yishujia Sandongwu juxing zhanlan jiashi gonggong hua" 十六位藝術家三棟屋舉行展覽　家事公眾化 (Sixteen artists hold exhibition at Sam Tung Uk, home affairs publicized), *Ming Pao*, June 10, 1999, C08. The quotation in Chinese:「我也想知道將一些不實際的東西，長期放在家裡會產生什麼變化。」余志強說。

[214] Craig Au-yeung and Dilys Liu, Artist's statement on *Life is a File*, "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

their white labels, and the monotonous repetition of identical rectangular shapes, created an impersonal, mechanical, office-like coolness which juxtaposed strongly the home setting. The anxiety of the collaborators' difficulty with information was visually expressed as an uncanny image and invoked an unsettling sense of unhomeliness, as if a pop gallery installation was displaced to the home. In reciprocal, Freeman Lau and the Tse household's *Two-head Family* [Image 62] attempted to create an alternate home in the end show at the museum. The displacement, like that in *Life is a File*, also owed to the family's experiences. While the issue for the above work was more general and abstract as it was about life, the issue in *Two-head Family* was more specifically and substantially related to living space. The artist told the story:

> My partners in *Home Affairs*, Mr Tse and Ms Yeung, are a newlywed couple who have just set up their new home. They described their home as "beautiful, just like a hotel room." Being dissatisfied about the tiny and messy living space in the past, the couple spent effort in decorating the new home. It provides a warm and cozy living environment and at the same time fulfills their ideal of home. But on the other hand, a certain part of their lives is sacrificed as a result.

> Ms. Yeung is an art teacher who has created a lot of art works. Mr. Tse a

collector of thousands of toys – from models to electronic game sets.

These were not accommodated in the new "home" due to the limited space

and style coherence.[215]

Displaced in the exhibition, the collaborators retrieved this sacrificed part through

assembling their unaccommodated collections in a simulated bedroom. The couple,

who had to shut these memorable objects out from their everyday home, put them up

in the exhibition space themselves. Thus besides being a finished installation, the

work was also a process. Through this process, the collaborators performatively

reflected upon the idea of home. Yeung Hiu-wai from the collaborating household

wrote of the experience:

Mr. Lau and we repeatedly reshaped our concept of this home. [He] led us

to see the deeper meanings behind home affairs, and we had a share in the

creative process.[216]

The home experiences in *Life is a File* and *Two-head Family* had a social

background in the scarce living space in Hong Kong. Likewise, Benny Ding and the

Leong family's collaboration in *Dream Alike?* [Image 63] also involved a social

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[215] Freeman Lau, Artist's statement on *Two-head Family*, "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

[216] Yeung Hiu-wai, statement on *Two-head Family*, in *Home Affairs exhibition catalogue*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 劉先生和我們不斷重整這個家的概念，帶領我們認識家事背後的深意，令我們在創作過程中有不少發揮。

agenda. The work was an examination of home and collective Hong Kong experience:

the common dream of becoming rich through the Mark Six lottery, the sole licensed

lottery in Hong Kong. The lottery had attracted weekly bets from millions of people.

People's obsession with it was seen by the artist as symptomatic of a mass mentality

bred out of spatial compression and materialism:

> Because of spatial and temporal compression, personal life habitually
>
> becomes quantitative and distorted…..In after-work hours, few could get
>
> out from man-made space, shopping arcades, movies, fast food, etc. This
>
> entrapment makes many people psychologically and spiritually
>
> imbalanced, and need some channels for refuge. As materialism directs
>
> Hong Kong society, "Mark Six" becomes the object of a "common
>
> ideal."[217]

From this critique against mass culture, Ding produced a work which documented the

Leong family's involvement with this "common ideal." The artist asserted: "the focus

is on the process and documentation, and not the final product," thus the family's

experiences were the object of the work. Three thousand dollars were spent on buying

Mark Six tickets and the family's emotional changes inflicted by the lottery –

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[217] Benny Leung, Artist's statement on *Dream Alike?* , "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit. The quotation in Chinese:由於空間的壓迫、時間的緊縮,個人的生活習慣自然地被量化和扭曲起來……工餘的活動有多少能離開人工的時空,逛商場、看電影、吃快餐等。這種困局令很多人的心理及精神淊於失衡與萎縮,極需要尋找逃避的渠道,而在香港物質價值主導的社會裡,「六合彩」就變成了一種「共有理想」的借身。

expectations, longings and fantasies – were filmed. At the end of the experience, the residue lottery tickets and video were recollected in an installation in the end show. This end product, assuredly not the focus of the work, was again a simulated home, veiled with white satin drapery to suggest the idea of dream. Video segments were projected onto the drapery. While the audience could physically go through the space and the projected image, the work questioned the substantiality of the dream. As the projections simultaneously hit upon the viewer, they vaguely addressed the issue of social interpellation over individual subjectivity. The home issue thus was extended to a more general social theme.

A further example which put together domestic experiences and the artist and household's collaborative participation was Evelyn Liang and the Tran family's *Family Quilt* [Image 64], which again had certain social undertones. The Tran family lived in the Vietnamese boat people camp. The camp was a temporary shelter for refugees and its facilities were unimaginably basic. When Liang first visited them, she sat on their bed which was also their sofa for guests. Though having limited means, the family was earnest in their hospitality and wanted to make their sofa/bed beautiful. So it was decided the collaboration would be a family quilt. The family and artist learned to sew together, and sewed onto the quilt images of the family's dreams. Reminiscent of similar quilts by feminist artists like Miriam Schapiro, the work

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echoed with their prototypes as an exercise of collective women's domestic activity. The subversion of a domestic quilt as opposed to high art also brought about reflections upon the project's central issue of home/art, and the undertone of the family's marginally dwelling at the boat camp.[218] It is hard to tell how far the quilt was a piece of fine art, but to the artist what was more important was that it signified her intimate concern for the home. She wrote in her statement : "Was it art? We didn't care. We just thought the quilt was beautiful."

The intimacy between artists and households in the above collaborations was not present in all projects. Rather than collaborations between the two parties on equal grounds, a number of works were more likely investigations of home from the artists' perspective. A frequently adopted strategy in these artists' investigations was documentation. For example, *chin ching man as at 310599* [Image 65] was Chan Mi-ji's documentation of the Chin family's daughter's personal belongings. A photograph was taken for each of the items, and by 31 May 1999, as suggested by the title with the accounting language of "as at," Chan ended up with a thousand odd pictures. Chan's rationale was "to document in detail every object that surrounds a

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[218] The undertone was suggested by the artist in her statement on the work: "I felt uneasy each time I visited Moon at her home. No matter how welcome her family is, I have to fill in application form in order to get permission to enter the camp. The policy of the Hong Kong Government becomes a barrier to us. Something to do with Hong Kong's 'Home Affairs'?" See Evelyn Liang, Artist's statement on *Family Quilt*, in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

person."[219] However, the project's irrelevance, or at least lack of direct relevance, to

the issue of home was outwardly pointed out by a later newspaper article: "the project

became more and more unrelated to home affairs."[220] It was not exactly fair to reject

the work as totally irrelevant to the issue of home, for the ideas of the personal and

home always overlap in an ambivalent threshold. However, in terms of execution, the

work was obviously artist-oriented. Similarly, Choi Yan-chi and the Chan household's

Home Affairs [Image 66] was also primarily directed by the artist. A plaster bust,

painted with fluorescent green paint, was placed in the home and the Chans' reactions

were collected through photographs and later interviews. Choi saw her project as an

investigation on the relation between art object and home. Although she described her

relationship with her "collaborators" as "equal" and "interactive"[221], the Chans' status

in the project was undeniably more akin to subjects in a laboratory rather than active

partners.

Works of this strand illustrated artists' treatment of home affairs as a subject of

their investigation. The households' participation was apparently an indispensable part

of the works, but compared to the formerly discussed examples, the uniqueness of the

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[219] Chan Mi-ji, Artist's statement on *chin ching man as at 310599*, "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

[220] Zheng Wei, "Shiliuwei yishujia Sandongwu juxing zhanlan jiashi gonggong hua," op. cit. The quotation in Chinese:此計劃愈變愈跟《家事》無關，卻啓發了陳米記將類似的計劃擴展，多找同齡的青少年拍私物相簿，相信當中物件的異同是很有趣的。

[221] Choi Yan-chi's statement on *Home Affairs*, "Artists Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit. The quotation in Chinese: 我與家居是對等互動的合作關係。

households was not given a genuine regard. The artists' concepts could be independent of the households' characteristics, and the homes could be any homes. Thus despite their physical relations to the households, these works were inevitably closer to art than to home. Home, instead of a subject, became a subject matter and an object from which the work departed. A further, extreme example of this strand of works was James Wong's *Homeless 1-2* [Image 67], which he claimed as partnered with "residents and homeless people in the New Territories".[222] Wong physically departed from any home setting and did his work as a performance: he put on the role of a homeless person and wandered around Kat Hing Wai, a historical walled village in Yuen Long, and Tai Po Market. His concept was the embodiment of "he state of homelessness, and the abandonment and hostility facing homeless people." There was a socio-political agenda as he vaguely related to the issues of refugees and emigration – which could also be cross-read to the marginal position of artists as "outsiders".[223] For his relationship with his "collaborators", Wong ambiguously suggested: "random, could be active or passive, could co-operate, or not."[224] To borrow a critique mentioned earlier: the project became more and more unrelated to home affairs.

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[222] James Wong's statement on *Homeless 1-2*, "Artists' Statements," in *Home Affairs*, Siu King-chung, Howard Chan, eds., op. cit.

[223] Ibid.

[224] James Wong, op. cit. The quotation in Chinese:隨遇、隨機，可主動接觸或間接接觸，既可合作，也可不合作。

The above examples show a variety of treatments of the subject matter of home in different collaborations. Collectively, as a piece of public art, the project positioned homes as a unit of the public. Tightening the relationship between public and art, as opposed to conventional displays of finished works, contents and creation of art were both rooted in the public site/home and public and art were to collaborate on equal grounds. Such intense engagement and interaction were conceptually very ideal for public art. However, in execution the rationale might not have been fully accomplished. A review by a visiting reporter reveals:

On the day of our home visit, we discovered most artists and house-owners were earlier acquaintances. So whether *Home Affairs* could follow its rationale, internalize or deepen public art, and whether artists and the public could really get into a dialogue, become questionable.[225]

The query is substantiated with two examples:

A house-owner (Choi) says: "If I didn't know her (artist Connie Lam), I would never let her in. How could I know what she would do!"[226]

[the Tam household on their collaboration with Sara Wong] "She is the

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[225] Cheng Su程素, "Yin yishu zhi ming pomen ruwu" 因藝術之名 破門入屋 (Breaking in in the name of art), *Sing Tao Daily*, 10 June 1999, D08. The quotation in Chinese: 家居探訪的當天，我們也發現，藝術工作者與屋主本身大多早已相識，故此《家事》是否能貫徹初衷，把公共藝術的概念內在化、深刻化，從中又有著藝術工作者與公眾的對話，這恐怕太成疑問了！

[226] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 其中一位蔡姓的屋主說：「如果我不是認識她（藝術工作者林淑儀），我才不會讓她進家來，怎知她亂搞甚麼！」

artist, let her decide!" It reflects a certain intimidated feeling in front of art.[227]

Limitations of the project were also acknowledged by curator Siu King-chung when he evaluated the project. He regretted that the number of participants was too small and interaction was not exactly serious and deep.[228] However, despite its shortcomings in execution, the project was an important trial of public art because of a few significant conceptual contributions. As opposed to the aforementioned object-oriented public art programmes or even more so than the interactive works in *City Space* or *Art Windows*, *Home Affairs* was process-oriented. Its objective was not to create physical works, but evoke experiences in which the public could genuinely get involved with art – not only through perception but right in the process of art-making. Its site-specificity was not just a reading of the site from the artists' points-of-view, but specific because the habitants of the site had a collaborative share. Public engagement of interactivity was asserted, and as it substantiated the public with the precise unit of home, the public was no longer construed as any vague generic idea but highly specified and substantial.

The specification of home raised compelling arguments in the project. Its

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[227] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese:「她是藝術家，她話事囉！」其實多多少少透露了在藝術面前弱勢的自覺。

[228] Interview with Siu King-chung by the author on 12 August 2002 in the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

emphasis on people's daily experiences rather than physical location offered an alternative proposal for defining public space. This alternative proposal was particularly suggestive in Hong Kong, where physical public space is problematic. Sited not at any common venue but a plurality of individual homes, the project also affirmed multiplicity in public space. As a result, the project marked a notable difference from public art models that installed artworks in public places. Among the list of previously discussed examples, *Home Affairs* makes a significant contrast to the municipal scheme in installing artworks in public estates. Both projects involved bringing art to the people's habitats, but their difference is obvious. While works in the municipal scheme patronized their exhibition space with an officially sanctioned narrative, the present project brought up a variety of individual narratives from a public base. This difference, further to indicating varied interpretations of the public, also registers a different attitude towards public art. Public art is no longer conceptualized as the seizure of public space for public statements or representation. Meaning is not predefined but generated through an interactive process. Art, instead of representing or creating a public image, ventures to interrogate the public as a subject of interest.

Landscape

The conception of public art as an interrogatory exercise was shared in *Landscape*, a comparable project initiated by Young Hay in 1999. In many ways, this project hardly fits into the category of "public art": it was not exactly done in physical public space; its process was also not exactly interactive with the majority of the public. However, it was still relevant to the public as the works contributed to the understanding of local public space.

As *Home Affairs* approached the public through investigating the public's domestic experiences, *Landscape* interrogated the public in spatial terms. The vision for public art as a process of survey was clearly articulated by Young:

> Some people think they make public art by putting artworks outside. But another conception of public art is to see it as something contextual. I'm more interested in this: my relationship with the context as an artist, or how I survey within this context.[229]

Driven by such a rationale, the project was subsequently joined by many other visual artists, media artists, designers, fashion designers, musicians, dancers and performance artists as it finished off as a part of the Fringe Club's *City Festival* in 2000. The collaboration by this great variety of disciplines was a multi-media (2D,

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[229] Interview with Young Hay by the author on 13 March 2003 at the City University of Hong Kong.

mixed-media, site-specific art, fashion, music, virtuality, forums and publications) re-construction of "landscape" in Hong Kong. In the project proposal, "landscape" was conceived as "not just a physical form. It is also a concept that people of different time-space all have to explore and define."[230] Public space in the territory was interrogated for its implications on public experience.

The project had intense references to the trajectory of art history: in western art, from the subordination of landscape to genre as in the paintings of Pieter Brugel, its becoming a self-contained subject in 17th Century Dutch art, its expressionistic propensity as in the case of Van Gogh, the enigma of Magritte's concealment in *Human Condition* to later conceptual appropriations by Mondrian, Kandisky, Christo, Walter de Maria and Richard Serra. In these prototypes, landscape, besides its physical form, is also a space where artists project different ideas and explore different possibilities. Landscape also has special significance in the Chinese culture.[231] It was the most prominent subject matter for ink paintings since the Song Dynasty and a central notion in Chinese cosmology, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, which the contemporary Chinese writer Tang Junyi has once generalized the Chinese cultural as "a culture of touring〔遊〕." From this legacy,

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[230] Young Hay, Project proposal for *Landscape* (information provided by Siu King-chung.)

[231] A point to note concerning the genre of 'landscape' in western and Chinese art is that, though bearing the same name, they are defined in different categorization system. While western landscapes are distinguished from History, portraiture, still-life and genre, categories in the Chinese system are different. Chinese landscapes are distinguished from portraiture and bird and flower.

Landscape was embarked on to explore and define landscape in the present time and space.[232] The concept of "scape" was developed as the approach to look into patterns of people's practical and cognitive experiences. The initiator talked of the rationale:

> The project was to re-map Hong Kong landscape. We know there is a certain map, but this map is not that useful. It may be useful politically, but when we interpret the "scape" we use our own ways. For examples, a medicine salesperson would have a very different landscape from that of yours, the "hair-style-scape" in Tsimshatsui would be very different from that in Tung Tau Estate, the "language-scape" in Tsimshatsui would also be very different from that in Fan-lang, though people in both areas speak Cantonese.[233]

The emphasis of the project was clear: instead of making artistic representations of visible landscape, art was more akin to a sociological tool disseminating how "scape" comes into being, and how people map different scapes according to their living conditions, and how these, in turn, reveal relationships between people and their physical environment in the public space.

The project was presented in January 2001 as a series of exhibitions,

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[232] Ibid.

[233] Interview with Young Hay by the author on 13 March 2003 in the City University of Hong Kong.

performances, tours and forums. The most outwardly public event in the project was a

mixed-media performance held along Tai Ping Shan Street on 20 January 2001.

Besides this show, the project related to the public space through its thematic

inquiries into different public "scapes" and this was the governing rationale behind

most visual works. A most visually potent work was Young Hay's *Property Market

Scape*.[234] Like a painting of building skylines, the image was actually a bar chart of

property prices along Nathan road. The information was collected from a property

agency and re-presented in a witty format. It was a manifold sign: the landscape

imagery was simultaneously indexical to the invisible scape of the capital/land.

Another work which dealt with a more people-oriented subject was Miranda Tsui's

Shoes Stories [Image 68]. The work, which later became a chosen entry in the 2002

Hong Kong Biennale, was a horizontal alignment of three rectangular video images, a

certain triptych format, of the city, the ground and peoples' shoes filmed at a low

height. The video conveyed a moody feel with its bluish-green monochrome and high

light and dark contrasts. There was an interactive dimension: as the audience walked

past the image, the projection would hit upon them and their shadow would cast upon

the image. As the shoes image and the walking audience embodied each other, the

work thematically dealt with the scape of walking in the city:

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[234] Regrettably, the author cannot obtain an image of the work before submission of this thesis.

We wear shoes everyday. What do you see behind shoes? Have you heard

the shoes' stories? Wearing the same shoes, walking pass the same places,

seeing the same faces, would you think about anything? The city grows

under your feet. Would the images of life prompt your feelings towards new

landscape in Hong Kong?[235]

Apart from works by established artists, like *City Space*, tertiary students also

participated in the project. Design students enrolled in a relevant course organized by

Siu King-chung at the Polytechnic University held a visual show, called *Cityscapes*

Reading Guide. As the title suggests, the project offered ways of reading the city

through research and re-presentation. Exhibited in the exhibition gallery of the Hong

Kong Cultural Centre, the project's relationship with public space was again defined

by its investigations. This approach was precisely illustrated by a work by Siu

King-chung himself, titled *The Beautiful Cityscapes I Collected* [Image 69]. The title

was literal of the work: it was a ready-made, with twelve colourful images of tourist

attractions on velvet scrolls sold by hawkers in Temple Street. By re-presenting these

representations of the city, Siu asked a number of questions:

…how are these souvenirs conceived and produced: How do the merchants

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[235] Miranda Tsui, Artist's statement on *Shoes Stories*, *Landscape* catalogue (Hong Kong: 2001): 我們每天都穿著鞋子，鞋子背後你看到些甚麼？你聽過鞋子的故事嗎？每天穿鞋子，走過相同的地斷，見到的面容，你可有所思？城市在你腳下成長，生活的細萃透過視覺影像可否牽動你對香港地貌新的感受？

deploy their production lines and marketing strategies? How do the workers

select a particular set of city's features and translate them into colourful

images? How does somebody come up with the idea and method to put

shiny powder on black velvet just to produce the necessary visual effects?

Where do they collect their inspirations from in order to create varieties of

items? What do they want to tell us (or the tourist) about the landscape of

Hong Kong?[236]

As he brought out these specific questions concerning the making of the city's

"tourist-scape," Siu conceptualized the whole show as an attempt to stimulate

audience's re-examination of the environment:

Why don't I invite you, rather, to go out and construct a real experience tour into

our city? Through this exhibition, I invite our audience to reconfigure their

framework towards cityscapes-reading, and to see how each of our Hong Kong

perspectives has been constituted.

Based on this rationale, the other projects by Siu's students likewise reconfigured

ready-mades from the city and visualized different scapes. These student projects

might not have been maturely executed, but there was a strong research element with

them and many interesting, lively readings of the city had fermented. For example,

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[236] Siu King-chung, Artist's statement on *The Beautiful Cityscapes I Collected* (Hong Kong, 2001).

Hong Kong Pace Scape [Image 70] dealt with people's paces in different districts. A set of tracks was marked on the floor, on which the average walking speed, time required over the marked distance, of a district, including business areas epitomized by Central and Tsimshatsui, functionally mixed Mongkok and suburban Shatin, was specified for each track. According to these speeds, visitors could walk on the tracks and physically experience the different paces in the districts. Varied temporal-spatial relations in public space were thus brought into the gallery, abstracted as they were displaced from the actual environment and became a thematic reflection.

The city as a site experienced by the body was more explicitly highlighted by *Chinese Clinic and Meridian-scape* [Image 71]. In the project, the city, specifically the area along Nathan Road, was read as a diagram of channels and collaterals in Chinese surgery.[237] The association was due to visual patterns in the concentrated advertisements of Chinese clinics along the road:

> Promotion of Chinese clinics is special in Hong Kong. Their red, black and white lightboxes are hung everywhere in the streets. The scene appears like a diagram of body's channels and collaterals.[238]

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[237] The channels and collaterals are the representation of the organs of the body. They are essential to Chinese medicine as they are responsible for conducting the flow of qi and blood through the body.

[238] Statement for *Chinese Clinic and Meridian-scape*, *Landscape* catalogue. The quotation in Chinese: 中醫的宣傳方式在香港別樹一幟；尤其是它的紅、黑、白招牌處處張揚，佈滿市內的大街小巷，看來有如人體穴位、經絡的圖貌。 Such diagrams are always drawn in red, black and white.

Picking up on the colour and meridian pattern, the project presented its findings on Chinese clinics in a mixed-media set-up. Images of the clinics' advertising lightboxes were put on a wall. From each of these different specialties, a red thread was tied to the corresponding body parts of two clinical dummies. Yet instead of suggesting any cure, the set-up was more like two dummies trapped in a web of tense red threads, with a background reasserting all kinds of discomforts and illnesses. The connection between the city and body experience was thus an uneasy one.

As illustrated by the above components, *Landscape*'s approach to public art was very akin to research. The works were not representations of existing ideas. Rather, they reexamined how our sense of the public environment is constructed and subsequently presented their findings in visual ways. Publicly relevant nonetheless not executed in public space, the project offers an insight for considering public art. Without adhering to any ideological definitions, public art can actually be understood in a very liberal way as an art that carries a particular public orientation. This definition may seem loose, but considering all local limitations as raised in the introduction, a more flexible view of public art provides the room for alternative experiments.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the examples reflect the wide range of approaches tried out by different agencies during the beginning stage of local public art in the late 1990s. From art installed in public places, temporary set-ups, and community projects to treatment of the public as a subject of interest, these examples reveal how public art has been conceptualized and experimented with by makers from different backgrounds. While most of the above approaches could be compared to overseas prototypes, these local projects adopted them with a special interest in the local. They were all keen in superficially or profoundly representing, fashioning, rediscovering and investigating features of the local culture and public space. This site-specific inclination towards the local contextualized the beginning of local public art. Growing attention in public art can be contextualized with paralleling interests and re-consideration of socio-cultural meanings in Hong Kong. It registered another kind of politics after the handover. Politics was no longer overtly political as with the cases of the *Pillar of Shame* or the *Forever Blooming Bauhinia*. It changed into another guise. Examples from this chapter, most notably in the cases of the Public Art Schemes, show attempts to model public images through representation of regional features. Other cases, aiming less for a unifying impact on the public, reflect a kind of spatial politics as they try to annex different forms of public space.

For the concept of public art, a full view of the conglomeration of varied

approaches shows that the subject itself is also very much a public discourse involving contending ideas. The discussion in this chapter has addressed and evaluated a number of notable views. In this conclusion, the position this thesis takes for the discourse is that, instead of buying into any particular view, it proposes to comprehend the subject in a more liberal way. Rather than advocating any definitive model, public art could be construed with art's orientation towards the public, as a site, a functional body, the people's experiences or a subject of interest. In such a light, public art is not necessarily a definitive category but a socially promising tendency in which art gears towards the public. This heightened relationship between public and art is relevant to trends in wider art history. As opposed to the isolation of high modernism, recent art has endeavoured to break away from seclusion and rekindle tighter relationships with society. This tendency is comparable to public art and simultaneously redefines the social position of art. In the next chapter, departing from labeled "public art," a further group of art examples which exemplified such a tendency will be studied to see how, in less programmatic ways, how local artists ventured to explore and redefine art's position in public space.

Chapter Three

The Public Orientation in General Art Practices

Introduction

As local public art increasingly geared itself towards public engagement, a similar maneuver was also practiced by many other art projects without such a label. Works of this strand, a close relative to public art, had their significance in broader art history as they represented gestures against the grain of the white cube centered modernism. Modernist art is frequently conceived as isolated objects contained within the neutral setting of exhibition institutions. Works considered in this chapter, however, tried to move away from the white cube and pushed art to more active interactions with the public environment. Not exactly titled or programmed as public art, the publicness of such works cast light on the fact that the orientation towards the public was not only tied to a discursive category called "public art," but a general vision for closer relationships between art and society. In this light, public art, instead of just being a defined category, could be fitted into this broader art historical trend.

A dominant tendency in modernism, most notably argued by prominent critics like Clive Bell, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, is its purism. Art is

approached in terms of forms. Aspirations for mere aesthetic feelings undermine

signification or references to contexts.[239] In this tendency, as commented by David

Clarke, modernist art is likely to be oblivious to the outside world and find shelter in

the neutral white cube of the museum.[240] Yet in recent decades, a motivation to break

away from such isolation is present among the works of many contemporary artists.

Interest in site-specificity, practices of land art, environment art, social events and

public art demonstrate the intention to re-establish relationships between art and

society.[241] This international tendency also involves a national dimension.

Contemporary Chinese artists like Zhan Wang, Song Dong, Wang Jin, Lin Yilin, etc.,

have made art, ranging from object-based works to performances, in various public

places in China since the 1990s.[242] Their public works, in addition to a general turn

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[239] See Clive Bell, "The Aesthetic Hypothesis," in *Art in Theory: 1900–1990*, Harrison & Wood, eds.,
op. cit., pp. 113-116; Clement Greenberg, "Modern Painting," in Paul Wood, eds., op. cit, pp. 754-760;
Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art in Theory: 1900–1990*, Harrison & Wood, eds., op. cit.,
pp. 822-34.

[240] Clarke, "Site-specificity in Recent Art," *Art and Place: Essays on Art from a Hong Kong
Perspective*, op. cit., p. 6.

[241] See ibid. and also Suzy Gablik, *The Enchantment of Art* (New York, Thames and Hudson, 1991)
which discusses recent art practices with heightened emphases on ecological and social factors.

[242] Examples of such works: Zhan Wang, *The Ruin Cleaning Project* (performance in Beijing, 1994),
False Ornamental Rock series (metallic stone sculpture installation in public places, since 1995), Song
Dong, *Breathing* (performance at Tiananmen Square, 1996), *Printing on Water* (performance in a river
near Lhasa, 1996); Wang Jin, *Red: Beijing – Kowloon* (performance on a section of rail link between
Beijing and Hong Kong, 1994), *Fighting the Flood: Red Flag Canal* (performance in Henan), *Ice. 96
Central China* (installation and performace in Zhengzhou, 1996); Lin Yilin, *Facing the Wall*
(performance and installation in Guangzhou, 1993), *Safety Maneuvered Through Lin He Street*
(performance in Guangzhou, 1995). Besides this selection, a great many other Chinese artists have
been involved with art in public places. For details of such projects, see for example Gao Minglu, ed.,
Inside Out: New Chinese Art (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Asian Art
Museum of San Francisco, 1999), Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the
Twentieth Century* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999), ed., *Chinese Art at the Crossroads:
Between Past and Future, Between East and West* (Hong Kong, New Media Art, 2001). Among the
above artists, Song Dong and Lin Yilin were invited by Oscar Ho for the *Outside the White Cube*

against isolation, are overlaid with a socio-cultural agenda that they have sought to make critical remarks on public space in China.

The growing orientation towards the public environment has significant implications on the relationship between art and society. It calls for serious rethinking for how indeed the two correlate. While the previous chapters take a more empirical angle, this chapter proposes to examine the art-public relationship from a more conceptual perspective. Theoretical insights could be borrowed from Guy Debord and Michel Foucault. Debord, whose theory of the Spectacle addresses Capital's annexation of the image, has proposed another theory for a very different use of art. The theory, associated to a movement called "Situational International," advocates a new form of art that aims at creating engaging situations rather than isolated objects.[243] In such a model, the image and society is no longer alienated as what happens with the Spectacle. Rather, people become active participants in situations and co-players in the works' cultural projects. The creation of situations, according to Debord, relies on the works' capabilities in deriving from and engaging in real life. Art's appearance in everyday space evokes an unusual cognitive threshold. Returning

exhibition which he curated in Hong Kong in 1996, from August to December. A total of six artists, two each from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, were invited to make art in local public space.

[243] Debord, "Writings from the Situational International," in Harrison & Wood, eds., op. cit., pp. 693-700. Similar avocations for the combination of art and life are also articulated by practicing artists, most notably Beuys who advocates the aforementioned concept of the "social architecture," see Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man* (New York: Four Wall Eight Windows, 1990); and Allan Kaprow, who founded "happenings" as a way to mix art and life, see Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, University of California, 1993).

to the question raised in chapter one: are works of this kind art or just something happening in the everyday and, in the context of this paper, the public enviornment? Physically, they are both, but in terms of cognition, how are they conceived? Perception of these works are subject to two paradigms, one of art and the other of everyday (public) life, and the juxtaposition of these two paradigms challenges each of them with alternative logics. This juxtaposition of different paradigms could be cross-referenced to Foucault's idea of the heterotopia.[244] In Foucault's theorization, heterotopias hold different forms of space within a same physical space. Operation and cognition of the spaces are subject to different systems, and the departure from conventions prompts reflection in new lights. Thus as art takes place in everyday (public) space, it evokes heterotopias and stimulates rethinking for both the paradigm of art and everyday public life, and at the same time, the relationship between them.

The relationship between art and the public is presumably positive with "public art." Although public art's approach to the public environment, as suggested in the previous chapter, can be either affirmative or critical, one of its fundamental assumptions is that it connects art and the public. However, the relationship between

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[244] Michel Foucault, "Of other spaces," *Diacritics*, 16/1, 1986, pp. 22-27; also collected as "Different Spaces" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* , James Faubion, ed. (London, Penguin, 1994), pp. 175-186.

the two paradigms of art and of everyday life is hardly that straightforward. By bringing in a number of works which were not really conceptualized as "public art," this chapter will show how art and everyday spaces are really "hetero", and as the two different spaces were brought together, how the cases featured varied relationships between the two paradigms. Works by five local artists are chosen to illustrate different approaches towards the public environment, as well as different art-public relationships. The discussion will start with the example of Kwok Mang-ho, who has been making art in local public space since the 1970s. Advocating an equation between art and life, Kwok's art has continually disrupted everyday space. Despite his advocacy, his example ironically reasserted the distance between the two paradigms. From Kwok, the discussion will move on to artists from later generations who ventured for tighter art-public/society correlation. The example of Kith Tsang outlines how the artist projected public narratives through his works in public places and in the process also revealed paradigmatic difference. The case of Young Hay suggests a reflective twist. Acknowledging the inevitable distance between the two paradigms, his work played with the idea of "void" and experimented with the creation of space amidst the filled-up urban environment. While works by the above artists exemplify how art and the everyday paradigm were "hetero" in the sense that they were different, two further cases of So Yan-kei and Kacey Wong show another kind of heterotopic

quality – that the two paradigms fused together. The works of these five artists, exercising different forms of social orientation, have redefined the role of art and artists in society at large. The projects' keen interests in social involvement suggest that, thinking in terms of public art or not, modern art could depart from the isolated margin and move to a more prominent position in people's lives. This move, a key idea of public art, shall justify why this subject is worth considering for art today.

Kwok Mang-ho: the Equation of Art and Life

Kwok Mang-ho could be considered the first local artist who actively pulled together art and everyday life. Long before any local conceptions of public art came into being, Kwok started making art, both in and out of conventional exhibition space, in the 1970s. His motivation has been quite straight-forward: art could be anything anywhere. This advocacy is historically comparable to Allan Kaprow's proposal for the mixing of life and art,[245] and an idea suggested by Joseph Beuys that every human being could be an artist working on an art of everyday life.[246] While Beuys's suggestion was related to a social idealism and Kaprow was philosophically

[245] See Kaprow, op. cit.

[246] See Beuys, "Not just a few are called, but everyone" (conversation with G.Jappe, *Studio Internation*¸vol. 184, no.950, London, December, 1972); "I am searching for a field character," op. cit., pp. 902-903.

sophisticated, Kwok was a lot more carefree. The rationale of his works was just that art was not limited by anything and creativity could flourish in all space. Over the past few decades, Kwok has persisted in making art, in forms of painting, photography, calligraphy, graffiti, sculpture, installation, multi-media performance and happenings, in different kinds of spaces. His practice asserted that art was the artist's action, and art-making in social space was equated with the artist's actions in society. This methodology provides a good starting point for this chapter: while such practices did break the boundary between art and everyday experience, they also present a problem that leads to further consideration for the mixing of art and life.

Since the earlier part of his career, Kwok has tried to blur the distinction between art and life. An early work recalled by the artist was a performance done on his own roof, so unlike art that his neighbor mistook it as an attempt to suicide.[247] Kwok was keen on mixing art with the mundane. His motives were sketchily shown in his curatorical practice in "Tuen Mun Art Exhibition," done on the campus of a secondary school over a weekend in 1978. In the exhibition, besides paintings, calligraphy, prints, installations, performances, happenings, etc., there was an "indoor art show" which

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[247] Interview with Kwok Mang-ho by the author on 3 July 2002 in the artist's studio. The artist recalled in Chinese: 大概七二年左右，我在我家天台做表演，鄰居看見了，就說：「哎呀！郭生在樓上跳樓啊！」我跟他們說：「我不是跳樓，我在做表演。」(At around 1972 I did a performance on the roof of my house. The neighbors saw me and said, "Oh! Mr. Kwok is about to jump off!" I told them, "I am not jumping off. I am having a performance.")

presented plants and cactuses as works of art.[248] The gesture, seemingly trivial, was

nonetheless a strong argument for what art could be, a botanical version of

Duchamp's *Fountain*. It defied both conventions and institutions. Like Duchamp's

urinal, the cactuses challenged art with the shockingly mundane.

In 1979, a more potent project was done at the Great Wall.[249] Namely *Great Wall*

Plastic Bag [Image 72], 200 plastic bags, a material frequently used by Kwok because

of its commonness in everyday life, were tied on a rope along a section of the Great

Wall. Similar set-ups could be found in Hong Kong in the New Territories, where

farmers made use of the fluttering plastic bags to scare away birds. The combination

of the mundane form and the cultural fetish led to an extreme juxtaposition. As the

Great Wall sublimely sat as a steadfast masonry along the ridges, the plastic bags

made a sharpest contrast to it with their cheap, light-weighted, transient forms, ever

changed by the wind. This visual contradiction was reinforced by an audio parallel.

The noise made by the fluttering plastic bags caused constant disturbance to the

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[248] The exhibition was included in Kwok Mang-ho, *Kwok – Art Life for 30 Years 1967 – 1997* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999), pp. 32-33.

[249] The Great Wall has been a site frequented by many contemporary Chinese artists, yet at a much later date after the late 1980s. A work that was particularly comparable to Kwok's was Sheng Qi's *Concept 21, Taiji* (1998). Sheng Qi's work, stylistically comparable to Kwok as it also used the form of tying, wrapped the artists and his collaborators to the Great Wall with bandages, a recurrent image of the New Wave movement regarding the new generation injured and tied by tradition. Thus though formally comparable, Sheng's work involved a more solemn agendum while Kwok's was more playful. A contextual reference for these latter works at the Great Wall was suggested by Wu Hung in *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* as a campaign started by Deng Xiaoping in 1984. The campaign, a restoration of the Great Wall under the slogan "Let us love our country and restore our Long Wall," had stimulated responses from the Chinese artists. For further information, see Wu, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, op. cit., p. 35. A research on art at the Great Wall is also undertaken by Gao Minglu.

solemn site. To evoke all these contradictions was obviously anti-monument. The

ideologically loaded site, however immutable it seemed, was ironically subverted by a

material as cheap, mundane and insignificant as plastic bags. In addition to being

anti-monument, the work was also anti-art. By tying the most unaesthetic plastic bags

on an unaesthetic rope, it challenged the concept of art as aesthetic objects. This

counter-proposal for art featured the artist's principal advocacy: art is the artist's

action in any form at any place. [250]

    Kwok's works notably challenged conventional notions of art through subversive

use of the mundane. At the same time, they registered attempts in mixing art and life.

The concept of "happening" was picked up by Kwok, who translated as it *kebinlin*

〔客賓臨〕, literally meaning "guests-coming." [251] With this concept, art was no

longer understood as resultant objects. It was conceived rather in terms of process, as

real life experiences, or returning to Debord's vocabulary – situations, set up by the

artist and participated in by the coming guests. The methodology sourced from Allan

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[250] Indeed, a work in similar format had been done a year earlier in 1978 during the 10th International Sculpture Conference in Toronto. In this earlier work, there was also a keen juxtaposition of the plastic bags installation, with all implications suggestiveness, and the Conference, suggestive of institution and the genre of sculpture. Comparable in their problematization of institutional cultural sites, the Great Wall project is chosen in this discussion because of it was in a certain way more remarkable because, while the former was essentially a work done within an exhibition context, the later was more likely an unregulated seizure of public space. Brief photographic and publication records of the two works are printed in Kwok, op. cit., pp. 21, 40-41.

[251] A remark on Kwok's translation of happening as *kebinlin* by Kith Tsang is included in Kwok, op. cit., p. 96. Tsang wrote in Chinese: 我卒之明白到亞郭把happening譯做「客賓臨」的意義。他的創作是要等待賓客駕臨一刻始發揮作用的，所以賓客在亞郭的創作裡佔有很重要的位置。(I finally why Kwok translated happening as *kebinlin*. His works function only when the guests come. So guests are crucial in his works.)

Kaprow, who advocated it as a way to mix art and life.[252] Introduced to the

international art scene since the 1960s, the genre was nonetheless a local novelty

when Kwok brought it to Hong Kong. Thus Kwok's attempts were again considered

transgressive. Press reviews all discussed them in quotation marks and made a point

about the eccentric use of unusual objects: "Plastic bags, live chickens. This is

happening. Just the author's expression, indifferent to others' perception" –

exemplified the common view.[253] Yet for Kwok, who was familiar with international

modern art, these locally exceptional moves were a most natural way to relate art to

life.

From 1980 to 1995, Kwok moved his base to New York (with occasional visits

back to Hong Kong). As a center of modern art, New York provided a very favorable

environment for his artistic development. Between 1984 and 1991, Kwok collaborated

with a number of other artists and formed a group called "Yomoma Arts."[254] The

group, subsidized by the New York City government, worked on community art

[252] See Kaprow, op. cit.

[253] Oriental Daily reporter, "Sujiaodai huoshengsheng de ji zhejiushi kebinlin yishu chuncui zuozhe biaoxian guanta nengfou jieshou" 塑膠袋活生生的雞 這就是客賓臨藝術 純粹作者表現 管他能否接受 (Plastic bags, live chickens. This is happening. Just the author's expression, indifferent to others' perception), *Oriental Daily*, 25 February, 1980, in Kwok, op. cit., p. 184. A few other news clips are also printed on the page. For example: "Jiaodai yu yishu Guo Menghao zhowan biaoyan 'jiaodai lin'" 膠袋與藝術 郭孟浩昨晚表演「膠袋臨」 (Plastic bags and art, Kwok Mang-ho performed 'Plastic Bagging' last night), *Tai Kung Pao*, 25 February, 1980; "Chuangxin yishu huodong Guo Menghao biaoyan jiaodailin" 創新藝術活動 郭孟浩表演膠袋臨 (Innovative art activity, Kwok Mang-ho performed plastic bagging), *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 25 February, 1980.

[254] Interview with Kwok by the author on 12 August 2002 in the artist's studio. See also Kwok, op. cit., p. 174.

projects through performances and installations in public venues during Sunday afternoons. The communal inclination with Yomoma Arts was subsequently picked up in Kwok's solo practice. In 1989, Kwok started his *Froggy Sunglasses* project with a similar communal dimension.[255]   In the project, Kwok, who had then been applying a signature frog motif in paintings, calligraphy and installations for over a decade, continued his frog duplicates by inviting people to put on a pair of specially designed "froggy sunglasses" for photographs. [Image 73] Involving not only the resultant pictures but also the process, the project was seen by the artist as a way to link up people from all over the world with his fetishized frog. The work's concept was stated as "Frog is the artist's theme and symbolizes a messenger of happiness and joy to the people. Wherever in the world he goes, Kwok askes [sic] people to wear his 'Froggy Glasses' and pose for one second for him – so called, 'one second performance.' He captures the happy expressions of people with froggy Glasses in his lens that moment of a second."[256] As of 2003, Kwok has been working on this project for fourteen years and has collected thousands of pictures of people whom he met in every place he visited. As they wore the same froggy sunglasses and participated in the playful project, Kwok absorbed them as elements in his equation of art and life.

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[255] See Kwok, op. cit., pp. 118 – 123. It is suggested that the project spanned over the ten years between 1989 and 1999. Yet the project was continued till now and Kwok was still asking his acquaintance for picture in froggy glasses.

[256] Ibid., p. 118.

The above projects illustrate Kwok's attempts in merging art and life. His pursuit has also been carried out in less programmatic ways. At times, Kwok "made art" by just acting in everyday space. Without a definite status as art, these actions provoked outright confrontation between creative acts and the everyday paradigm. Such confrontation could be exemplified with a performance done by Kwok in Hunghom in 2002, recalled by the artist on oral account.[257] The performance was conceptualized by the artist as a personal ritual and schematically an artist's intrusion into public space. It started with the artist, clad in a costume which he conceived as that of a sorcerer's, going into the hills for a personal ritual of frog release. After this initiating ceremony, the artist went into the city and reworked his sorcery into an urban version. He handed balls, frogs and bananas to passers-by on a flyover in Hunghom. The action became a test of people's reactions to such unusual happenings. As a result, the weird acts were, quite understandably, met with people's rejection and avoidance. By adopting such a socially alien guise, the action put art and life into confronting positions. Creative work deviated from social standards and the artist positioned himself at the social margin. Thus the meeting of art and life turned out to be quite its contrary: all the more it reasserted the distance between the two.

The meeting of art and life is even more problematic in some further actions

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[257] Interview with Kwok by the author on 12 August 2002 in the artist's studio.

done by Kwok. In an even less programmatic way, Kwok's daily impromptu actions were also seen by him as "art." Works of this kind, as orally recalled by the artist, include a piece done when he suddenly threw a handful of rainbow-color ribbons to school children when he was visiting the Heritage Museum.[258] The artist was also keen on making frog images out from the environment: whenever he sees any triangules, like the architectural structures on bridges, gates, or specifically the Bank of China Building and the Hong Kong Arts Centre, he would picture (usually through photography) and assimilate them as his typically triangle-eyed frog [Image 74 & 75].[259] It is as if an artist's perception of the environment were also legitimately art. These actions are again assertive of the artist's conception of art as simply anything done by the artist in any place. Yet the practice is problematic: while the artist insisted that such actions were art, how far were they comprehended so? Were they really, as the aforementioned press review suggests, just the artist's expression, oblivious to public perception? How far did they add to the meaning of their public sites? After all, though the artist mixed life in his art, did his art really mix with life?

Kwok's practice calls for critical reflection. His works evoked a very reflective

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[258] Suggested by Kwok in the interview by the author on 12 August 2002 in the artist's studio. The artist talked in Chinese: 那天我去文化博物館，剛巧有班小學生去參觀，於是我拋出一些彩虹繩帶，他們便爭著接……配合時空出一招，又得。 (I went to the heritage museum the other day. Some primary pupils were also paying a visit there. I threw out some rainbow-color ribbons and they gathered to get them……it was a gesture matching that particular time and space. And it works.)

[259] See Kwok, op. cit., p. 105. Such images were turned in to collages which Kwok practically titled "Frogscape," p. 103.

kind of heterotopia. The spaces of art and everyday life overlapped, but their correlation was more akin to confrontation than interaction. Works of art took place in everyday space, but their primary concern was still on art. The artist's disruptive, frequently spontaneous methodology showed that he had little intention to link his art to life in tenable ways. Not striving for any substantial connection, the artist's works, however "active" in society, still stayed at a distance. The mixing of art and life was *hetero*topic – it juxtaposed two different spaces and highlighted their difference.

These complexities were not given much thought by Kwok. As an artist of an earlier generation, Kwok's vision was simply a ubiquitous celebration of art. Such devotion has made him a highly respected individual in the local art community. However, artists of later generations, as exemplified by Tsang, Young, So and Wong in the following discussion, have strived to achieve something more than just having art everywhere. Their projects were more complicated and undertook to rethink specifically what art and artists could do in public space.

Kith Tsang: Artist's Narratives in the Public Space

Among contemporary local artists, Kith Tsang is an artist who frequents public space with an articulated awareness for how his works function in the public realm.

He is exposed to theories on the public and public art in overseas literature and has a precise idea of the methodology of his own works. He sees art-making in public space as the artist's participation in the public. Such participation, however, is not spontaneous and casual like that of Kwok's. The artist's participation is conceptualized with critical understanding of the public site and the works convey specific narratives. Tsang's methodology will be discussed in greater detail in the following discussion. Two works in public sites, an installation at Rennie's Mill before the place's redevelopment, namely *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four*, and a collaborative event concerning June Fourth as flower presentations to *The Flying Frenchman*, will be examined to see how they projected the artist's narratives into public space, and what implications these projections evoke on the relationship between artist and society.

Tsang has an articulated sense of the complex implications behind making art in the public space. His practice is influenced by concepts related to the public in western literature. Ideas by prominent public art critics like Patricia Philips and Suzanne Lacy's have been acknowledged affirmatively by him.[260] He is aware of the need for conceptualizing the "public" critically and agrees on Philips's argument for the concepts of the public:

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[260] Suggested by Tsang in an interview by the author on 15 August 2002 in Para/Site Artspace and in a number of writings, see below.

It is well said by American art critic Patricia Philips, "the 'public' is

plural, changeable and susceptible to changes, and full of

controversies. It sources from the private lives of all citizens." [261]

For the concept of public art, Tsang understands it not in physical but social terms.

Again he refers to Philips:

Public art is "public" because, in additional to its outdoor or public

location and mass appeal, it takes the concept of the "public" as its

source and target of analysis.[262]

Understanding public art with a social emphasis, Tsang is also aware of international

trends which approach public art as a form of context-bound social action:

Many artists and critics have reflected on the collective

environment. For example, Suzanne Lacy observes that the

concern of American public art has moved from the focus on the

spread of 'art' to respect for public interest.[263]

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[261] Kith Tsang's original quote is from a translated version of Philips by Mu Xin慕心, Dai Yuxian戴育賢, "Meiguo gonggong yishu pinglun" 美國公共藝術評論(Critique on American Public Art) (no bibliographic information provided). The quote in the above text, with its emphasis on Tsang's citation, is a translation from his Chinese quote in "Chucun jiyi" 儲存記憶 (Storing Memory), *Exhibition catalogue of Terrace Topography* (Hong Kong: Para/Site ArtSpace, 2000), pp. 12-13. Tsang cites the Chinese translation: 美國藝評人Patricia Philips說得好：「『公共』是多樣的，變化不定、善變易動，且充滿爭議；它源起於所有市民的生活。

[262] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 公共藝術之所以是「公共」的，並不僅因爲它的展示地點是在戶外或公共場所，而且幾乎是人人可以了解的作品，也是因爲它把「公共」的概念是爲分析的來源和對象。

[263] Tsang, "Hello! Rennie's Mill – Installation Art in the Public Space of Hong Kong" 哈囉！調景

From such ideas, Tsang sees his own practice of art in public space as a form of social

participation: "as a citizen wanting to join in an interested affair, through the means of

his own expertise."[264] With expertise of an artist, Tsang conceives his participation as

both committed and detached. On the committed side, he has a keen concern for the

works' contribution to different communities and hopes they could enrich their

sites.[265] On the detached side, the artist maintains an objective understanding of public

conditions. Philips' suggestion of the plurality of the public is picked up by him, and

he sees the public as different communities with which he has to work with specific

focuses and strategic considerations. Thus combining the two sides, Tsang's works in

the public space turned out to be specifically devised projects, through which he

contributed his opinions on issues related to different public sites.

Tsang's approach to art-making in public space could be clearly illustrated with

Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four. The work belongs to a series of installation projects

which Tsang did between 1995 and 1997 as *Hello! Hong Kong* in seven parts.[266] The

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嶺 – 香港公共空間的裝置藝術, in *Complement and Supplement – Appreciation of Hong Kong Installation Art* 拆東牆補西牆 – 香港裝置藝術賞析, William Cheung, ed. (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999), p. 5. Tsang paraphrases in Chinese: 不少公共藝術家和評論家已作出整體性環境的思考，如Suzanne Lacy就觀察到，美國的公共藝術所關注的課題已由集中在「藝術」的散播，轉移到尊重公眾的利益 (public interest) 上去。

[264] Interview with Tsang by the author on 15 August 2002 in Para/Site Artspace. Tsang talked in Chinese: 作爲一個普通市民，覺得這件事值得參與的，用專長的手法去參與。

[265] *Ibid.* The quotation in Chinese: 要很清楚作品對那個community有甚麼貢獻，如果可以enrich那個environment是最好的。

[266] See article on Tsang's *Hello! Hong Kong* series in Ho, Clarke, eds., *Someone else's story – our footnotes. Contemporary Art of Hong Kong (1990–1999)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2002), pp. 104-105.

series, primarily assemblage of ready-made objects, was conceptualized by the artist as a visual expression of the feelings towards local culture and history before the return of sovereignty.[267] In 1996, *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four* was done by the artist in a public site at Rennie's Mill [Image 76].[268] The site was full of special political and symbolic meanings for the pre-handover days. Until 1996, Rennie's Mill was a concentrated habitat of former members of the Guomindang government, deserted in Hong Kong when the majority of the party left China for Taiwan. This historical background had made the area, contained in the fareast end of the Kowloon peninsula, an apparent displacement of Taiwan. The Taiwanese national flag was omnipresent and residents lived in solidarity under Guomindang ideologies. Thus at the turn of 1997 when Communist China was going to reclaim Hong Kong's sovereignty, considering the political divergence between China and Taiwan and their major dispute over China's will to unify all Chinese territories, the area became a very problematic site. In the few years before the handover, a series of redevelopment was implemented by the government at the place. Its adjacent harbour was reclaimed and residents who used to live in the autonomous community of squatter huts were to be relocated to public estates. Extensive protests were launched by the residents but the

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[267] See the artist's own interpretation of the *Hello! Hong Kong* series in "Visual Art in the Context of Post-colonial Discourse"〈從後殖民論述思考視察藝術創作〉, in William Cheung, ed., op. cit., p.191. Tsang wrote in Chine: 源自香港主權回歸中國之前，我運作視覺藝術來表達香港本土文化和歷史的情懷。

[268] Tsang, "Hello! Rennie's Mill," in William Cheung, ed., op. cit., p. 3.

government was determined to reform the place. This effacement of the old Rennie's

Mill was seen by the artist as a political step taken before the handover:

> Before the sovereignty's return to China, the Hong Kong
>
> government must dissolve the solidarity in "Little Taiwan" so
>
> to prevent the odd situation caused by this Taiwan symbol. [269]

Transformation of Rennie's Mill, not only of its politics but its history and culture,

was a keen concern of the artist, who used to go there sketching and had a lot of

personal memories of the place. *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four* was thus executed as

the artist's tribute to the place in its last days.

The work was specifically sited at the deserted campus of a secondary school at

Rennie's Mill, notably run under Guomingdong doctrines, that had educated residents'

offspring accordingly for generations. Thirty old bunk beds were borrowed from the

school and placed in its playground, in a triangular pattern pointing to the sea-facing

school gate. Additional materials were put onto the bunk beds for a double imagery:

Bamboo scaffoldings topped by a blue light bulb, assimilating a sail, were fastened to

the headboard of each bed. At the foot of the sail, a black and white photograph of

turbulent waters was placed to complete the boat imagery. Two further materials,

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[269] Ibid., p. 8. The quotation in Chinese: 香港政府必定要在回歸中國大陸之前，瓦解「小台灣」的
團結力量，以免這個台灣符號引起政治窘境。

printed fabric and zinc sheets, were hung to the scaffoldings to create a domestic look

of squatter huts. As these two images crisscrossed, every bunk bed became a

metaphor of Rennie's Mill at the time. Homes were in exile as the boats seemed to

rush out through the gate. The voyage was ominous in the eyes of the artist:

> Disproportionate shapes, torn structures and scafforded sails
>
> could only form so-called ships that could not function. It
>
> implies that they will sink immediately when they get into the
>
> waters and will be buried undersea. At the same time, it
>
> symbolizes that residents had to take the risk before having
>
> enough preparation, and the urgency to leave before the
>
> "emergency exit" is blocked.[270]

The artist's statement suggests that the work, besides being a portrait of Rennie's Mill

at that time, was also "foretelling" a future that the forced redevelopment of the place

would cause problems to the habitants. As a counterpoint to this foreboding picture, a

huge illuminated structure was set up at the dormitory behind the playground [Image

77]. The structure was a steel rack covered with plastic sheet, lit up by light bulbs like

a giant lantern. The lantern was a reference to the traditional lantern craftsmanship.

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[270] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 不合比例的型態、船身破爛不堪的結構與及竹排造成的帆，只構成不能操作的所謂船，意味著下水即沉、長埋海底。同時，象徵了區內居民還未有充足準備便要以身犯險，在「逃生出口」閉塞前離開的逼切性。

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This reassertion of tradition was a direct contrast to the situation of redevelopment. By installing a large and bright structure at the back behind the torn "boats", the artist tried to argue that some firm values "would not be totally 'resettled' during the move."[271]

In representational language, elements of the work articulated quite clearly the artist's argument for the issue of the place's redevelopment. The narrative consisted of a further concept of desertion and recognition. The apparently abandoned materials (the no longer used bunk beds, functionless scaffoldings and trash-like zinc and fabrics) at the deserted site paralleled Rennie's Mill on the verge of its demolishment. In day time, the artist suggested that "the whole work was like other deserted objects in the district."[272] After nightfall, the neglected work regained recognition with its illumination. This varying perception experience positioned the work as an attempt to light up the neglected and highlight the significance of its argument.

Connotations of *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four* were rather overt, particularly with a later essay by the artist himself which explained the visual codes as discussed above. However, understanding of the work was notably varied at Rennie's Mill. The artist recorded in the same essay:

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[271] Ibid., p. 10. The quotation in Chinese: 植根土地的中國文化傳統，不會因爲搬家而一下子被「徙置」。

[272] Ibid. The quote in Chinese: 整件作品就如區內其他被棄置的遺物一樣。

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Audience's response to *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four* was unusually varied. "Incomprehensible", "don't understand" are frequent comments on modern art. This time, I also had to face residents' direct vulgar languages, damage and thefts….In the morning a woman dried clothes (one day she hung clothes on my wires)….at midnight there were youngsters climbing up and pushing down my work. [273]

To these varied responses, Tsang suggested that he accepted them delightfully. As he articulated his narrative through his art, he was also conscious of a fact that residents at Rennie's Mill were at a very different point of view from his. He acknowledged:

To a large extent, my work intruded into their living sphere…..If I were in their place as residents at Rennie's Mill, considering it was already the last stage of their struggles with the government, my creative work in their community was not sufficient in arousing their attention, not to mention resonance. [274]

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[273] Ibid., p. 11. The quotation in Chinese: 觀眾對《哈囉！香港──第四集》的反應異常多樣化，「看不懂」、「不明白」等評語是當代藝術工作者耳熟能詳的了。今次我要面對的還有區內街坊坦率直接的粗話、破壞和偷竊……早上有位太太晾曬衣物被單〔有一天她把衣服掛在我的綱線上〕……半夜裡還有年青人身體力行的攀爬和推倒我的作品。

[274] Ibid., p. 13. The quotation in Chinese: 很大程度上，是我的作品入侵了他們的生活領域……若果我易地而處，從調景嶺居民的角度出發，考慮到他們當時跟政府的抗爭已經進入最後階段的話，我在他的社區創作，根本不足以引起他們的關注，遑論共鳴。

In an interview, the artist reiterated:

> Very frequently I conceive my works' meanings to a place or an
>
> event from another perspective. But it could be very self-willed.
>
> It could be meaningless to the public.[275]

Discordance between the artist and the public's understanding of the meaning of the work provokes a series of questions. While the work represented a narrative of the artist's own, how did it interact with other concurrent narratives by different constituencies in the public sphere? In what ways did such individual action of the artist enhance the collective meaning of the public site?

The above questions could be considered with a further example of Tsang's participation in public space – his involvement in actions related to the commemoration of June Fourth. Since 1999, Tsang was involved in a flower presentation ritual to Cesar's *The Flying Frenchman* upon the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown [Image 78].[276] The event, as suggested by Tsang in a later essay, was presented by the members of an art criticism class organized by Para/Site

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[275] Interview with Tsang by the author on 15 August 2002 in Para/Site Artspace. The artist spoke in Chinese: 很多時候我在另一個perspective看我的作品怎樣對那個地方或當年發生的事加一層意義上去，但這是一廂情願的，對公眾來說可能是沒有意義的。

[276] The first flower presentation was done on 3 June 1999. In the following years the event were done on the exact day of June Fourth.

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Art Space.[277] The idea to make an art work relating to rumours about *The Flying Frenchman* has been thought of by many in the local art circle. For example, David Clarke suggested that he once talked about the idea with Oscar Ho. Para/Site's initiative in the flower presentation was first represented by Leung Po-shan, who was the event's spokesperson at its first year launch. Since 2002, Tsang has taken the role as the initiator (as Leung was in the United Kingdom for further studies) and sent out email invitations asking receivers to join the event. The invitations, asking the receivers to bring white flowers to the sculpture on June Fourth at 6 p.m., were signed with "Tsang Tak-ping, a Hong Kong citizen." The event was a deliberate public action. Before its 1999 debut, it was publicized in advance by the local press:

> At the approach of June Fourth, a group of artists think that the original
>
> inspiration of the sculpture *The Flying Frenchman*, placed at the Cultural
>
> Centre Piazza, was commemoration of June Fourth victims and its
>
> original name should be "Freedom Fighter." They suspected that during
>
> the installation of the sculpture, someone was afraid that the name was
>
> sensitive and changed it. In order to reveal to the public the "truth", they
>
> will present flowers to the sculpture tonight.[278]

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[277] Kith Tsang, "Wuge ruhe ling Faguoren aoxiang di fangfa" 五個如何令法國人翱翔的方法 (Five ways to make *The Flying Frenchman* fly), *P/S*, no.12, December 1998, p.10.

[278] *Ming Pao* reporters, "Aoxiang di Faguoren yingwei ziyou zhanzhi ? Shiju beiyi cuangai tongdiao yuanming"「翱翔的法國人」應爲「自由戰士」？市局被疑竄改銅雕原名 ("*The Flying Frenchman*"

As the press article suggests, the event was related to a rumour that the sculpture,

presented to the former Urban Council by Cartier Foundation in 1992, had been

renamed and thus had its meaning distorted because of political censorship. The

flower presentation on June Fourth, as explained by Leung Po-shan in the same article,

was thus performed as an action to commemorate the crackdown, expose the work's

hidden meaning and contest the government in public space.[279]

Like *Hello! Hong Kong—Part Four*, the flower presentation was again a

projection of a narrative in the public space. Disposed to the public sphere,

interpretation of the work again varied. In 2000 after the second annual practice of the

presentation, a response from a different angle was expressed by Lai Kin-keung in the

Hong Kong Economic Journal. In his essay, Lai questioned if the action had

appropriated the sculpture into another *Pillar of Shame*. To this query, in a different

attitude from the openness to the varied responses from residents at Rennie's Mill,

Tsang published a further article in *P/S*, publication of Para/Site Art Space, to clarify

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should be "Freedom Fighter"? Urban Council suspected for changing sculpture's original name), *Ming Pao,* 3 June, 1999, A4. The quotation in Chinese: 六四將至，一群藝術工作者認為，擺放在文化中心廣場現達七年的銅雕塑「翱翔的法國人」，作者的創作靈感是爲悼念八九年六四事件死難者，而其原名應是「自由戰士」，他們懷疑當年設置有關雕塑時，有人惟恐名字敏感已將其改名；爲向公眾反映有關「真相」，他們將會於今晚到銅像獻花。

[279] Ibid. The article cites Leung Po-shan: 行動的目的除了悼念六四事件外，還要讓公眾知道該雕塑背後的真正意義……她覺得今晚的行動是市民自發力量與政府在公共空間的角色。(Apart from aiming at commemorating June Fourth, the action also strives to let the public know the real meaning behind the sculpture….she thinks that the action tonight is a contestation between citizens' initiatives and the government in public space.)

the case.[280] Tsang reasserted that the action did not intend to replace the *Pillar* with the sculpture and the emphasis was rather on annexing a room in public space for expression.

This notion about the space for expression in the public is an important point for the previously raised questions. In the cases of both *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four* and *The Flying Frenchman*, Tsang's actions were related to such a space for expression as the works pronounced his critical narratives towards the public sites. As projections of public-related statements, the works are comparable to many examples discussed in the previous chapters, like the *Pillar of Shame*, Pun's incident, and even the *Bauhinia*, the *Monument* and the municipal commissions recorded in chapter two. Yet these works by Tsang did not communicate as the others did. While the *Bauhinia* and other official works were for a didactic cause and aimed at promoting their ideas to the public, the *Pillar* intermingled with ongoing debates on socio-political issues and Pun's incident generated affected response, Tsang's works were simply the artist's expression, not exactly pertaining to two-way communication. Thus the meanings of Tsang's works, as admitted by himself,[281] were indeed very much confined to the paradigm of art. Art did find room for expression in physical public space, but it did

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[280] Tsang, "Wuge ruhe ling Faguoren aoxiang di fangfa," op. cit.

[281] See pp. 195-196, footnotes 274 and 275.

not really communicate with the everyday world. The paradigm of art and that of everyday life were still distinct.

This situation, however, may not necessarily be a problem. The incongruence between art and life is after all a fact and marginality is not exactly an absolute disadvantage. At times, the marginal position of art could indeed be employed as an alternative way to approach life. Art's failure to communicate with the everyday paradigm can also be potentially provocative. The possibility in building public projects exactly on art's marginal position could be seen in the following discussion of Young Hay's *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)* which, bearing no intention to negate the distance between art and life, could still be considered as meaningful pieces in the public space.

Young Hay: Reasserted Distance between Art and Society

Over a period of five years from 1995 to 2000, a project was done by Young Hay as *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*. The project, which involved both the performance and black and white photographic documentation of the artist walking through the urban environment of Hong Kong (1995), New York (1998), Berlin (1998) and Beijing (2000) with a 4 times 5 feet mounted white canvas on his back, was

conceptualized as a reflection of the position of art and artists in public space. While the work took place in public space, it nonetheless had no intention in putting art and life together as one thing. The work rather registered the distance between the two, and it was very much based on such a distance that the work made its point about society and art's place in it.

Bonjour, Young Hay was Young's exploration of the relationship between society and himself as an artist. He expressed in a press article:

> When I started working on this project, I was a full-time
>
> painter. I was then doubting the relationship between art and
>
> society, so I decided to carry a blank canvas to the streets.[282]

The canvas, further to an index to his painting career, also bore an art historical association to Courbet as bracketed in the work's title. The specific reference of *Bonjour!Young Hay* was Courbet's *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*, also known as the *The Meeting*. Like Young's inquiry into the relationship between the artist and society, the painting is about a similar subject matter as it shows Courbet meeting his patron Alfred Bruyas in the countryside of Montpellier in 1854. To Young, this painting represents a very optimistic artist-society relationship:

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[282] Lao Baoxia 勞寶霞, *Yang Xi bai huabu zai Beijing*楊曦白畫布在北京 (Young Hay's white canvas in Beijing), *Ming Pao*, 4 May, 2000, C08. The quotation in Chinese: 我開始做這創作時，是個全職的畫家。那時我對藝術與社會的關係，感到十分懷疑，所以才決定把一塊空畫布搬到街上。

…the work shows Courbet carrying a paint box and a roll of canvas on his back. He portrays himself as a proud traveler-artist with his sleeves rolled up and sporting an outwardly thrusting beard.

The elegant Bruyas takes off his hat, and with outstretched arms, stands between the bowing manservant on his right, and a faithful dog on his left, to extend a reverent welcome to Courbet…

To Courbet and Bruyas, the meeting represented the union of genius and wealth: a utopian vision shared by some 19th century French intellectuals. (Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, *Courbet Reconsidered*, p.118) This kind of high hope and self-confidence it seems, was revealed by the bright palette of the picture, and Courbet's firm stand, at the time.[283]

Yet as Young assimilated Courbet as a traveler-artist with a canvas on his back, he was conscious of the difference in time and space. The optimistic picture of Courbet in the nineteenth century was not the picture of Young's contemporary circumstances:

Unlike the case of Courbet, the meeting between the people and

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[283] Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000), p. 22.

me did not generate any solutions. Our meeting only brought out

questions, numerous questions. For me, the first question was:

"What are we, we other painters?"

Mimicking, yet in a more dramatic way, the canvas-carrying traveling artist,

Bonjour! Young Hay was done by the artist as an attempt to deal with the above

question. The work could be approached from two angles. On one hand, it was a

process involving both the generic performance of an artist going through the city and

specific interactions he got into with the public along his trip. On the other, in each of

these trips, Young was accompanied by a different photographer who photographed

him in the journey.[284] The collections of photographs, besides being a documentation

of the process, are also art in their own right. The simultaneous presence of the two

forms has telling implications on the meaning of the project. While the process in

everyday space led to heterotopic situations as art intruded into real life, the

photographs, which essentially function as works of art, maintain that a large part of

the project's meanings are, like in the formerly discussed cases of Kwok and Tsang,

essentially captured in an art paradigm. The failure in communicating fully with the

everyday world was schematized as a situation faced by the artist, and the discordance

between the work of art and its everyday setting was presented in sharp contrasts

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[284] Photographs of the trips were taken by Kith Tsang (Hong Kong), Cheung Chi-wai (New York), Christian Rothmann and Nana Frenzel (Berlin), Wong Hung-fei (Beijing) and Fang Fang (Tiananmen).

which subsequently highlighted different features of the two.

Before analyzing the holistic effect achieved by the work, *Bonjour, Young Hay* should first be introduced as a generic performance. The theme of an artist's journey through the city was physically embodied by the artist's body. The canvas was carried on the artist's back, and it was the artist's movement, his labour in carrying the heavy canvas throughout long walks, that created the work. The result of making art with a canvas and the artist's body in such a manner was conceptualized as an unusual way of "painting": the movement of the canvas, over time and space, was conceptualized as a 4-dimensional scroll, a blank landscape painting which was "painted" as it went through the city on the back of the artist. Thus the transformation of Courbet's pictorial representation of the artist meeting society was simultaneously configured as a painting, a life painting which co-existed with actual everyday space. In such a painting, the artist worked on a few issues. A very first one was the position of the artist. Echoing with the previous quote, the position of the artist, unlike the affirmed standing of Courbet in *Bonjour! Monsieur Coubert*, was materially presented as problematic: the canvas was unpainted, an unknown. Appearance of this problematic canvas and a person traveling with such a thing on his back was obviously strange in the city setting, and as he made art in this peculiar way, the artist was like a marginal other whose appearance was seemingly outside the on-going hustle and rustle.

While the artist appeared as a stranger in the city, the principal motif of the white

canvas equally stood out. At the onset, the appearance of such an object in the city

was obviously unusual. Formally, the white rectangle was also distinctive to the

compactly filled up city site. The use of the white rectangle indeed bore another art

historical reference to Malevich's *White on White*. By painting a white square on an

equally white background, Malevich reductively inquired into forms and space. The

inquiry was picked up by Young, yet much altered. Displacement of the present

rectangle, not on white, but on the city redirected *White on White*'s purist pursuit to

the making of a void as a contrast to the densely filled up space of the urban

environment:

> In the city, space is understood as built-up space, positive
>
> space. Empty space, the void was always left at the margin
>
> and construed only as negative space. My work tried to take
>
> such space back to the centre.[285]

A void was thus pursued in the project with the white canvas. As a happening,

negative space was realized through opening the room for such an event in city space

and the physical blankness of the canvas. Reflectiveness of a white surface, the

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[285] Interview with the artist by the author on 13 March 2003 in the City University of Hong Kong. The artist talked in Chinese: 在城市裡，空間通常被理解爲built-up space，positive space；empty space，或者void通常被留在城市的邊緣，被理解它爲negative space。我的作品嘗試將這些空間帶回中央。

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rectangle shape and its flatness juxtaposed strongly with the inevitable light and shade modulation, irregular contours and three dimensionality of the surrounding city. Thus in the temporal-spatial movement of the imaginative scroll, the blankness of the canvas seemed to clear out parts of the compact environment as it visually blocked them from time to time.

On top of the generic performance, as a process *Bonjour, Young Hay* was also made up of specific interactions with different constituencies in the public space. These interactions empirically tested out the artist's relationship with society. For example, the work's varied experiences in New York and Hong Kong were very telling of how art was received differently in the two places. The artist suggested he received a warm welcome from the New York community. An anecdote, as recorded in the project's documentary publication, happened as "on hearing [the artist's] interview on Radio WBAI, a New Yorker purposefully waited at Times Square to say 'Bonjour' to [him]."[286] Such enthusiastic reception, however, was not experienced in the Hong Kong trip. On the contrary, the work was received mostly with indifference. As a very typical example, the artist once went to a crowded tea house. His canvas, obtrusive though, was received with the least attention. The artist thought the experience was very reflective of local people's lack of interest in art. He may not be

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[286] Ibid.

exactly accurate, for perhaps the tea-house goers did not really know the strange

canvas was art. But the anecdote does suggest how the people were rather indifferent

to their surroundings and this underlines local art's difficulty in attracting attention

from the public.

Another anecdote worth mentioning was the artist's trip to Tiananmen Square

[Image 79]. [287] The work's experience in Tiananmen, besides reflecting the

relationship between the artist and that specific context, also reveals a subversive

propensity of the project. At the politically sensitive site, the blank canvas of such a

visible size, with nothing on it and thus able to become anything, could be a most

dangerous object. Thus when the artist went to the Square, the canvas became a

troubling appearance. The artist recalled:

> …a commander came forwards to interrogate me anyway….We
>
> exchanged words three times. Finally he drove me away with
>
> the reason: "Your white canvas is too eye-catching."

However, the notion of "art" seems to have neutralized the occasion:

> …I walked into the tunnel leading to the Square. Having

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[287] A comparable project in Tiananmen Square which also involved the artist's body and an ambivalent act was Song Dong's *Breathing* (1996). In the performance, the artist lied on his stomach on Tiananmen Square at a location in front of Tiananmen at a distance. It was done during winter thus the artist breath created patterns of steam on the cold ground. For further details of the project, see Wu, *Transience: Contemporary Chinese Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

reached the end, I walked up the staircase. A troop of guards

rushed towards me. (Fang Fang told me later, three Falun Gong

disciples had just been arrested.)…I told them calmly that I was

just a painter from Hong Kong and that I was on my way to

make a painting of Jianyangmun. I opened the paint box for

them to search and they found only charcoals, brushes and

tubes of acrylic inside. They were totally convinced…the

officer in plain-clothes reported to his senior via a walky-talky.

Then he patted me shoulder and said, "it's alright." A gentle

smile suddenly replaced the stiffness of his face.

Nonetheless, considering the site was such a strictly guarded place, with memories of

subversive "art" such as the *Goddess of Freedom*, the blank canvas was under

surveillance:

A group of guards quickly came forwards to question me

repeatedly, six or seven times during my thirty-minute stay. I

felt suffocated, even in such an enormous space. Fang Fang

[Young's photographer in the trip, who photographed him with

telefocal lens at a distance] told me later, a police car had been

circling around me.[288]

This Tiananmen experience is reflective of both the specific context at Tiananmen and the general condition of the work. The point is about subversion, yet not of a political kind as the Tiananmen guards feared. *Bonjour, Young Hay* was a subversive work in terms of its attempt in projecting an alternative cognitive frame onto everyday space. The marginal, drifting position of the artist, the obtrusive white canvas, the urge for negative space and obviously the test of space in Tiananmen were all critical of the sites. However, as none of these was involved with outward violations, they were well accommodated within public space. Thus the subversion was that, while being accommodated within the space, the work contradicted it on a conceptual level.

In such a light, the photographs of the project could also be seen as a part of the work's critique on society through a more recognizable form of art. As the photographs capture moments of the process, they visually pin down how the work prompted reflective pictures at specific sites. Indeed, in each of the trips, Young has worked with a different photographer on a particular theme in the public sites. With the photographers' share, visual qualities of the photographs articulate further details for the work's critiques. A few examples would show how the photographs add to the meaning of the process. An example from the Hong Kong trip (with Kith Tsang as

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[288] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

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photographer), which focuses on "human space," captures Young's visit to the tea house [Image 80]. It shows a restaurant interior crowded with diners. The white canvas, carried by the artist as he walked along an aisle between the tables, abruptly disrupts the dining scene as it annexes the centre in a considerable large size. However, as reccounted by Young, none of the diners around it is paying any attention to the intrusion. Even two men sitting closest to it are not at all bothered and keep on immersed in their reading. The canvas is obtrusive, not because it disturbs the people but the contrary: that the people's unaffectedness really makes it out of place. Oddity of the canvas is visually cued with qualities of the black and white photograph. The white makes a sharp contrast with the dimmer setting. A play of focus, which blurs the adjacent diners while keeping the canvas clear, prominently suggests the two sides as separate space.

In comparable ways photographs in the overseas trips make their points on different themes. The New York trip (Cheung Chi-wai as photographer) was focused on the examination of architectural space. The canvas problematizes existing architectural features, particularly those with strong ideological implications. For example, its cancellation of the base of a column of the Supreme Court in No.6 Central Street [Image 81], effacement of the altar of an anonymous church [Image 82], and appearance under the hand of the silhouetted statue outside the Federal Hall

National Memorial[289], whose identity is unclear as he was shot from the back, nevertheless unmistakably some important historical figure [Image 83], all subtly destabilize and problematize these symbolic constructions. The blankness of the canvas does not project any outward statements. Rather, its void opens up a space for spectators' reflections. Likewise, the Berlin trip (photographed by Nana Frenzel and Christian Rothmann) undertook to reflect on history. The blank canvas was pictured beside relics of war: a façade defaced by bullet holes and under the pedestal of another silhouetted statue of a hero on a horse [Image 84]. The blankness of the canvas opens up a hole in the memory of war, a question for such a history. Contemporary history of Berlin was also addressed. A picture, fully blurred, shows the canvas-bearing artist on a road with other Berliners walking beside him [Image 85]. The context of the picture, as suggested by the artist, is the uncertainty of Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall. After the union of East and West Germany, the expected promise had not been realized and Berliners were full of doubts. In the photograph, everything is unclear and people cast long shadows under the distant blaze of the sinking sun. The canvas is in the middle of the picture. Midway of a tilted line between the distant sun far back and two blurred Berliners in the foreground, visually connected with its own tilted shadow, it is like an opening between the

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[289] The image is particularly provocative considering the symbolic meaning of its site. The building, presently the Federal Hall National Memorial, was formerly the Customs House. See Wayne Craven, *American Art. History and Culture* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p.177.

unclear present and an unclear future. However, unlike the brightness and clarity in other compositions, the canvas in the picture is equally grey and blurred. The whole composition, shaky and dull, moodily suggests a feeling of uncertainty of the moment.

History and the trajectory of culture was also the focus for the Beijing trip. Images taken from the journey capture the white canvas opening a void in historical relics: *Tiantan*〔天壇〕[Image 86], *Shisanling*〔十三堎〕[Image 87]，the *Hutong*〔胡同〕[Image 88], the Great Wall [Image 89] and the like. All of these places are symbolic of Chinese heritage. *Tian Tan* is an outward totem of imperial rule and the belief in heavenly mandate, a site where Chinese people, their reign and the indigenous faith in heaven are architecturally cemented together. *Shisanling*, with implications similar to those of *Tian Tan*, adds another dimension of time and the Chinese affirmation in ancestry, *Shenzhong Zhuiyuan* 〔慎終追遠〕. The *Hutong*, at the verge of disappearance during these recent years of Beijing's city renewal, is once and might be ever a fetish of the old Beijing habitat. The Great Wall is definitely an epitome of Chinese cultural representations. In the photographs, these landscapes are mostly shot with extreme long shots as if suggestive of their expansiveness and sublimity in both physical appearance and symbolic connotation. In these enormous landscapes, the white canvas, also posing at a distance from the camera on similar

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planes with the relics, is always dwarfed. However, because of its whiteness against

the darker chiaroscuro, the tiny rectangle is unaffectedly capable of annexing attention

in the composition, and in a certain sense even more subversive because it manages to

disrupt the supposedly overwhelming environment with such a small size.

Both as a process and in the form of photography, *Bonjour, Young Hay*

exemplifies the use of art for opening alternative, reflective space in the public space.

Its deliberate use of the marginal position of art and artist for subverting the everyday

paradigm casts light to the problem of the difficulty art has in communicating fully

with its real life counterpart. The correlation between art and life, indeed, does not

necessarily need to be pacifying and a critical approach from a distanced position

could also bring reflective results. The heterotopic situation evoked in the case,

besides the confrontation between the everyday paradigm and the contrasts brought

by the work, also involves a dimension of cognition. Meanings in the work could be

approached in two ways. There were two kinds of audience: the audience making

sense of the work as art (as this discussion does), and the audience meeting Young in

the street, oblivious to the work's artistic implications. Thus the artist who actively

went into the city, as understood in the paradigm of art, is simultaneously a peculiar

outsider in the everyday world; the reflective white canvas is at the same time an

obtrusive object; the opening of negative space could be a disturbance to the urban

environment. Such ambivalence is a situation shared by many of the previous examples, yet in the present case, the artist demonstrated a more conscious, critical use of the public audience's non-art response. It was captured as the work's content. The heterotopia created in this case is antithetical: art and everyday space were to collide, but at the same time they were set apart – the work's meaning, as a result of the artist's attempt to go into the city, was ironically grounded on the work's "failure" to communicate in the everyday world.

Young's example shows that the incongruence between art and everyday life can be appropriated for reflecting the relationship between art and society. While art's marginality, as illustrated by the case of Young, can be employed to bring reflections to society, some other artists still aspire for a more intimate relationship between art and the public. Further to art that makes sense of public life, such artists tried to make art that simultaneously makes sense to the public. In the following discussion, the examples on So Yan-kei and Kacey Wong will be introduced to show how the two artists have tried to make art matter with the general public through inviting public participation.

So Yan-kei: Art Engaging the Public

Like *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, So Yan-kei's *Bitter Gourd No.5* (1996)

and *Memo* (1999) are also about experiences in public space. However, the artist,

other than remaining in an outsider position, was more active in interacting with the

public. Instead of having the works making their meanings only in a paradigm of art,

So tried to present them to the public through a participatory model. The artist

undertook the position as a situation prompter, and the public participated in the

works. In the following paragraphs, two works of So will be discussed to see how she

created art with the public as she invited them to participate in her works, and how

such participation added to the works' meanings as art about public experience.

In 1997, *Bitter Gourd No.5* [290] was conceived by So Yan-kei as a deliberate turn

against the museum setting which she saw as problematic for both the artist and the

audience:

> I have done many exhibitions in museums. There were so many
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> limitations. Many ideas would work better if they were not done
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> in museums or galleries. The museum setting frequently changes
>
> the works' ideas. So I think it would be better to look for a very

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[290] *Bitter Gourd No. 5* was the artist's initiative and prized in the 1998 Hong Kong Biannual. So Yan-kei suggested the museum had once approached her for purchasing the work, but the deal was not made probably because the museum was still reluctant to buy a work that cannot be physically collected in the museum. The work had been mentioned in numerous publications. See for example, So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000); Kith Tsang, "The Installation Works Inscribed in White Ink by So Yan-kei" 蘇恩祺用白色墨水書寫的裝置作品, in William Cheung, ed., op. cit., pp. 218-220; selected news coverage: *He Luan* 何鸞, "Huogui li de lengnuan renjian" 貨櫃裡的冷暖人間 (Human temperature in a truck), Hong Kong *Economic Journal* (bibliographic information missing, sourced from press clippings by the Department of Fine Arts, the University of Hong Kong); Zheng Weiyin 鄭維音, Baise moshui Su Enqi" 白色墨水蘇恩祺 (White Ink So Yan-kei), Ming Pao,15 September, 2000, C09.

flexible exhibition venue, where no one would intervene.

The relationship between museum, art and us is also possibly

problematic. If you go to a place, you go to their museum and see

its culture. But when you see art in museums in Hong Kong, do

you think you could see our culture?......Their collection of

contemporary art is at least fifteen years earlier, or perhaps

twenty – how could that represent our present culture, our present

thoughts?[291]

Actively finding a way out from these problems, So Yan-kei devised *Bitter Gourd*

No.5 as more open and contextually relevant project. The work moved away from the

museum site. In the form of a refrigerator truck, it took art to the public as the truck

traveled through public space.

Originally a vehicle used for delivering ice, the truck was turned into a

heterotopic space where So set up an art experience for her audience. The vehicle was

repainted on the outside as if giving a new label to the goods it held. The Chinese title

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[291] Interview with So Yan-kei by the author on 1 May 2002 over the phone. So spoke in Chinese: 我在 museum做過很多展覽，我覺得有很多limitations，好多idea其實不在museum或gallery做會好一 點，其實在musuem做作品，很多時候都會把作品的idea改了，所以我想不如自己找一個很flexible 的展覽場地，又不用給人管。而且museum的art和gallery的art跟我們的關係……即是，當你去到 一個地方，你們到museum或者gallery看他們的culture，但你到香港的museum看那裡的art，你覺 不覺得可以看到我們的culture？都是兩回事是不是？因爲他們contemporary art 的collection都是 越過十五年前的，十五年前的事──其實我已經說早了，可能是二十年前──怎樣represent我們現 在的culture、我們現在的想法呢？

of the work was painted on both sides, overlapping a different image on each side. On one side, the image echoed the title and showed a bitter gourd [Image 90]. The image of the other side showed the face of an anonymous young woman with an opened mouth [Image 91]. Both images were painted as photographic negative images in black and white. These exterior images were like a cue to the interior setting, which also involved photography. The interior, making use of the function of the refrigerator truck, was a freezing cold, dimly lit chamber. Six six-foot tall ice tablets were ranked by the sides. A life-size, brownish portrait was frozen inside each of the tablets [Image 92]. The photographs were taken by the artist at earlier dates and showed six anonymous passers-by, including the young woman painted on the outside [Image 93]. As an audio complement to these tablets, there was a playback of pre-recorded monologues (discussing their own concerns and feelings during that time) by some further anonymous members of the public. At the end of the truck, plenty ice-wrapped sweets was offered in a sink [Image 94].

The subject of *Bitter Gourd No.5* was city experience. A moving truck, passing pedestrians, frozen moments and freezing temperature symbolized So's reading of the speed and coldness in the city. She expressed her feelings of the city:

It's like a vehicle, an ice vehicle. It's moving, but things

inside are frozen. In this city…this is how I feel about Hong

Kong. It seems moving so fast, but it's also like it stopped.

Very cool.[292]

Based on this impression, So set up the installation as an environment for her public audience to experience. Her concepts were coded in the various materials, and the chill of a refrigerator truck was used for immediate sensual impact. So suggested:

Why did I use the refrigerator truck? It was because I wanted

them to feel it without feeling me pushing them. I wanted

them to feel. Feelings could not be chosen. It could not be

switched off. You feel the cold immediately. And then you

could sense it.[293]

Hit by the coldness right at the moment when they stepped aboard, the audience saw the dim, cold chamber with framed stiff pictures. Viewing the exhibits involved a sequence of experiences: walking through the aisle, coming to the far end where a basin offered candies. To an audience who was familiar with local rituals, this sequence of experiences would likely conjure associations to visits to funeral parlours. Thus seeing art, seeing the frozen scenes from the city became reconfigured as a

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[292]Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 好似是一輛車，還是冰車，動動動，但入面的東西是freeze了的，在這個city裡……我覺得香港就是這樣，好像動得很快，但又很像停了，很cool。

[293] Ibid. The quotation from the artist in Chinese: 我為甚麼要選這個雪車，是因為我要他們不會覺得我push他們，但我要他們會feel，感覺你不能選，不能關掉，你即刻會感到冷，然後感覺一下。

tribute to something cold and ghostly. This was the work's critique against people's

indifference and alienation in the city, and a condition that the work simultaneously

tried to challenge.

As the work created an environment that exposed these negative qualities of the

city, it tried to overcome them by being very active in establishing contacts with

people. The work was technically done through the artist's interaction with the public.

The frozen photographs were not snapshots but frontal portraits taken with the

persons' consent. A total of two hundred odd pictures had been taken by the artist,

who boldly approached people, explained the project, asked them for a picture and

chatted with them. From the collection, the chosen six showed a number of different

dispositions, each entailing a different story. For example, the picture of the women

with an opened mouth captures a character who was very enthusiastic towards the

project. The women, who was a student from the Polytechnic University, was very

excited to learn that the artist was a graduate from the same institute and suggested to

make the funny face herself. A very different story lies behind another picture of a

skeptical looking old lady, who had only agreed after the artist's persistent urging.

These stories were not told in the exhibited work, nonetheless they were parts of the

work as a process of social contacts. As for the audience visiting the finished

installation, further to the aforementioned experience, additional objects were given to

each visitor to tighten their interaction with the work. As visitors boarded, the artist

would always present them with a fluorescent light bar which served as a formal link

to the work. Lights of the same kind were placed under the ice blocks. A parallel was

thus created between the viewers and the frozen strangers, and the audience was

prompted to reflect upon themselves as they saw the exhibits. Rebuking the

conditions of coldness and isolation, the work invited audience's participation for its

counter-argument. The ice-wrapped candies offered at the end were regarded by the

artist as a "touch": the audience, after experiencing such coldness of the bitter gourd,

could be rewarded a sweet if they melt the ice with their hands. Audience's

involvement became an important element of the work's meaning.[294]

The stress on audience's participation asserted that work was not just an

autonomous object in a paradigm of art, but an experience which also made sense in

the everyday world. Interaction with the public took place inside the truck as the

audience perceived and participated in the set-up, and at the same time involved

society at large as it traveled over public space. If the work had escaped institutional

limitations as it got away from museums, the step down from the pedestal had

simultaneously disposed it to limitations of the everyday social environment. Yet

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[294] The process of having the audience getting objects out from ice could be cross-referenced to Wang Jin's *Ice. 96 Central China* (1996). In Wang's work, consumer goods were placed inside a huge ice wall and the audience's greed propelled them to break the ice for the "prizes." Thus though the works formally resembled each other, their arguments were quite different. Wang's was a cynical attack on consumerism, So's on the contrary, argued for the warmth of human touch amidst a cold society.

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while the former constraints were regarded as restricting, the later was seen by the

artist as more worthy as they allowed substantial and meaningful understanding of the

public sites. Interaction with different people and circumstances at different spots

greatly enriched the work as a project of city experience. The alien truck, not

particularly site-specific in its design, managed to achieve a special kind of

site-specificity as its processes revealed different characteristics in different

communities. Substantial interaction had exposed regional qualities which were out of

any expected image of the place. For example, while the city's central areas like

Central would likely be imagined as a place "closest" to art, the work's experience in

the district problematized such locations of elitist art:

> I went to Central on the first day. People there were so different.
>
> They would think: what? You want me to see an exhibition on a
>
> truck? And actually before they got aboard, you could tell how
>
> long they would stay just by the thickness of their make-up.
>
> The ones with thicker make-up would soon come out, and dash
>
> away.[295]

On the contrary, when the work visited some other places where access to art was

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[295] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 其實你去不同地方，每個地方的人都真的是有他們獨特的性格，比如我第一日去中環，中環的人會真是很不同，他們會想：甚麼？你要我到一輛貨車上看展覽？還有，在他沒上車之前，從他塗粉的厚度你可以知道他會停留多少秒，厚的呢，很快他就會走出來，很快就掉頭走。

much less direct, with hardly any art institutions and mostly populated by the grassroots, the people's responses indicated an unexpected promise for art:

> I went to Golden Computer Centre in Shamshuipo.…You know it is a place for the latest computer and electronic products. People there were very open to new things. They were very interested. They came on their own. But my truck was so small and only a few could board at once. So they had to line up by themselves.[296]

> I went to *Quan Zhang Ju* [old Chinese restaurant].….those women, those cleaning workers all came out. And they told the old men in the kitchen to come and see…this is installation? Isn't it like our fridge in the kitchen? But when you explain to them, they would understand, and asked people from near-by restaurants to come.[297]

Yet there were also cases when interaction reaffirmed existing inertia:

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[296] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 我去到深水步黃金商場，你知深水步黃金商場那裡的人雖然全是男人，但他們其實很易接受很多新事物，你知黃金商場全是售賣那些最新的電腦產品，最新的電子那類東西，在那裡的人其實是很容易接受新事物的，他們很有興趣看的，他們會自己上來看，但我的車很小，要限著人數上車，所以他們要自己排隊。

[297] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 我去泉章居，即是旺角七十一那裡，那些大嬸，那些洗碗大嬸都出來了，她們還叫其他房裡的老伯出來看，這些就是installation，不是像我們廚房的冰箱，但是你講解給她們聽，他們又哦哦哦，然後又叫隔鄰酒樓那些來，我覺得是很好。

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…Wo Che Arcade in Shatin, it was a public estate. I always

wanted to get to an estate, but it was the worst failure. Only a

few people came. You told them it was an exhibition, they

would think, what, something like this in an estate? As if you

are cheating them.[298]

In different ways such experiences enriched *Bitter Gourd No.5* as both a work about

the public and a work in the public. The empirical experiences offered insights to a

number of issues: human characters of the sites, how people in different communities

construed themselves, their different responses to art, and collectively, the space for

art under different contextual conditions. The connection between art and the public

was very strong: the artist initiated the situation, the public completed it with their

reaction and participation.

In a similar structure, a comparably publicly oriented work was done by So

Yan-kei in 1999 as *Memo* [Image 95]. Contrastive to *Bitter Gourd No.5*, *Memo* was

done in an institutional setting at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Thus instead of

defying museum limitations by running away, the work tried to open new room within

the museum environment. The public experience that the artist dealt with in this

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[298] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 是一個公共屋村來的，我一直好想到一個公共屋村入面，一個
村入面，那是我在這麼多個地方中最失敗的一個，只有幾個人去，還要你跟他說有這個展覽，
他們會覺得，甚麼，屋村有這些東西，好像覺得你是騙他們，或是騙婆婆那樣，他們是很害怕，
很害怕似的。

occasion was people's need for a space for expressing themselves. The artist suggested her inspiration from real life observation:

> When I listen to the radio, many people phone in to dedicate songs without knowing if the person hears it. Sometimes people keep on talking and never hang up. I realize people need a space so much.[299]

The audience was thus practically given a "space" in the work. When the exhibition began, *Memo* was hardly any final object but the provision of a dimly lit space, a plain ivory-coloured wall, pads of yellow self-adhesive memo papers and pens. With these materials, the audience was to "create" the work by writing on the memos and sticking them on the wall.

The space opened to the audience was not only a space for personal expression, but also a room in the museum for the public to make art themselves. This, modestly though, was certainly a challenge to the conventional rigid and passive museum-visitor relationship. The idea of having an artwork undone before the audience came was quite a problem for the museum in the beginning. The artist recalled museum staff calling her up on the first day of the exhibition, outwardly

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[299] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 我想那時是我聽收音機，很多人時常打電話去點唱，又或者有些人會說很久也不願掛線，我發覺人其實很需要一個space。

expressing their worries for the few pieces of memos on the wall. Yet as the wall got

eventually covered up with more and more memos from a greatly interested audience,

the museum was reassured and offered to give the artist additional space.[300] In due

course, the work physically grew from day to day. The artist's creation of a situation

was again met by the audience's participation. They wrote on the memo, altered the

shape of the collage by posting their memos on different places and introduced further

creative inputs as some audience members brought in their own multicoloured memos

and stickers.[301] Participation, as a process and also a schematic idea, got materially

stuck on the wall and the changing visual form evidenced it materially.

Formally, *Memo* was a lot simpler than *Biter Gourd No.5*, yet its keen

relationship with the audience within a museum setting had probably made an even

stronger statement for the turn against isolation to an art that connected the people. In

addition to the general format, details of the work also celebrated an orientation

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[300] Ibid. The artist recounted her experience in Chinese: 第一天我給museum的人話我，因爲牆上只有幾張memo，他們說，你知不知道你從New York回來，我們特意找你，希望我有一個改變，或者給一些很不同的東西給他們看，但當他們看到只幾張memo，他們說，真是我看到那麼多artists中最懶的一個artist，但一個星期之後很多人天天就在這裡貼貼貼貼，還要extend到郭孟浩那邊…..然後他就說，一樓，一樓，整個一樓都讓你玩。(On the first day the museum staff was displeased because there were only a few pieces of memo on the wall. They said, "Do you know we asked you when you came back from New York, we wish you could have a change and bring in something different?" When they saw there were only a few memos, they said, "You are the laziest artist." But a week later, people were sticking the memos up everyday and the work extended to Kwok Mang-ho's side….and then they said, "You could work with the whole of the first floor.")

[301] Ibid. The artist suggested in Chinese: 有些人還自己帶memo來，我做的時間是很控制colour的，它的牆是米色的，我不想它很跳，我想作品是很merge的，所以我控制有甚麼顏色，出來大概是怎樣，但是有些人帶些很粉紅，很藍色，還有帶些貼紙來。(Some people brought in their own memo. When I did it I controlled the colours. The wall is ivory. I did not want it to be unmatched. I wanted it to merge into a whole so I controlled the colours. But some people brought in memos that were very pink and blue, and some brought stickers.)

towards real life. Memos were an outwardly everyday material which juxtaposed strongly with exclusive objects of high-art. The material, which was for contents that might be forgotten if unremarked, could have symbolic implications. As the title of the work, it could suggest that the work was also involved in a parallel task in noting down what might be neglected: a space for expression according to the artist's initial conception; and as the interactive project grew in the museum, that art could actually come from the people. In such a reading, the public's act in putting memos on the wall could be understood not only as an interactive element, but a performance with notable significations. The wall of the gallery, a material employed as the backdrop of the work, was as an archetypical representation of the white cube, which the artist, together with her public collaborators, plastically effaced with another layer of popular inputs. The museum, instead of a confining institution, was annexed and subverted as a new room for an art which dealt with a public theme and engaged the public in its making.

Bitter Gourd No.5 and *Memo* illustrate So Yan-kei's vision in making an art that is both about the public and involved the public. Unlike works by the previously discussed artists which largely remain in a paradigm of art despite their public settings, the works of So managed to engage the public. Their orientation towards the public did not only involve public locations and public subject matter. There was a

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significant difference in the form of the work, and thus the relationship between the

artist and the public audience. As opposed to the earlier discussed works, *Bitter Gourd*

No.5 and *Memo* were not just an artist's works disposed to a passive audience. They

were rather open-ended works to be completed by a participating audience. The role

of the artist, thus, was not just a person making art or projecting his/her own

narratives in the public space but a host of the art situations. The public audience, no

longer just passive receivers, became active collaborators. Their visit to the truck,

their response to the work and interaction with the artist completed the work's quest

of linking art and the public. Notably different from the previous example, So's works

created another kind of heterotopic experience, a fusion of the two paradigms: the

audience understood her works simultaneously as a common truck/common stationery

and also art. The works let the public experience art in the familiar.

Kacey Wong: Publicly Oriented Art in a Museum

As a final example of this chapter, Kacey Wong as *Drift City* (2001) added to

above modes of public orientation a further dimension that art about the public, art in

the public and art with public could also be done within the museum. Like So's *Memo*,

Drift City was done in the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Yet while the former work

subtly subverted the site, *Drift City* affirmatively used the site as its context and link

to wider public space. This affirmative use of the museum setting raises an alternative

argument for the white cube. While defying institutions and getting into public space

were frequently adopted as ways to move away from isolation to social engagement,

the present case counter argued that a certain way of utilizing institutional space could

also bring about similar results.

The subject of *Drift City* was local public experience on the themes of home,

architecture and building. The work was an extension of a conceptual programme

which the artist, who was previously a practicing architect and keenly interested in

such themes, started since 2000 as *Personal Skyscraper*. The work, comparable to

Young's *Bonjour, Young Hay*, was also a combination of public performances and

photography. The prop used by Wong was a cardboard skyscraper costume,[302] which

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[302] The central object of the project, the skyscraper costume, has its source from similar masquerade practices in the US during the 1920s and the artist's own experiences when he was studying at Cornell University.

he put on and traveled through different local and overseas places.[303] This *Skyscraper*

project was embarked on to rethink architecture, and the relationships between

buildings and people's home in the city. The artist has suggested that "cities are

essentially constructed with buildings, but people's attention for architecture is not

adequate."[304] Thus the *Skyscraper* project was done to bring architecture and its

implications to public attention.

The travels of the "skyscraper", which happened as performances and were

pictured in photographs (later exhibited in "Personal Skyscraper," curated by Wong in

2000 at Para/Site space, joined by eleven artists working on the same theme) were

poetically construed as a search for the position of architecture in city space. The

"skyscraper" visited many local landmarks. These visits were reflections on the

relationship between the skyscraper and places, for example, on an occasion the artist

went to the seaside [Image 96]. The visit was a critical response to a phenomenon in

the local property market: "buildings with sea views command higher prices, so I

want to have a look at the sea – this is something this skyscraper will say,"[305] so a

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[303] Besides visiting different places, from the waterfront by the Victoria Harbour to urban areas like Temple Street and unrecognizable roads in the countryside, the "skyscraper" has also visited places like Egypt, Singapore and Shanghai. For further information on the visits, see Ann Mak, "Kacey Wong: *Cité à la dérive*," *Parole*, May – June, 2003, pp. 24-25.

[304] Interview with the artist by the author on 28 May 2002 in Queen's Café, Causeway Bay. The quotation in Chinese: 城市是由architecture構成的，但普遍人對architecture的關注都不足夠。

[305] Ibid. The quotation in Chinese: 看到海的樓貴一點，所以我想看一看海──這是這個skyscraper會說的話。

photograph shows the "skyscraper" paying a visit to the waterfront to have a look at the sea. In similar reflective and playful ways the "skyscraper" went through many different local places. Through the visits, the connection between the skyscraper and the body was another metaphor. Buildings are where people in the city dwell. Yet most local dwellings are high-rise apartments developed as business-driven estate projects, rarely tailored to the habitants' individual characters. A skyscraper tailored exactly to a person, as in the present case, would be a sharp juxtaposition with the actual relationship between local buildings and their occupants. A further contextual reference for a skyscraper on the move was the phenomenon of cyclical demolishment and rebuilding. As building is much driven by the market, old houses are frequently pulled down for more profitable redevelopment. A consequence of this material situation is a drifting feeling for both the people, who move frequently and tend to have little sense of belonging towards their dwellings, and architecture itself. Thus as the skyscraper moved from one place to another, it highlighted the rootlessness of the city. Dwelling became drifting, and the skyscraper did not fit in any single place of its visits. The only site was the body of its carrier and this linked the work to a further contextual situation with a temporal specificity: the colloquial pun "carrying a house" 〔孭住層樓〕(meaning having a house on mortgage) was a very common experience among local citizens, particularly as many them suffered from negative equity after

the property market downfall in 1997.

The above thematic elements were the background for *Drift City* [Image 97]. The work continued to work on the above themes in a different form, intentionally using special aspects of its museum site. At the outset, the museum environment was employed as a forum for public participation. In recent years, the Hong Kong Museum of Art has frequently included an interactive education corner for its exhibitions. Set up at a least conventional exhibition site at the escalator lobby outside the exhibition halls, the work was like one of those education corners. A bench was placed by the harbour-facing French windows. On top of the bench, handicraft wooden splints, glue and pens were provided to the visitors for making model houses. The set-up attracted many visitors. Model houses soon filled up the bench and the work ran out of materials a number of times. As the visiting public built model houses by the bench, knowing or unknowingly, they were participating in Wong's art project as the audience took part in So's art in *Memo*. The set up was meant to engage the audience in a home-building happening, which made particular sense with the work's physical location. This involved the architectural environment of the particular site. The placement in front of the harbour viewing French window put the model houses and real skyscrapers on the opposite shore in a perspective. [Image 98] In this perspective, the actual city scene was posited as both a context and contrast to the

bench of houses. Juxtaposition of the two built scenes raised a few issues. The first was the relationship between buildings and people in a city. The model houses on the bench, though small, realized a very ideal situation when people could build their own houses according to their will. This made a direct contrast to real life high-rises over the shore, which as opposed to the intimately-built model houses, was corporate-developed and hardly personal. A second issue, developed from the first, was a question of substantiality. While the real life skyscrapers were obviously reality and the model houses fantasy, the material situation that the former was then distant outside the window as the latter were at hand suggested another way of understanding: the supposedly real skyscrapers were nonetheless an image, an impersonal spectacle of capital; the model houses, on the other hand, however unreal, were in a way a lot more substantial as they were more intimately related to the people.

As the audience embodied *Drift City* when they took part in the house-building exercise, they also collaborated with the artist in a museum version of the *Skyscraper* project. According to a schedule, again like scheduled educational programmes in a museum, the artist appeared around the work in the role of the "skyscraper" and interacted with the audience. In such a way, the "skyscraper" continued its earlier "travel" in the present site where museums goers were engaged in a work about homes, building and architecture. As the artist conceptualized, the process was

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literally albeit bizarrely a dialogue between the public and architecture. These

dialogues, further to the outward picture of people talking with a skyscraper, had been

reflective of people's thoughts about buildings. Notable anecdotes included small

children talking about 9/11 and bin Laden as they gave the skyscraper a punch.[306]

Suggestions like these, hardly professional, were very reflective of how the mass

apprehended architecture in the everyday paradigm. The views thus served as input

from the people in the *Skyscraper* project's search for the meaning of architecture in

public space.

Drift City illustrates how Wong tried to connect art and the public through

utilization of the museum site. Both the educational function and physical

environment of the museum were absorbed by his work through which he invited

public participation and linked the work to a wider public context. The work was

heterotopic in a number of ways. Obviously, the oscillation between reality and

fantasy as brought about by the model houses and the conversing "skyscraper" evoke

heterotopic situations for reflecting upon the work's themes. A further heterotopia

happened with the museum site. At the same time, the museum was an institution that

contained the work as art in the gallery and also a platform which bridged the work to

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[306] Ibid. The artist recalled in Chinese: 有些小朋友走來說甚麼 9/11 和拉登，那時大概是那段時間，然後打我一鎚。(Some children came and talked about 9/11 and bin Laden, it was about that time, and gave me a punch.)

public space at large. In such a way, the work raised an alternative path against "museum isolation." Other than defying the museum, isolation could be overcome by making a different form of art. It is after all, not only the physical location of the museum that bars art from the public. What matters more perhaps is the form of art. The case of *Drift City* vividly shows that, at perfect ease within its museum location, art could still intimately relate to the public through its interests in public subjects and presentation in an engaging form.

Conclusion

In this chapter, works by the Kwok, Tsang, Young, So and Wong illustrate the various approaches taken by the artists as their art has been oriented towards the public. The artists put on different social roles and created different kinds of heterotopic situations in which art and the public relate to each other in varying ways. As Kwok eccentrically construed all his actions in the public as art, and Tsang projected his contextually-relevant, nonetheless personally developed, narratives onto public sites, their works represent a primarily art-centred model. In such a way, the works in public space were more likely making their meanings in a paradigm of art rather than of public space. The distance between the two paradigms was highlighted

in the example of Young, who appropriated the situation and made use of art's marginality to make critical remarks on the alien status of art and other conditions in public space. Differing from all such approaches, common in the way that art remained largely autonomous though disposed to public space, the works of So and Wong fused the art and public paradigms through an alternative methodology. So's works actively overcame art's distance from society through the use of an interactive and engaging model. The artist-public relationship was no longer one of art-maker and art-seer. Rather, as the artist initiated her works for public participation, they collaborated in a project that made sense to both art and public life. Wong's work, also adopting a participatory model, raises an additional point that art does not necessarily go out to the public to be publicly engaging. An engaging form can also foster tighter connections between art and the public.

Although works discussed in this chapter were not exactly conceptualized as "public art," they all demonstrate a keen interest in making art more relevant to the public world. They evidence that the orientation towards the public is present even in works without the label of public art, and art in general is also disposed to questions like art's correlation with society and the social position of artists. In this discussion, the examples raise two points for these questions. The cases of Kwok, Tsang and Young highlight the paradigmatic difference between art and everyday life, which

public art must acknowledge. On the other hand, the public connection achieved by the works of So and Wong suggests how the distance could be overcome through employing engaging forms. However, this is not to say which methods are better off and which are not – for all these examples provide reflective accounts on the relationships between art and the public. Unlike the examples discussed in the previous chapters, these works, not labeled as public art, were not subject to the ideological presumption that they had to bridge art and the public. Their different relationships with the public – alienated, disconcerting, accommodated and intimate – were reflective of a more pluralistic and realistic picture of how art and society correlate. In such a light, public art could be conceived in a different way. Instead of a form of art that is obsessed with "successful" interactions with the public, it could be seen as a threshold which allows empirical observations on how art and the public get into varied relationships under different circumstances. In such a way, the subject reasserts itself as a substantial source for rethinking the relationship between art and the public realm.

Conclusion

This thesis tries to explore the subject of public art from three directions. In this

conclusion, discussions of the three chapters will be brought into a whole. The thesis

starts with a "beginning" of public art in Hong Kong – the mid 1990s, when art

gained unprecedented eminence in the city's public life. Intermingled with public

events, the examples presented in the first chapter illustrate how art played a part in

the contestation of public meaning among different social parties during the handover

period. Art was involved in a variety of ways: it was used for ideological expression

by individuals (the case of Pun), social groups (the commission of *Hong Kong Tripod*

by the Association of All Sectors on Hong Kong Island for the Celebration of the

Handover and the appropriation of the *Pillar of Shame* by the Alliance in Support of

Patriotic Movements in China), and the authorities (the *Bauhinia* and the *Monument*

in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China); and as objects

appearing in public space, the works stimulated public responses and reactive

discourses. In due course, the public experiences of these works were suggestive of

the character of the local public. To have the vague idea of the public substantiated at

this moment is timely, for the mid 1990s was, with critical issues like the end of

colonialism, the return to China and the establishment of a new state, a time when

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Hong Kong society developed a growing consciousness of its public. The impression that the public is a concrete mass is refuted as these examples demonstrate that the idea of the "public" is indeed a discourse, largely directed by agencies with power over public (or more preciously, publicly accessible but nonetheless owned) space or public discourses such as the media. As a discursive sphere, the "public", registering more dissonance than consensus, is hardly homogeneous but plural and diverse. Rather than a place where members of the society join, the public arena is actually a space where social segments negotiate and compete for public meanings. It is within such a context that art, with its transgressive marginality, spectacular attractiveness and propensity for provoking imagination, enters the scene and plays a part in the construction of public images.

Recording the emergence of public art in Hong Kong and outlining the character of the public, the first chapter lays a background for the following chapters. The second chapter is a chronological continuation of the first, and also zooms in on the subject of public art itself. While the first chapter samples art that was employed in public events and overshadowed by politics, chapter two looks into programmatic public art. Formulated to connect art and the public, these examples show how different public art makers tried to insert art into the public environment. A plurality of methods was attempted, including conventional outdoor commissions, temporary

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installations and experimental projects executed in alternative public space. Amidst this methodological variety, a common feature was shared by all the projects: they all tried to foster a certain kind of site-specificity. This interest in the site was of contextual relevance. If examples in the first chapter, seized for political purposes and obsessed with the issue of sovereignty, are reflective of the highly political period, examples in the second chapter, venturing for public meanings of the place – the newly established Special Administration Region, a new phase of Hong Kong – suggest that reexamination of the city has become a new public agenda after the confirmed handover. The different agencies (the municipality, the MTR as a commercial enterprise, Artist Commune as a non-government group in collaboration with the communal District Council, and independent curators like Wong, Fung, Siu, Chan and Young) have interpreted the site differently, and their treatments are related to their varied degrees of control or access in public space. Projects initiated by the space owners (like the municipal and MTR projects) tended to fashion a favourable, and at times stereotypical, image of the sites. The lack of criticalness with such commissions reveals a fundamental condition of public space in Hong Kong. Space in the territory is all owned (either by the municipality or private corporations), and truly "public" space is virtually missing. Thus public art in Hong Kong faces a most intriguing question: how is it to take place in this absence of genuine public space?

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While the aforementioned examples show that public art was subject to the space-owners' power, the other examples of the chapter illustrate how another strand of projects, not having their own space, experimented with more critical approaches as they borrowed ("Art Windows" and Artist Commune's electricity supply boxes project), annexed ("City Space"), or even invented public space ("Home Affairs" and "Landscape"). How these works negotiated meanings in the public space – how art (and its maker) is overpowered by spatial ownership, how it finds room in the midst, how it subverts, transgresses and creates alternative space – was reflective of a kind of spatial politics. Thus while the first chapter suggests that art in public space was of social significance as it played a part in ideological struggles over critical socio-political issues, this discussion also underlines a socio-political aspect of programmatic public art: as it ventures for public meanings, the process registers power relationships in public space.

The two major implications of chapter two, that the gist of the various approaches to public art is principally an orientation towards the public, and that the appearance of such art in society is reflective of spatial relationships, lead the thesis to the third chapter. A vision derived from the first implication that public art, rather than being a defined category, can be seen as a tendency towards the public, brings into the inquiry the third group of examples, works that were not exactly conceived as "public

art" but nonetheless also demonstrated keen interest in the public at roughly the same time as the previously discussed projects. Examining such art, the chapter addresses spatial relationship from a more conceptual perspective. The contestation involved in art's appearance in public space does not only take place among social agencies, but also, in terms of cognition, between the paradigms of art and everyday life. How art is understood in the everyday context cast light on art's (and the artist's) correlation to society. An inevitable distance between the two paradigms is pinpointed by cases (those of Kwok, Tsang and Young) in which the artists' works, though executed in public space, posed as a marginal Other vis-à-vis everyday operations. This distance was tackled by artists (So and Wong) who tried to make their art more engaging. Conclusively, this last group of examples, unlike labeled "public art," which usually assumes, or at least aspires to a positive relationship between art and the public, has allowed a more objective glimpse of the relationship between art and society.

Chapter three's interpretation of public art, emphasizing the correlation between art and the public rather than seeing the subject as an ideological category, can actually be applied to all the works discussed in this thesis. In such a light, a question raised in the first chapter becomes all the more eminent: after all, are these works art or simply happenings in public space? How are these to be acknowledged as art? Reiterating a suggestion from the very first chapter, the ambivalence of public art

demands critical rethinking of our conception of art. As previously stated, the issue is not whether these are art or not, but how our idea of art transforms with this emerging concept. The idea of public art rejects art for art's sake, and as a turn from Modernism's isolation, art faces issues like social values and contextual relevance. With the public being an important element, a most critical question is who is to judge such art, and by what standards. How does our idea of quality take into regard factors other than aesthetics? How does this challenge conventional institutions? And ultimately, how do these stimulate new ways of conceptualizing art? These are questions arising from public art, critical not only for the subject but also for art in general.

Returning to a more specific view of public art in Hong Kong, the subject is also disposed to many questions. Issues raised in this thesis, particularly the interaction between various social agencies and the intriguing problem of artistic evaluation, as well as those that cannot be accommodated in this research, such as reception by the masses, the institutional aspects of public art, and its comparison with other forms of public spectacles (architecture, advertisements, etc.), are all worth further examination. Looking forward, the development of local public art is also opening new vistas. While local art bodies have shown increasing interest in public art and the

government is considering legislation,[307] how will such growing consciousness affect

future development? Will the growing concern for public representation, public rights

and public expression, emerged after the 1 July parade subsequent incidents such as

the controversy over universal suffrage[308] reshape the local public and thus stimulate

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[307] Approximately six months after the submission of this thesis for examination in August 2003, the aforementioned second official public art research (undertaken by Desmond Hui) was presented on 21 February 2004 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre (see *Hong Kong Economic Journal* reporter, "Gonggong yishu yanjiu baogao chutai"公共藝術研究報告出台 (Release of public art research), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 26 February, 2004, p.32), and subsequently released on the Hong Kong Arts development website, Desmong Hui, *Public Art Research* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council: 2004). In the same month, an unprecedented public art symbolism, called "Soul of the City: International Symposium on Art and Public Space" was presented by the government's Home Affairs Bureau at the Hong Kong Arts Centre (13-14 February). The reach of this symposium, at least in the field of art and cultural enterprises, was remarkable with a long list of the co-organizers and supporters, including the Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Urban Renewal Authority, Hong Kong Designers Association, Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Hong Kong Institutes of Planners and the Asian Art Archive. A number of consulates, the British Council, the Austria Consulate General, Consulate of the Czech Republic, Consulate General of the Republic of Hungary, Consulate General of the Republic of Poland, Consulate General of the Republic of Slovenia and the Honarary Consulate of the Slovak Republic, were also involved as the symposium brought in ten odds overseas speakers. The two-day programme, a total of twenty-two talks by these speakers and other local artists, patrons and policy makers, attracted notable public interest and was widely reported. Besides event listing on newspapers' cultural pages (such as *Ming Pao* reporter, "Dushi shenyuen – yishu yu gonggong kongjian guoji yantaohui"都市神韻——藝術與公共空間國際研討會, *Ming Pao*, 12 February 2004, D12; *Tai Kung Pao* reporter, "'Yishu yu kongjian' guoji yantaohui jin juxin" 「藝術與空間」國際研討會今舉行 ("Art and space" international symposium held today), *Tai Kung Pao*, 13 February 2004, B03 and "Yishu yu gonggong kongjian guoji yantaohui" 藝術與公共空間國際研討會 (International symposium on art and public space), *Tai Kung Pao,* 14 February 2004, D03), there were also a good number of features and critical discussions on public art in Hong Kong. See for example, *Ming Pao* reporter, "Dushi sheji yi jia yishu kainian" 都市設計宜加藝術概念 (City plan should include artistic concepts), *Ming Pao*, 12 February 2004, D12; *Hong Kong Economic Journal* reporter, "Dushi shenyuen" 都市神韻 (Soul of the City), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 12 February 2004, p.28; Oscar Ho 何慶基, "Shuidi yishu? Shuidi kongjian?" 誰的藝術？誰的空間？(Whose art? Whose space?), *Hong Kong Economic Journal*¸26 February 2004, p.32; Chen Guanzhong 陳冠中, "Xianggang zhowei fangfa" 香港作爲方法 (Hong Kong as Method), *Ming Pao*, 29 February, 2004, D10. The symposium has also stimulated plans for a series of public project. In March, a very literal installation made up of plastic flowers and a set of "S-p-a-c-e", "P-u-b-l-i-c" and "A-r-t" letter blocks was put up outside the Hong Kong Arts Centre by students of the Arts School. Not particularly inspiring, the work nonetheless confirmed interest in the subject. See Hong Kong Arts Centre, *ArtsLink*, May 2004, pp. 34-35.

[308] The restructuring of Hong Kong's voting system became a subject of controversy at the turn of 2004. The process started with a call for universal suffrage (for electing the Chief Executive) by democrats, who suggested that the right to do so in 2007 was promised in the Basic Laws. Subsequent to this proposal were a series of debates and lobbying, among members of the Legislative Council as well as between Hong Kong and Beijing. By April 2004, the controversy reached its climax as Beijing vetoed the plead through an interpretation of Law. A selection of articles from the South China Morning Post chronicles the process: Michael Davis, "A vote for democracy, Michael Davis," 26 November 2003,

new directions in public art? Another factor that may well lead to new developments

in public art is the advocacy for creative industries and plans for the West Kowloon

Cultural District. Converging with capitalism, will such enterprises generate new

kinds of public art?[309] Furthermore, with rhetoric for making Hong Kong an

international metropolis and more frequent appearance of Hong Kong art by the

international art scene, how will public art react to the global gaze and establish its

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p.17; Klaudia Lee, "One man, one vote' isn't everything; Gordon Wu says democracy is also about freedom of expression and rule of law, and must preserve prosperity," 13 December 2003, p.3; Jimmy Cheung and Agnes Lam, "Democratic reform for 2007 'still possible;' But who will decide on changes is the key question in Basic Law interpretation," 29 March 2004, p.1 ; Jimmy Cheung, "Direct vote by 2007 'agreed in 1990,'" 29 March 2004, p.3; SCMP reporter, "Legco should elect the chief executive," 7 April 2004, p.12; Christ Yeung, "Beginning of the end in fight for democracy," 16 April 2004, p.2; Gary Cheung and Raymond Ma, "Democrats unveil their blueprint for 'balanced election;' The plan comes as Li Ka-shing reiterates opposition to fast-paced constitutional reform," 18 April 2004, p.3; Chris Yeung, "Further step to marginalise people's voice," 18 April 2004, p.10; Louisa Yan and Ambrose Leung, "Motion to condemn NPC toned down; Democrats to express regret over universal suffrage decision," 5 May 2004, p.3; Ambrose Leung, "Reform: where HK goes next; Tsang reveals public consultation over electoral change, but warns expecting too much is futile," 12 May 2004, p.1; Gary Cheung and Chloe Lai, "Parties call for larger Election Committee; Proposal would make chief executive selection body more representative," 12 May 2004, p.3; Gary Cheung and Quinton Chan, "Moderate democrats set for talks in Beijing; In first trip since the handover, they will propose 'one man, two votes' formula," 14 May 2004, p.1; Jimmy Cheung, "One-man, one-vote 'contravenes ruling,'" 18 May 2004, p. 4; Stella Lee and Jimmy Cheung, "Office of democrat smeared in attack; I won't be frightened into being quiet, says Leung Yiu-chung," 20 May 2004, p.2; SCMP reporter, "Confrontation will bring Hong Kong universal suffering," 22 May 2004, p.10.

[309] The government's intention to promote the creative industries and public art is official announced by Patrick Ho, Secretary for Home Affairs, in an address given in the Home Affairs Bureau meeting on 9 January 2004. See Patrick Ho, "Minzhengshiwuju jujiang zai lifahui minzhengshiwu weiyuanhui huiyi faran chuanwen" 民政事務局局長在立法會民政事務委員會會議發言全文 (Address by the Secretary for Home Affairs to the board of the Home Affairs Bureau) (Hong Kong: Government Information Services, 2004). The West Kowloon Cultural District, an expansive site of 40 ha stretching all along the southwestern Kowloon promenade, is Hong Kong's first zoned area for cultural facilities. (See the development's official website: www.hplb.gov.hk) At a scale as large as the international airport, the development – a public art project in its broadest sense – attracts attention from all social sectors. The cultural field was certainly attentive, and as developers keenly competed for the bid, cultural practitioners were concerned with how such a huge amount of resources could yield genuine cultural growth. See for example, Danny Yung, "Liangge timu ke shandian jianyi – guanwu Xijiulong jiehua" 兩個題目和三點建議 ——關於西九龍計劃 (Two topics and three suggestions – about West Kowloon project), *Ming Pao*, 5 November 2003.

local identity?[310] These questions are all worth examining and they shall be very provocative for both the subject and the context. As a first academic survey on local public art, this research aims to draw up a basic framework for the field. At the end of the discussion, it is hoped that this thesis has suggested useful ways for comprehending the local public, the development of local public art and the relationship between art and society, and its contribution is hopefully helpful for later practices and studies.

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[310] To establish Hong Kong as a "world-class city" was a fervent slogan of the Hong Kong SAR government. Fashioning such an image, the government has mostly looked overseas (such as the proposal to turn Aberdeen into a fisherman wharf, and a post-SARS harbour show starring overseas singers). The failure in recognizing local qualities was criticized by many, who at the same time urged for rethinking for what was meant by the Hong Kong character. See for example, *Hong Kong Economic Times* reporter, "Women xuyao shuiman jiugui di hongdizhan ma? 我們需要睡滿酒鬼的紅地氈嗎? (Do we need a red carpet for sleepy drunkards?), *Hong Kong Economic Times*, 17 December 2003, C19; "Congjian Xianggang" 重建香港 (Reconstructing Hong Kong), *Hong Kong Economic Times*, 17 December 2003, C19; Yu Shude余樹德, "Cong Weigonghui dao pipixiong, Xianggang di wenhua teshi zai nail?" 從維港匯到啤啤熊 香港的文化特色在哪裏？(From Harbour show to Teddy Bear, where is Hong Kong's cultural character?), *Ming Pao*, 17 May 2004, D06.
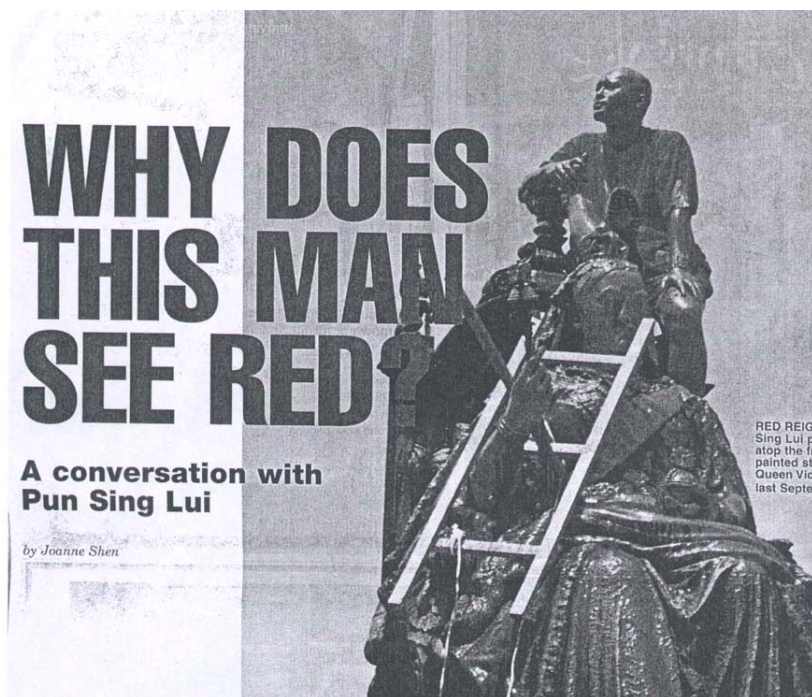
Top: **Image 1**
Pun Sing-lui, *Pun Sing-lui Incident*, Victoria Park, 1996. Image reproduced from *Hong Kong Magazine,* 14 February 1999.

Bottom left: **Image 2**
Pun Sing-lui, *Red Action*, Bank of China Building open area, 1995. Image reproduced from Pun Sing-lui, ed. *Pre '97 Special Art Zone* 前九七藝術特區 (Hong Kong: 1996).

Bottom right: **Image 3**
Jens Galshiot, *Pillar of Shame*, imported to Hong Kong in 1997. Photograph by the author at Victoria Park, 4 June 2003.

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Top: **Image 4**
Forever Blooming Bauhinia, installed in the Forever Blooming Bauhinia Plaza outside the Exhibition and Convention Centre in 1997. Photograph by the author, 17 May 2002.

Bottom: **Image 5**
Monument in Commemoration of Hong Kong Reunification with China, unveiled in the Forever Blooming Bauhinia Plaza outside the Exhibition and Convention Centre in 1999. Photograph by the author, 17 May 2002.

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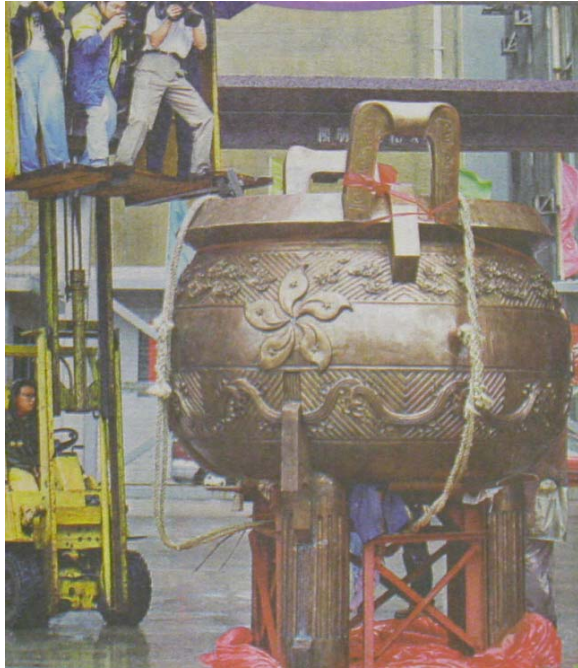
Top left: **Image 6**
Van Lau, *Hong Kong Tripod*, 1997. Photograph reproduced from *Oriental Daily*, 26 December 1997.

Top right: **Image 7**
Zunzi, *Reunification Tripod*. Image reproduced from *Apple Daily,* 19 July 1997.

Bottom: **Image 8**
Hong Kong Tripod with joss sticks, Po Lin Monastery. Photograph taken on 17 March 2004, courtesy of Emily Zhao.

Top: **Image 9**
Law Hon-wah, *Lanting Preface*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 1999," Tsing Yi Municipal Complex. Photograph by the author, 16 August 2003.

Bottom: **Image 10**
Chu Hon-sun, *Life is as on Stage*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 1999," Kwai Tsing Theatre. Image reproduced from the promotional brochure of "Public Art Scheme 1999" (Hong Kong: Arts Promotion Office: 1999).

Top: **Image 11**
Chu Hon-sun, *Working at Dawn*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 2001," Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung. Photograph by the author, 2 December 2001.

Middle: **Image 12**
Chu Hon-sun, *Rich Harvest*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 2001," Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung. Image reproduced from the promotional brochure of "Public Art Scheme 2001" (Hong Kong: Arts Promotion Office: 2001).

Bottom: **Image 13**
Chu Hon-sun, *Untitled*, commissioned by New World Development for the opening of Hong Kong Culture Centre, 1992. Photography by the author, 16 December 2001.

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Top: **Image 14**
Lee Chin-fai, *Today in Yesterday – Meeting of Minds*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 2001," Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung. Photograph by the author, 2 December 2001.

Middle: **Image 15**
Lee Chin-fai, *Today in Yesterday –Mutual Trust*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 2001," Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung. Photograph by the author, 2 December 2001.

Botton: **Image 16**
Poon Siu-wah, *Fortune and Auspices*, winning entry of Public Art Team's "Public Art Scheme 2001," Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung. Image reproduced from the promotional brochure of "Public Art Scheme 2001" (Hong Kong: Arts Promotion Office, 2001).

Top: **Image 17**; *bottom*: **Image 18**

Public comments on message board, exhibition of Winning Entries of "Public Art Scheme
2002," Exhibition Gallery, City Hall. Photograph by the author, 4 September 2002.

Top: **Image 19 & 20**
Larry Kirkland, *Flight of Fancy,* Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Hong Kong station.
Image reproduced from MTR "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Bottom left: **Image 21**
Gaylord Chan, *Swift and Safe*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Hong Kong station.
Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Bottom right: **Image 22**
Neil Dawson, *Birds of a Feather*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Tsing Yi station.
Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Top: **Image 23**
Display panels of "Community Art Gallery," Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations." Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Middle: **Image 24**
Raymong Fung, *Pat Sin Range*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Tai Koo station. Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Bottom: **Image 25**

Zhao Haitien, *Recreation of Being*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Fortress Hill station. Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Top: **Image 26**
Mariko Jesse, *Large Paintings Featuring Cups and Teapots*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in Cheung Sha Wan station. Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Middle: **Image 27**
Showcases of "MTR Roving Art," Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations." Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Bottom: **Image 28**
Tao Ho and children in North Point, *I Love North Point*, Mass Transit Railway "Art in Stations" display in North Point station. Image reproduced from "Art in Stations" promotional brochure.

Top: **Image 29**
Advertisement by Nokia at Kowloon Tong MTR station. Photograph by the author, 14 March 2003.

Bottom: **Image 30**
Advertisement by Bank of Netherlands at MTR Hong Kong station. Photograph by the author, 23 April 2003.

Top left: **Image 31**
Ricky Yeung, Fanling Lutheran Secondary School and The Salvation Army Shek Wu School, *Together*, Central, undated. Photograph by the author, 16 August 2003.

Top right: **Image 32**
Anonymous painting facing Chater Road (beside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel), Artist Commune's painting on electricity supply boxes project in Central, 2002. Photograph by the author, 16 August 2003.

Bottom left: **Image 33**
Anonymous painting facing Des Vouex Road (beside Wheelock House), Artist Commune's painting on electricity supply boxes project in Central, 2002. Photograph by the author, 16 August 2003.

Bottom right: **Image 34**
Chan Kao-on, *Central*, Artist Commune's painting on electricity supply boxes project in Central, 2002. Image reproduced from *Ming Pao*, 21 June 2002.
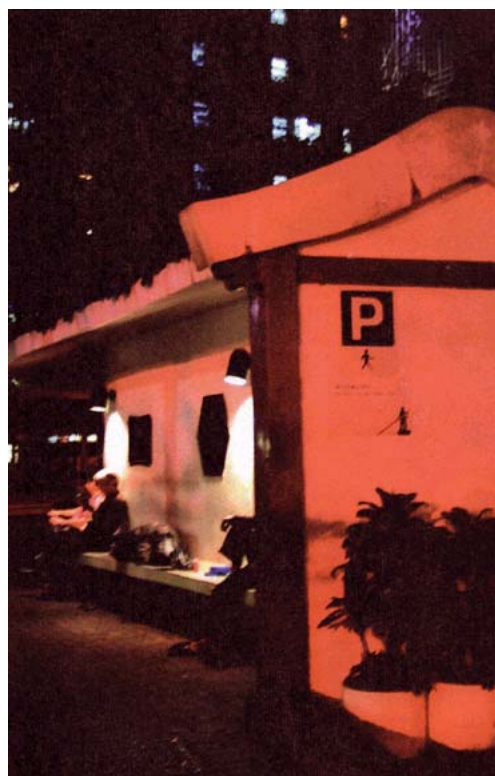
Top: **Image 35** (*left*) **& 36** (*right*)
Pedestrian Traffic Signs, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

Botton left: **Image 37**
Gate Patterns, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

Bottom right: **Image 38**
Searching for Level Grounds, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

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Top: **Image 39**
A dictionary about foul languages, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by
Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

Bottom: **Image 40**
Games and chess mark out on the street, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,*
Sheung Wan, curated by Kacey Wong, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

Top left: **Image 41**
Hanging green color clothing on the tree, in
*City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the
City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan,
2000. Courtesy of the curator.
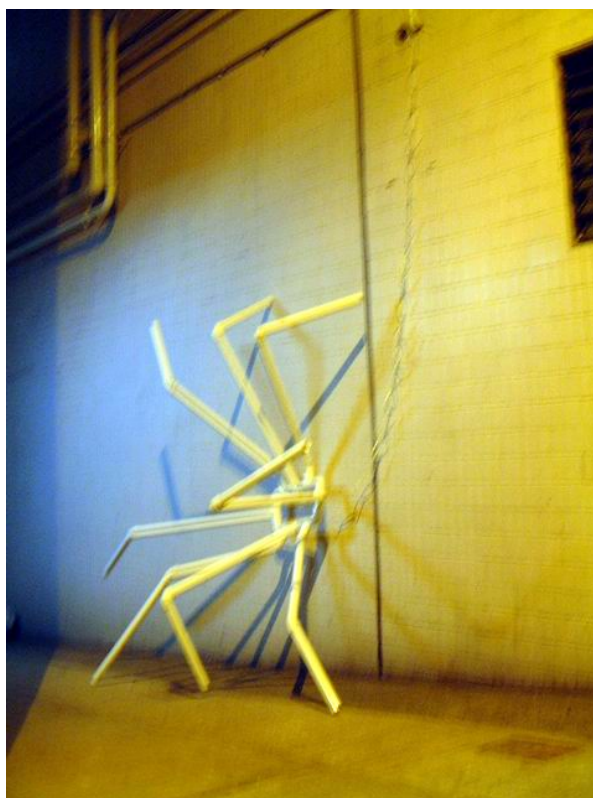
Top right: **Image 42**
Spider, in *City Space – Mysterious Art
Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey
Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the
curator.

Bottom: **Image 43**
Kam Chi-keung, *Installing bird nests on the
street*, in *City Space – Mysterious Art
Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey
Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the
curator.

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Top: **Image 44**
Installing mailbox on the tree, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

Middle: **Image 45**
Installing some fake garbage bins on the street, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.
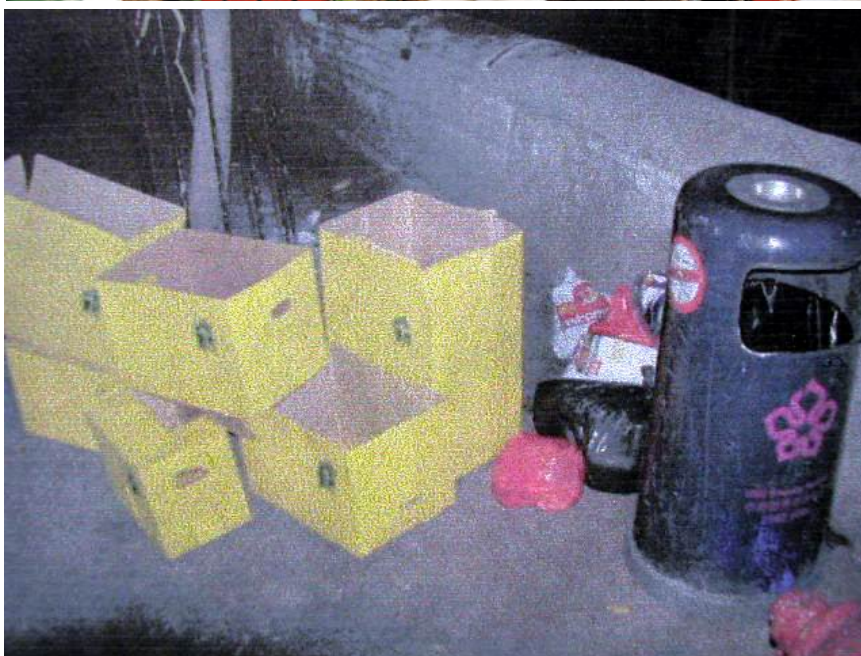
Bottom: **Image 46**
Let It Cry, in *City Space – Mysterious Art Installation in the City,* curated by Kacey Wong, Sheung Wan, 2000. Courtesy of the curator.

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Top: **Image 47**
Corrin Chan, *Tuen Mun is an Offspin*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Tuen Mun Town Plaza, 2001. Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.

Middle: **Image 48**
Kwok Mang-ho, *Art is Frog, Frog is Life*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Shatin Town Plaza, 2001. Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.

Bottom: **Image 49**
Kam Chi-keung, *Protector*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Hollywood Plaza, 2001. Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.

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Top: **Image 50**
Freeman Lau, *Dream of Desire,* in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Episode boutique, Central, 2001. Image reproduced from *Art Windows* postcard collection.

Bottom left: **Image 51**
Michael Chan, *Arrow of Desire*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Seibu department store, Causeway Bay, 2001. Image reproduced from *Art Windows* postcard collection.

Bottom right: **Image 52**
Neon sign outside a nightclub in Mongkok. Photograph by the author, 25 May 2003.
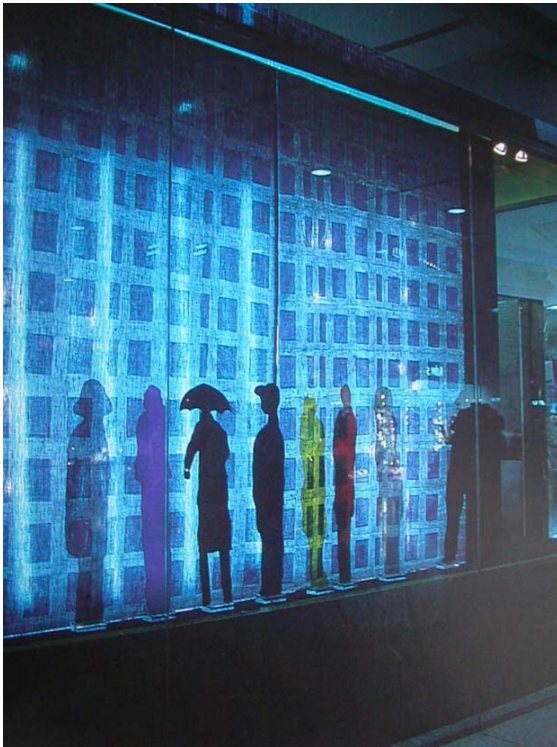
Top left: **Image 53**
Chu Hing-wah, *Night (2)*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Body Shop, Pacific Place, Admiralty, 2001. Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.
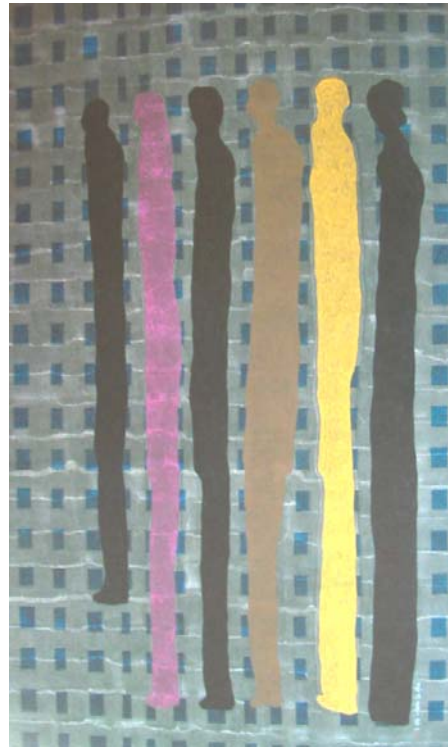
Top right: **Image 54**
Chu Hing-wah, *Night (1)*, 2001.

Bottom left: **Image 55**
Kacey Wong, *When Exactly is the Moment Dreams Become Reality?*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Joyce boutique, Central, 2001. Image reproduced from *Art Windows* postcard collection.

Bottom right: **Image 56**
Detail of *When Exactly is the Moment Dreams Become Reality?* Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.

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Top: **Image 57**
Alan Chan, *A Bowl of Rice Fits People of All Kinds*, in *Art Windows*, curated by Sabrina Fung, Seibu department store, Causeway Bay, 2001. Image downloaded from *Art Windows website*: http://www.artwindows.org.

Middle: **Image 58**
Connie Lam & the Choi household, *My Little Garden*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.
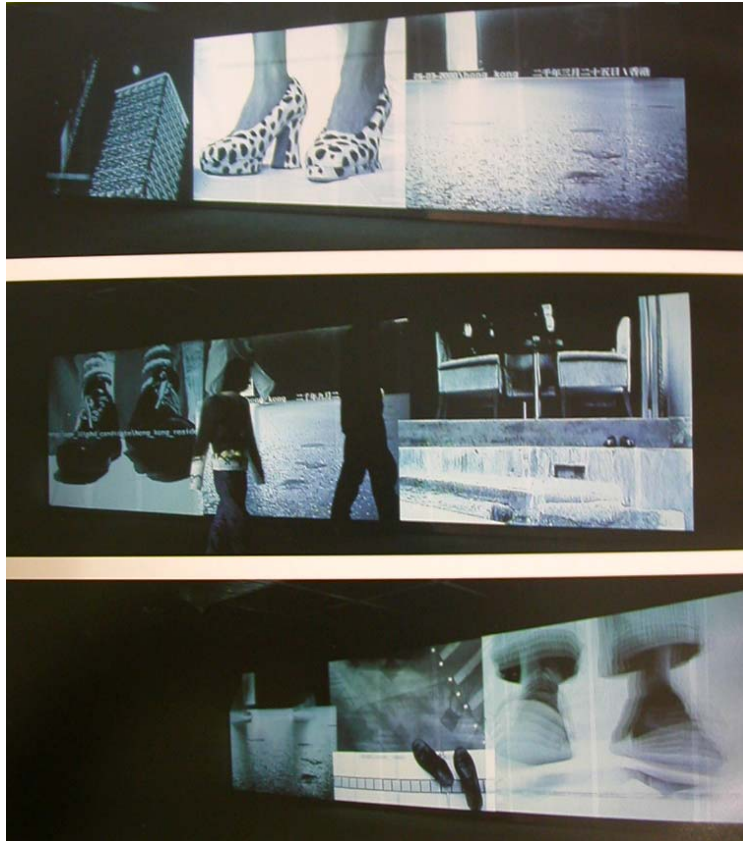
Bottom: **Image 59**
Sara Wong and the Tam household, *Star Watching in the Front Yard at Home*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Top left: **Image 60**
Wu Wing Yee and the Yue household,
Dog Proof, in *Home Affairs*, curated
by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan,
1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Middle: **Image 61**
Craig Au-yeung and the Liu
household, *Life is a File*, in *Home
Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung
and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of
the curator.

Bottom: **Image 62**
Freeman Lau and the Tse household,
Two-head Family, in *Home Affairs*,
curated by Siu King-chung and
Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the
curator.

Top: **Image 63**
Benny Ding and the Leong household, *Dream Alike?*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Middle: **Image 64**
Evelyn Liang and the Tran household, *Family Quilt*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Bottom: **Image 65**
Chan Mi-ji and the Chin household, *chin ching man as at 310599*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Top: **Image 66**
Choi Yan Chi and the Chan household, *Home Affairs*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Bottom: **Image 67**
James Wong, *Homeless 1-2*, in *Home Affairs*, curated by Siu King-chung and Howard Chan, 1999. Courtesy of the curator.

Top: **Image 68**
Miranda Tsui, *Shoes Stories*, in *Landscape*, curated by Young Hay, 2000. Image reproduced from *Hong Kong Bienniel Exhibition 2001 Catelogye* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2001).

Bottom: **Image 69**
Siu King-chung, *The Beautiful Cityscapes I Collected,* in *Cityscapes Reading Guide*, organized by Siu King-chung, exhibition in *Landscape*, curated by Young Hay, 2000. Courtesy of the artist.

Top: **Image 70**
Hong Kong Pace Scape, in *Cityscapes Reading Guide*, organized by Siu King-chung, exhibition in *Landscape*, curated by Young Hay, 2000. Courtesy of Siu King-chung.
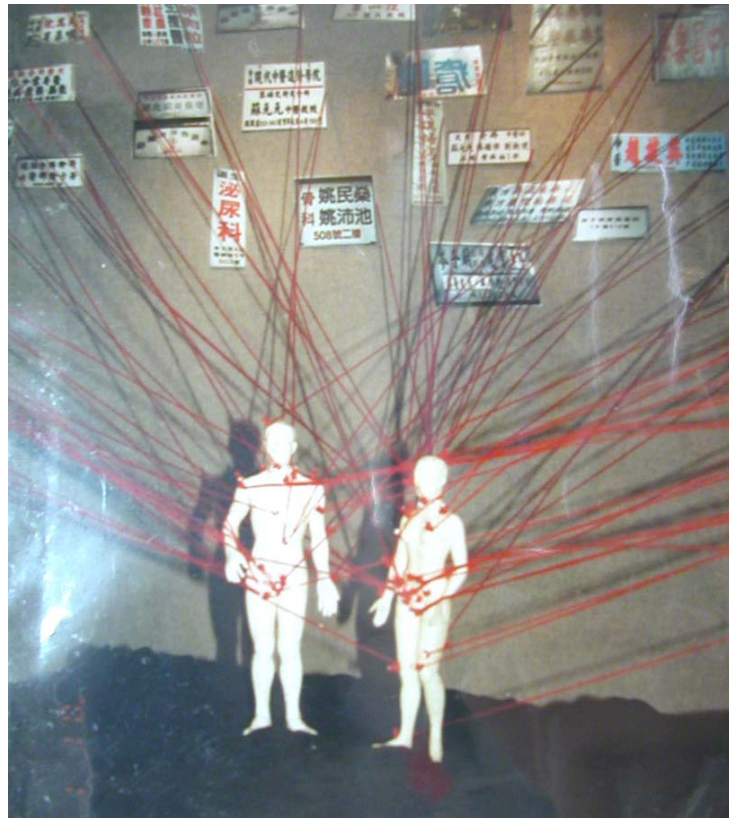
Bottom: **Image 71**
Chinese Clinic and Meridian-scape, in *Cityscapes Reading Guide*, organized by Siu King-chung, exhibition in *Landscape*, curated by Young Hay, 2000. Courtesy of Siu King-chung.
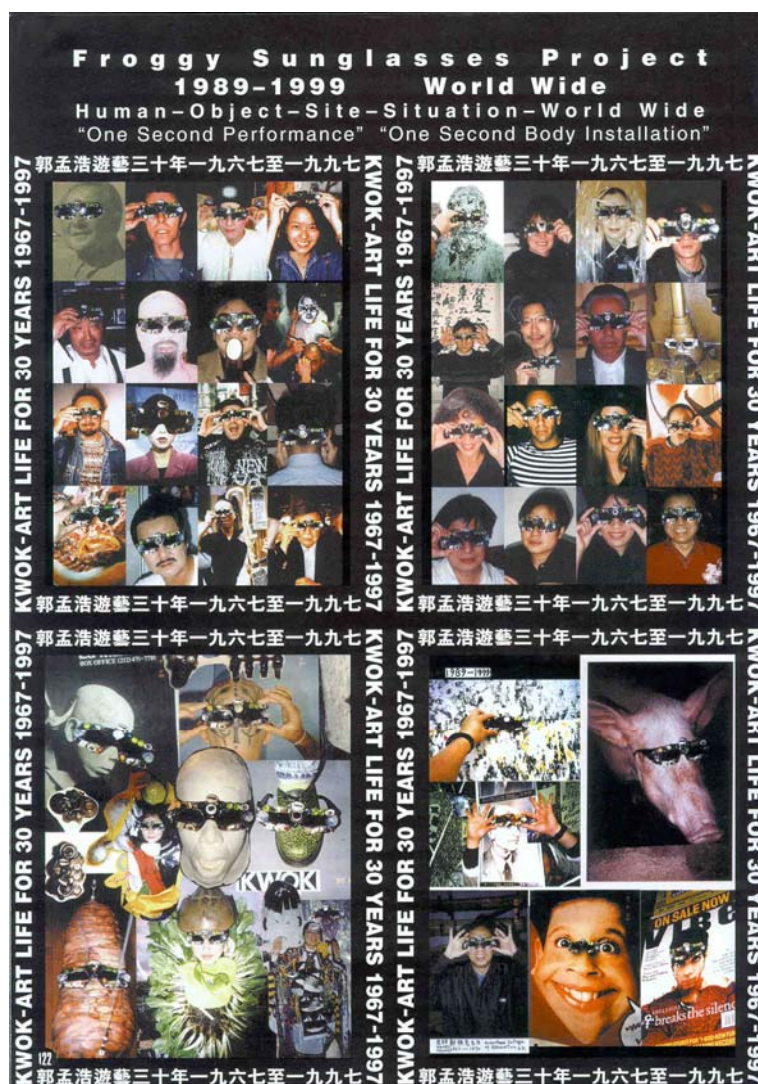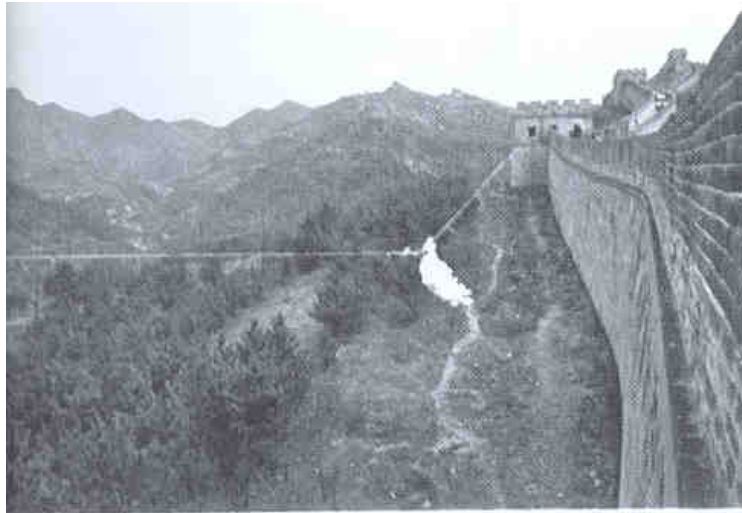
Top: **Image 72**
Kwok Mang-ho, *Great Wall Plastic Bag*, 1979. Image reproduced from Kwok Meng-ho, *Kwok – Art Life for 30 Years 1967 – 1997* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999).
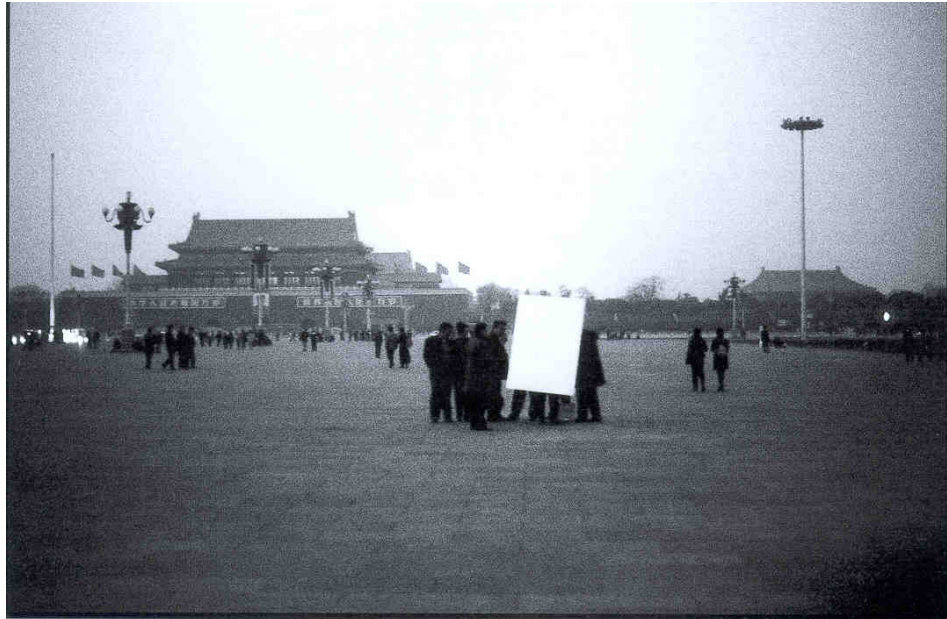
Bottom: **Image 73**
Kwok Mang-ho, *Froggy Sunglasses* project, 1989 – present. Image reproduced from Kwok Meng-ho, *Kwok – Art Life for 30 Years 1967 – 1997* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999).

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Top: **Image 74**
Kwok Mang-ho, "Frog" architecture. Image reproduced from Kwok Mang-ho, *Kwok – Art Life for 30 Years 1967 – 1997* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999).

Bottom: **Image 75**
Kwok Mang-ho, "Frogscape." Image reproduced from Kwok Meng-ho, *Kwok – Art Life for 30 Years 1967 – 1997* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 1999).

N Dimensional Frog H.K. Arts Centre 1998
無次元行為時空探討,香港藝術中心附近環境,1998
N Dimension Performance Time & Space studies,

OVER HONG KONG
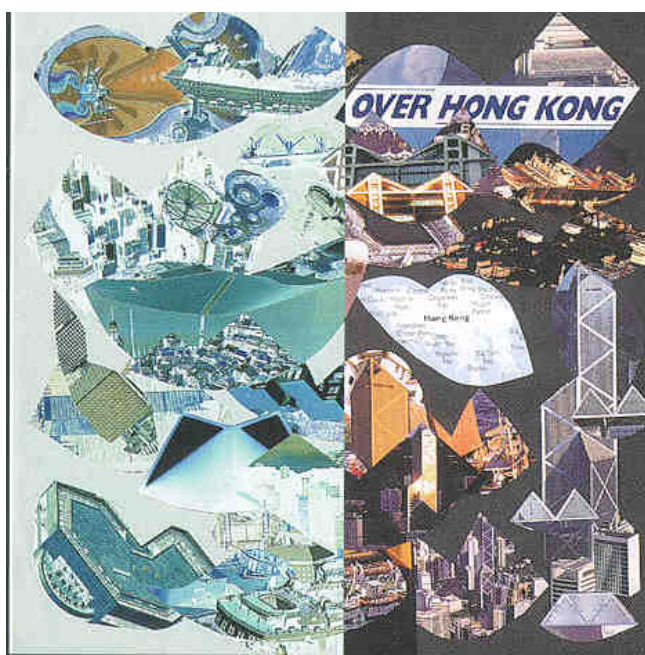
Top: **Image 76 & 77**
Kith Tsang, *Hello! Hong Kong – Part Four*, Rennie's Mill, 1996. Image reproduced from Oscar Ho and David Clarke, eds., *Someone else's story – our footnotes. Contemporary Art of Hong Kong (1990-1999)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2002).

Bottom: **Image 78**
Flower presentation to Cesar's *The Flying Frenchman*. Photograph by the author, 4 June 2003.
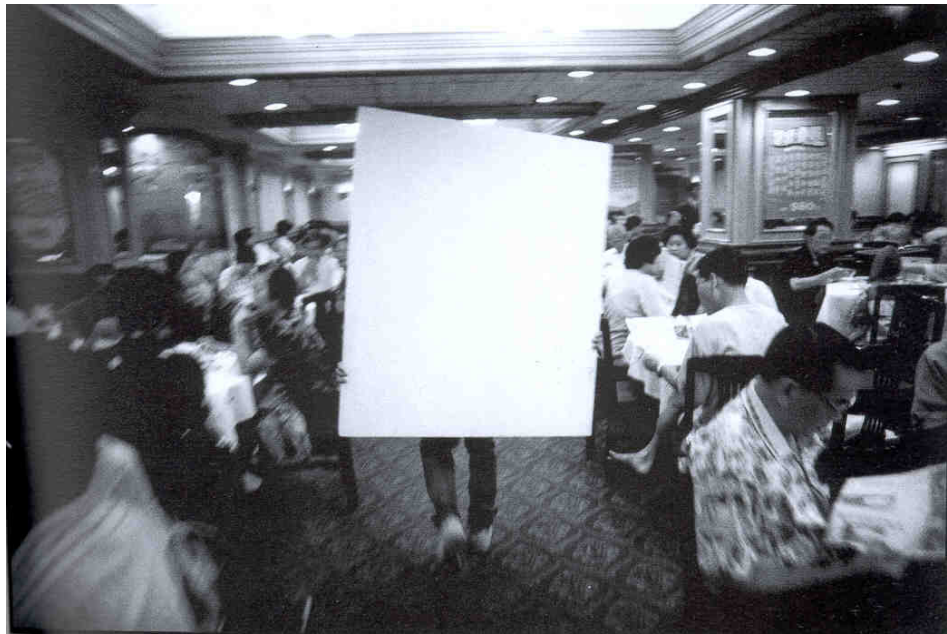
Top: **Image 79**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Tiananmen trip, 2000. Photograph by Fang Fang. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Bottom: **Image 80**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Hong Kong trip, 1995. Photograph by Kith Tsang. I Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).
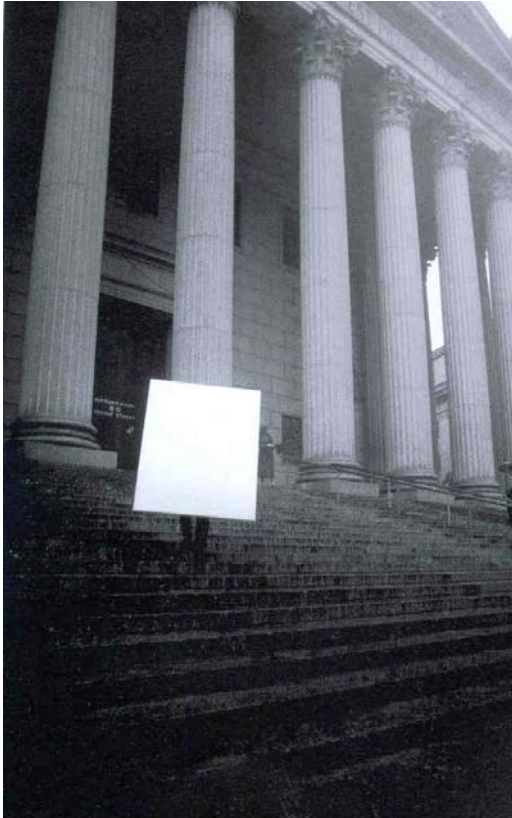
Top left: **Image 81**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, New York trip, 1998. Photograph by Cheung Chi-wai. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Top right: **Image 82**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, New York trip, 1998. Photograph by Cheung Chi-wai. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Bottom: **Image 83**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, New York trip, 1998. Photograph by Cheung Chi-wai. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Top: **Image 84**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Berlin trip, 1998. Photograph by Nana Frenzel and Christina Rothmann. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Middle: **Image 85**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Berlin trip, 1998. Photograph by Nana Frenzel and Christina Rothmann. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Bottom: **Image 86**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Beijing trip, 1998. Photograph by Wong Hung-fei. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).
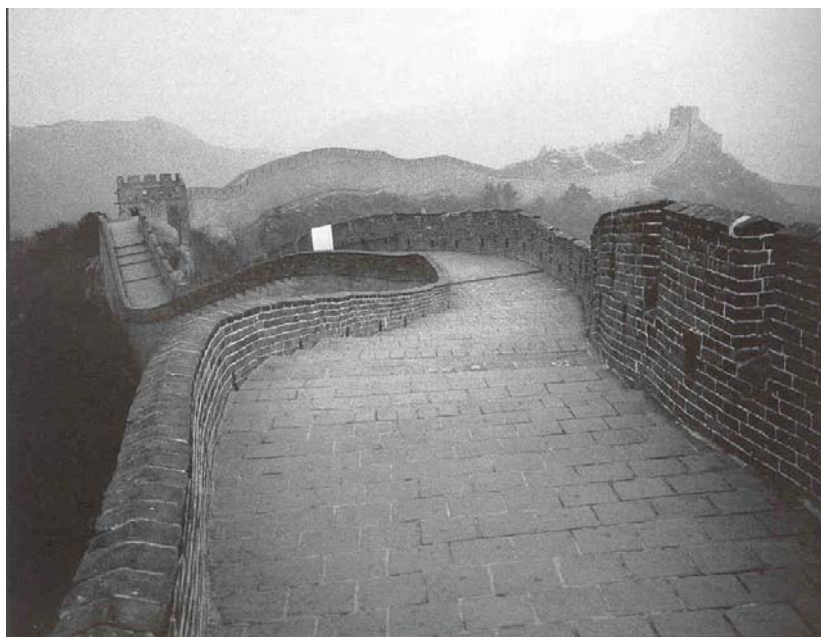
Top: **Image 87**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Beijing trip, 1998. Photograph by Wong Hung-fei. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Middle: **Image 88**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Beijing trip, 1998. Photograph by Wong Hung-fei. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Bottom: **Image 89**
Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (after Courbet)*, Beijing trip, 1998. Photograph by Wong Hung-fei. Image reproduced from Young Hay, *Bonjour, Young Hay (After Courbet)* (Hong Kong, 2000).

Top: **Image 90**
So Yan-kei, *Bitter Gourd No.5,* 1996 (exterior). Image reproduced from So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000)
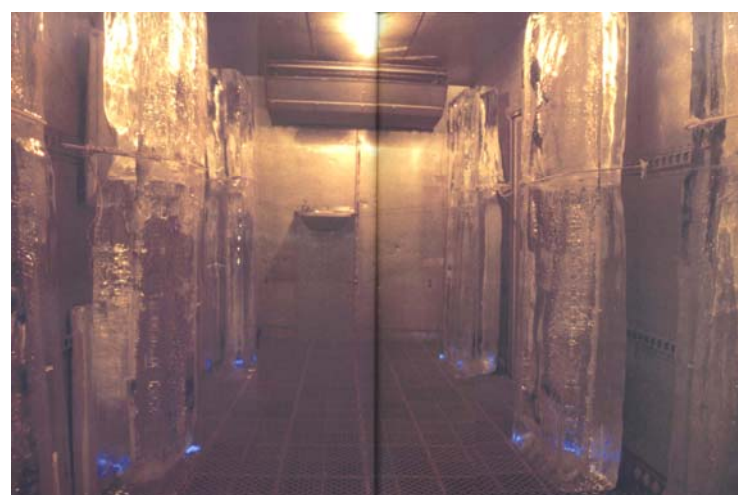
Middle: **Image 91**
So Yan-kei, *Bitter Gourd No.5,* 1996 (exterior). Image reproduced from So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000)
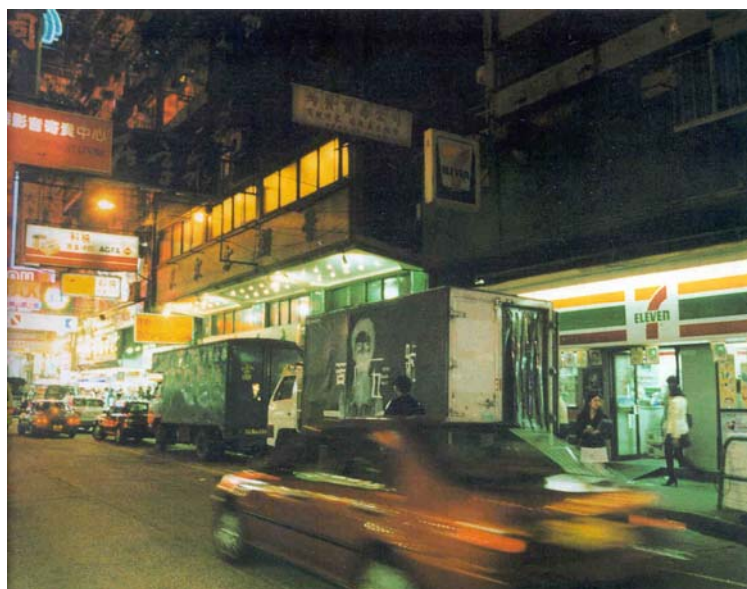
Bottom: **Image 92**
So Yan-kei, *Bitter Gourd No.5*, 1996 (interior). Image reproduced from So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000).
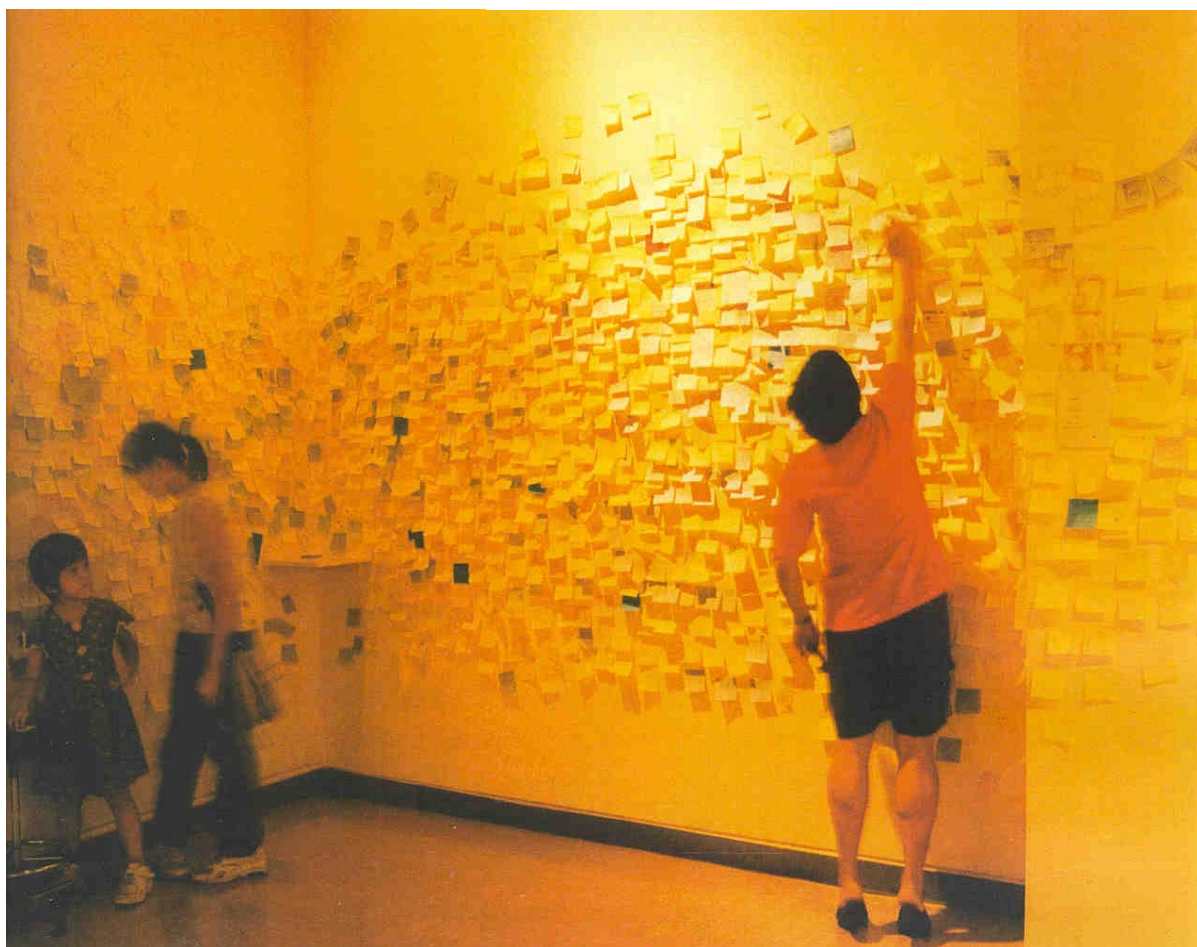

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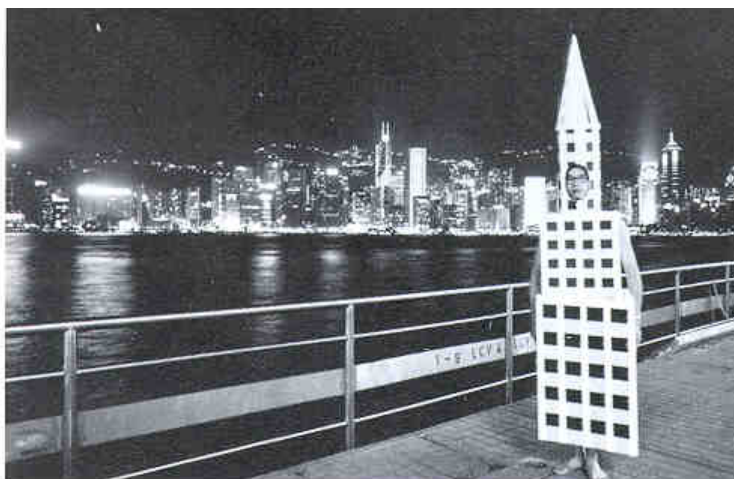
Top: **Image 93** (*left*) **& 94** (*right*)
So Yan-kei, *Bitter Gourd No.5*, 1996 (detail). Image reproduced from So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000).

Bottom: **Image 95**
So, Yan-kei, *Memo*, 1999. Image reproduced from So Yan-kei, *So Yan-kei* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, 2000).

Top: **Image 96**
Kacey Wong, *Personal Skyscraper*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist.

Middle: **Image 97**
Kacey Wong, *Drift City*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom: **Image 98**
Kacey Wong, *Drift City*, 2001 (detail). Courtesy of the artist.