



香港藝術館·館長(現代藝術)·譚美兒

「不中不英」

如果廣東話將要消失，你最想保留哪一句話？香港人說話又中又英，時中時英，最後不中不英，這是否就是我們對港式廣東話的集體記憶？語言跟文化、藝術一樣，都是具生命的有機體，它所表現的活力、特質，是生活在同一地方的人所共同擁有的。所以，語言是一種珍貴的公共文化、公共遺產和公共空間。可是，有哪個香港人曾為這種中英混雜的公共財產自豪？不中不英的港式廣東話(Chinglish)在讀書時是教授在課堂裡禁說的。任何公開演說或面試場合更是要說中是英，說英是英。誰，會認為它是優秀的語言呢？

香港由於殖民歷史關係，華洋混集，又長年以雙語教學，由是衍生了一套「不倫不類」的語言。開埠至今，香港一直游離於兩種截然不同語境的迷思中，人們一直不斷在中與英之間尋找自己。回歸以後我們用的又是兩文三語，香港人還要忙於惡補「煲冬瓜」；再加上全球化的浪潮，我們又努力用「國際語言」與世界接軌…香港人不斷在語言裡迷失、摸索。原本具有自己思想感情、具有生活智慧、富創造活力的語言，一直處於弱勢、邊緣，取而代之的是各種的「官方語言」、「祖國語言」和「國際語言」。就這樣，香港人一直用別人的邏輯思考問題，用別人的眼睛看世界。沒想到，自己的文字語言，才是自己的呼吸。

藝術語言和寫讀能力

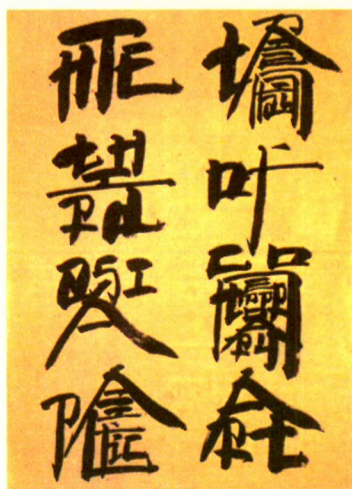
縱使我們並非語言學家，至少我們都是語言的「用家」。語言決定了我們的思維邏輯，主宰了意識形態。可是，對於自己的語言文化，我們並未有太多的尊重和關愛。這反映了我們對自己的文化傳統淺薄的理解，對本土文化身份欠缺認同。究其原因，在學校裡、在主流教育中，我們強調的只是文字「寫讀能力」(literacy)。基本教育就是把一個目不識丁的文盲，變成有寫讀能力的人。普遍的思想是，能讀能看能寫字就等於有「文化」。有趣的是，我們生活在一個圖像世界，特別在二十一世紀的今天，要解讀充斥在我們身邊各式各樣的影像信息，就得擁有對視覺語言的認知和掌握。可是，培養學生、市民對的「視覺語言寫讀能力」(visual literacy) 這工作，卻常被受忽視。

藝術之所以珍貴，正在於此。藝術家就好比文化、生活的翻譯家，他們透過作品審視自己，與觀眾一起作公共性的思考。藝術家用的是視覺語言、藝術語言，那是一種脫離文字語言慣性和既定框框的表達方式與溝通工具。由是，藝術作品讓我們看見更廣闊的世界，觸碰到生活裡更深層的東西。

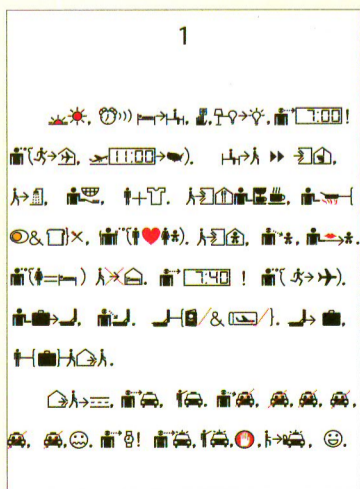
文字語言與視覺語言的較量，視覺語言對文字語言的挑戰、調侃，是一場發人深省、極其精彩的思想搏擊。當代重要的中國藝術家以語言文字創作著名的有徐冰和谷文達等。徐冰作有挑戰傳統的偽漢字「天書」(插圖1)；反思文化碰撞、融合的方塊字「新英語書法」(插圖2)；以及他最新思考國際語言文化問題的「地書」(插圖3)等。谷文達則有對全球化發展思考的「聯合國—中國紀念碑：天壇」(插圖4)；另從語言探討文化翻譯問題的「碑林—唐詩後著」(插圖5)等。他們透過(視覺)語言，對中國文化、對世界文明作出批判、思考和質詢。他們的作品大大地提升了觀者對個人、對世界的認知。



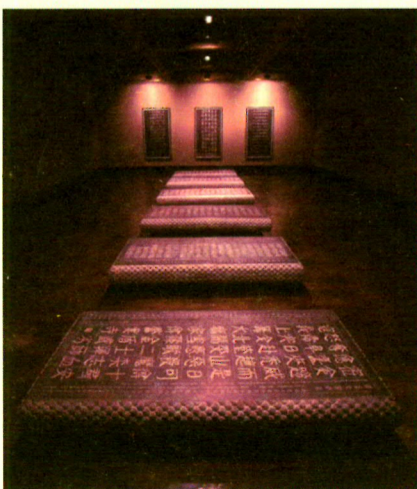
■ (插圖1) 徐冰·天書 1987-1991



■ (插圖2) 徐冰·新英語書法 1998



■ (插圖3) 徐冰·地書 2006



■ (插圖5) 谷文達·碑林—唐詩後著 1993-2004



■ (插圖4) 谷文達·聯合國—中國紀念碑：天壇 1998

「本地薑」

香港藝術家利用語言文字創作的，六、七十年代的有韓志勳(插圖6)、張義(插圖7)等。他們以中國文字作傳統文化符號，混和西方現代藝術語言，尋索中西融合的現代精神。八、九十年代，相信「生活就是藝術，藝術就是生活」的郭孟浩(插圖8)，作品用的是生活的語言，任何在生活裡面出現的東西，都是他的創作材料；另有喜歡用中國文字構思作品，糅合設計與雕塑的蔡啟仁(插圖9)等。新一代的藝術家則有王天仁、石家豪等。王天仁喜歡搜集在廣東話裡與動物有關的俚語(插圖10)，用撿來的木材作其漫畫式的雕塑。石家豪則愛把大眾文化如流行歌曲帶進其傳統工筆畫中(插圖11)，在在反映了新一代藝術與流行文化語言的關係。

是次展覽以語言為題，以館藏出發，探尋香港藝術的當代語境。展覽取名自本館的一件藏品——卜玉珍的「不中不英」。「融匯中西」一直是主導香港文化研究的論述，但是「不中不西」可能是更準確的描述。卜的作品以港式廣東話創作，表現了藝術家對地方特色敏銳的觀察。作品作於1999年，正藉香港重歸祖國，香港人仍在身份問題上糾纏的時候。作品在思考語言、本土歷史文化和香港藝術本質等問題上，提供了很有意思的起點。展覽同時展出的藝術家包括李慧嫻、曾建華、程展緯、洪強和黃琮瑜，他們都是歷屆香港藝術雙年展的得獎者和入選者，他們的作品為探討本土(視覺)語言文化提供了理想的材料。

李慧嫻的作品，是香港雙語教學的代表作。她的兩組作品把玩的是中、英文語言中的男、女觀念。她的「偽」術字典，故意製造誤讀，混淆視聽。李用的是漫畫式、卡通化的視覺語言，彷彿就是視覺上的港式俚語。「正統藝術」都向精美巧工方向走，李偏愛粗糙，她就像女版周星馳，善於把莊嚴、悲觀的東西，以通俗、幽默的語言演繹。她的作品具人民性，對小市民平凡的生活作出禮贊，對被受忽略者的生存空間寄予同情。她顛倒一切雅俗、美醜、男女的既定標準、關係。她的語言像電腦病毒一樣打亂觀眾的慣性思維，向社會提出探問。

相比起李慧嫻，曾建華的作品對語言文化應否有雅俗之分提出了更嚴厲的質詢。他的作品重點也是在於顛覆一切的「常理」。他把一般被人反感的粗口文化、次文化揭示於人前。他設計的視覺圖案亦中亦西，又非中非西。細看之下，美侖美奐的包裝藏著的是露骨的文字、市井的語言。視覺引發起的聯想與意識的落差，究竟是中是英，是美還是醜，叫人越看越糊塗。

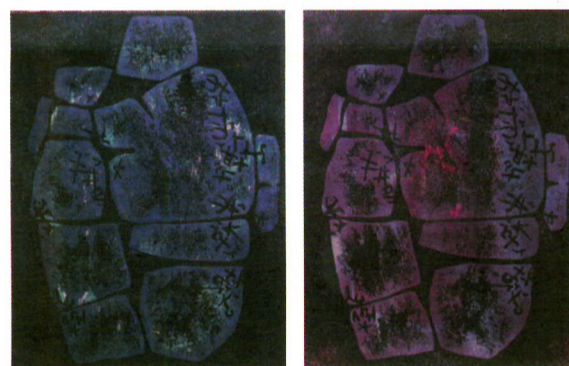
如果說曾建華的「粗口」作品，是為長期被受遺棄的本土文化發出叫喊。同樣對本土語言漸漸消亡有

感而發的程展緯，則試圖透過作品對本土文化進行積極搶救。正如很多殖民地一樣，英語在香港一直備受尊崇，香港人雖然開始推行母語教學，但在國際化的風潮下，英語始終保有壓倒性的地位。有見及此，程特別向他認為未受英語污染的國家學習原始的語言文化。他的作品嘗試以語言教室的方式，繼續把本土的、弱勢的語言文化散佈開去。

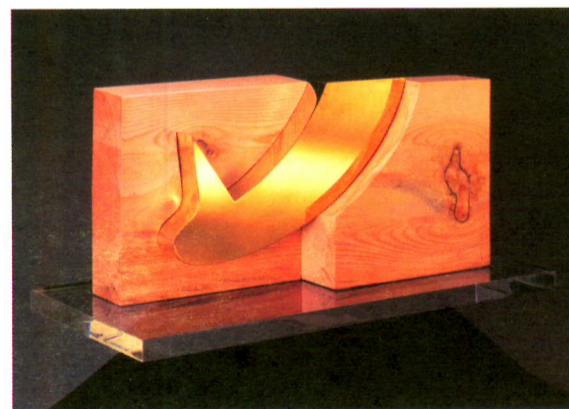
洪強關心的同樣是語言在世界高速發展下出現的失衡問題。在他的多媒體互動作品中，洪探討的是人自身與城市發展的關係。有感於聯合國宣佈以簡體中文取代繁體中文，又眼見城市不斷的建設、拆卸，他巧妙地把時下流行的「豐胸」、「瘦身」話題與語言、城市這種「此消彼長」的景觀連在一起。作品中文字與人的互動若即若離，道盡了個人在這種境遇裡複雜矛盾的心情，以及語言文化、地方歷史與個人微妙的關係。

黃琮瑜的兩件作品，同樣以高科技創作，用最當代的視覺語言思考自身和藝術的問題。黃遊戲在不同的藝術語言、概念與時空裡面，作品「中華長卷」糅合中國傳統文化材料和西方設計的視覺元素，說的卻是香港人都熟悉的歷史事件。另一作品「靈水」把水墨精神和現代科技結合，將水、墨、紙千餘年裡的傳統互動，加入現代的元素，讓觀眾參與。黃以國際語言為傳統藝術作翻譯，在藝術語言的探尋上，正如大多數的香港藝術家一樣，他並不拘泥於工具、方法、概念上的東、西；新、舊，他相信「一加一大於二」，就是說中加西、現代加傳統，結果是可以變化多端的。

¹「一加一大於二」的創作理念原出自香港著名前輩藝術家王無邪。王的藝術溶匯中西，他一生東西文化兼學，自言為「東西間道」。黃琮瑜曾跟隨王習畫，也以王的創作理論為濫觴。



■ (插圖7) 張義·化石 (1及2) 1960年代



■ (插圖9) 蔡啟仁·藏 (局部) 1995

「共生」文化

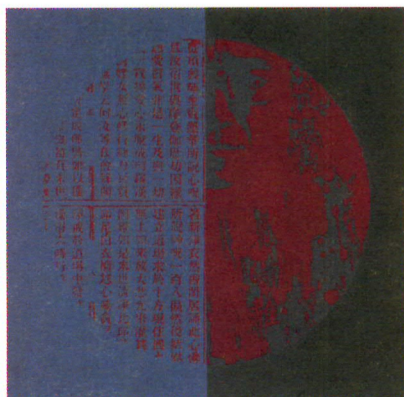
籌備展覽之際，恰巧在雜誌讀到拉雷·費恩(Larry Feign)一篇討論「港式廣東話」的文章，文中提到的幾個論點甚堪細嚼。在研究港式廣東話時，費恩留意到對這「不中不英」的語言，一般人有兩種態度：一是把它輕視作「笑話」(joke)；一是把它看扁為「病語」。費恩認為「港式廣東話」裡看似「錯譯」、「誤用」的英語，其實是一種充滿智慧的「雙語-俚語複合體」。他認為這種混雜用語的出現，並非沿於香港人對語言偶然的誤用或不求甚解的學習態度，而是在不受傳統語言框架束縛下產生的一種獨特的語言。它糅合了兩種「超級語文」——中文和英文，就是全球最多人使用的兩種語文——所以它是一種極具威力的語言，是人類史上最能把人結合起來的一種溝通工具。費恩更謂，類似的「中式英語/英式中文」在世界不同華人地方出現，在這種「新世界語言」的發展上，香港是一個「先驅者」，她的位置相當於這新文化國度裡的「梵帝崗」。²費恩的論說，為香港文化、藝術提供了一個很有意思的解讀。

香港文化、藝術的中西混雜特質，其實並不單是歷史發展使然，她反映的是香港兼容的個性，她不分中、西；更不分日、印、韓、蘇、歐、美……她一切兼收並蓄，盡顯活力和生命力。這種「兼容共生」的文化特色，可能就是大家所謂的「香港精神」，也是全球不同文化相互接觸時必需具備的精神。期望「不中不英」展覽，能引發更多對香港文化藝術的釋讀，和引起大眾對本土視覺藝術與文化的關愛。

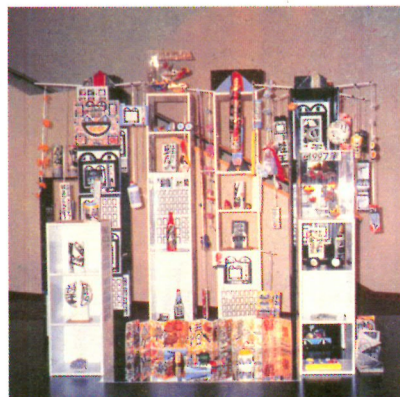
² Larry Feign, "Chinglish: The New World Language", Culture hongkong, no. 25. Jan/Feb 2007, pp.4-6. Larry Feign 是美國旅居香港的漫畫家，曾修讀「應用語言學」。



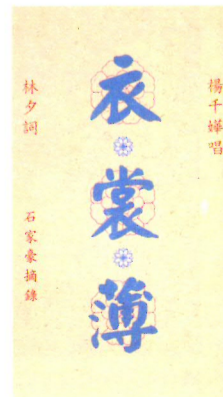
■ (插圖10) 王天仁·疊馬 2003



■ (插圖6) 韓志勳·綠碟 1968



■ (插圖8) 郭孟浩·青蛙嘉年華 1997



■ (插圖11) 石家豪·林夕詞話《再見二丁目》2003



"Chinglish"

If Cantonese were about to disappear, which one word or phrase would you wish to preserve? In Hong Kong, people speak a mixture of Chinese and English thus "Chinglish", so to speak, perhaps enshrines the collective memory of Hong Kong's language. Like its art and culture, the language of a place is a shared organic entity. It reflects the vitality and charisma of its region and its people. In this regard, language is a kind of "public culture", a sort of "public heritage", a type of "public space". However, who, as a Hongkongese, ever feels proud of their hybrid tongue? Looking back to school days, speaking "Chinglish" was forbidden. Only one or other "pure" language is considered acceptable for any kind of public speaking or interview. How then can we consider this "underground" language a distinctive cultural asset?

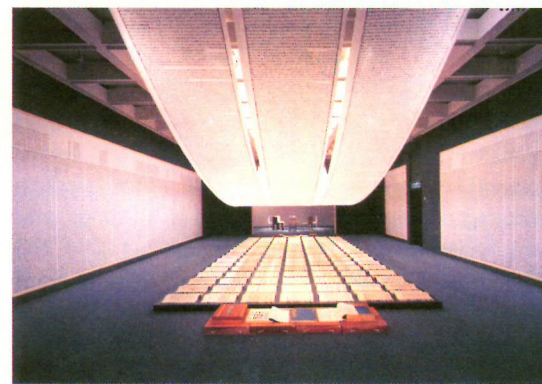
Because of her colonial history Hong Kong, a place of mixed identities, has developed a kind of composite language which grows daily. With bilingual education, the people of Hong Kong have been caught between "The East" and "The West" since childhood. In the post-colonial global era, Hongkongese are burdened with yet another language – Putonghua. As people of "Asia's world city", they need "an international language" to gain entry to the world stage. Consequently the people of Hong Kong keep adjusting themselves, shifting the boundaries of language and identity. The indigenous tongue, expressing our unique thoughts and feelings and being the accumulation of generations of wisdom, is however constantly being subjugated to all kinds of "official language", "mother language" or "international language". Hongkongese lose their identity in the mainstream narrative as a result of looking at themselves through the eyes of others.

Visual language and visual literacy

Although we are not linguistic experts, all of us are language users. Our entire capacity to think and reason rests on language. Language determines our mode of thought and defines our collective imagination. Without realizing its importance, we pay little attention, not to say respect, to our own language culture. Our negligence reflects our lack of understanding and this lack could be explained by the fact that, in schools, the kind of "literacy" that formal education emphasizes, is basically text-based. In this system the general idea is to transform an illiterate person to one who can read and write, the so-called "literate". This narrow understanding of "literacy" has resulted in a "visually illiterate" generation who are poorly equipped to decode a world that is mostly made up of visual codes. This is especially true of the 21st century as we enter an era of exceptionally intensive visual information. We often understand so little of the world we see and can be so confused that we do not even know we are confused.

Art is important as it affords a medium for alternative readings of the world. It allows us to expand our horizons and see life afresh. Artists are the interpreters of culture who provide translation of life experience. The visual languages they evoke go beyond conventional visual and textual syntax. Hence, their art frees us from conventional textual constraints and arouses public thinking.

The confrontation of the two types of languages – visual and textual – is a fascinating ideological combat. In the contemporary art world, many important Chinese artists enter this unusual battlefield. The most internationally renowned artists include XU Bing, GU Wenda and others. XU Bing has produced a number of works relating to language in the past 20 years. Among these, in the Museum collection, is the famous "A Book from the Sky" (fig.1) in which he created hundreds and thousands of "pseudo-Chinese characters", challenging traditional and cultural values. In his "New English Calligraphy" (fig.2), he invented a new Chinese writing system for non-Chinese-speaking people in search of cultural conglomeration. In his latest work,

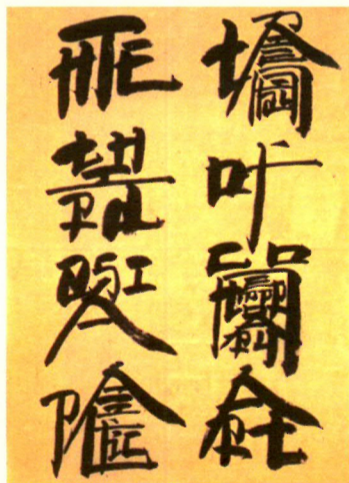


■ (Fig 1) XU Bing
A Book from the Sky 1987-1991

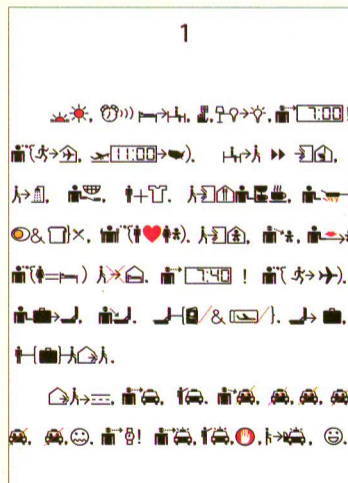


■ (Fig 4) GU Wenda
United Nations Series - China Monument :
Temple of Heaven 1998

"Book of Earth" (fig.3) he develops a new kind of "universal language" from pictograms collected in airports and airplanes. GU Wenda's language-based works include the "United Nations Series - China Monument: Temple of Heaven" (fig.4), also in the Museum collection. This comprises pseudo-languages of Chinese, English, Arabic, etc, made from human hair, in pursuit of a "global language" with an inquisitive mind. Another interesting work is his "Forest of Stone Steles: Retranslation and Rewriting of Tang Poetry" (fig.5), which is a profound meditation on the issue of cultural translation. Works of these artists provide much food for thought at both individual and universal levels.



■ (Fig 2) XU Bing
New English Calligraphy 1998



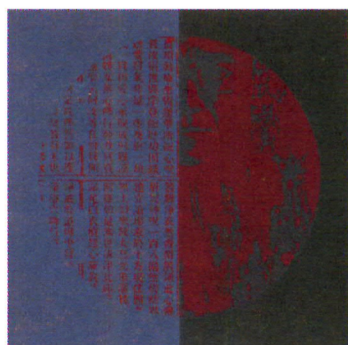
■ (Fig 3) XU Bing
Book of Earth 2006



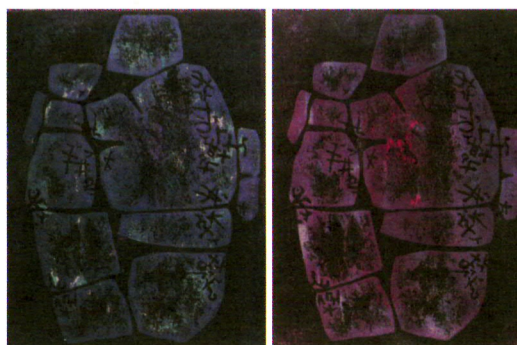
■ (Fig 5) GU Wenda
Forest of Stone Steles: Retranslation
and Rewriting of Tang Poetry 1993-2004

Hong Kong Versions

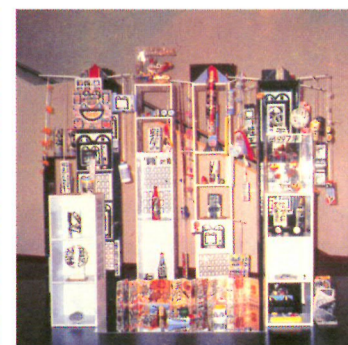
In Hong Kong, lots of artists work on similar ground. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, there were artists like HON Chi-fun (fig.6), CHEUNG Yee (fig.7) who used language as a Chinese symbol and as abstract visual elements in the pursuit of a new modernity. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were artists like KWOK Mang-ho (fig.8) who believed "life is art, art is life" and who incorporated everyday language and banal materials into his installations in defiance of conventional boundaries. There is also CHOI Kai-



■ (Fig 6) HON Chi-fun
Karma Passport 1968

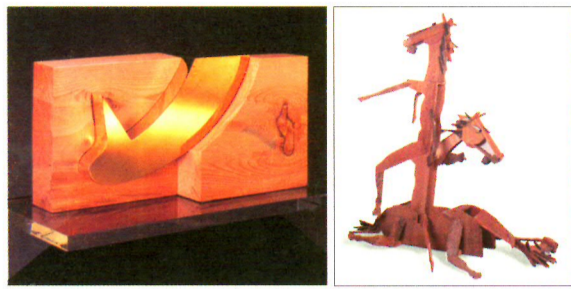


■ (Fig 7) CHEUNG Yee
Figures (1 & 2) 1960s



■ (Fig 8) KWOK Mang-ho
Frog Carnival 1997

yan (fig.9) who loved to incorporate Chinese characters into his abstract sculptures, showing a new taste in cultural aspiration. The newer generation artists include WONG Tin-yan, Wilson SHIEH and others. WONG develops a distinctive interest in collecting colloquial slang related to animals and he gives them visual form in his comic-like sculptures (fig.10). SHIEH has an acute talent in assimilating popular culture, like lyrics of hit songs, into his very refined *gongbi* Chinese paintings (fig.11). WONG and SHIEH both demonstrate the close linkage of art of the young generation with local mass culture.



■ (Fig 9) CHOI Kai-yan
Concealment 1995 (partial) ■ (Fig 10) WONG Tin-yan
Stacking Horses 2003



■ (Fig 11) SHIEH Ka-ho, Wilson
Lyrics by Linxi 2003

The concept of the exhibition is a search for contemporary examples of Hong Kong (visual) language in art. The curatorial idea is developed based on the Museum collection of Blue PUK's work "English in Chinese" or "non-Chinese-non-English" in direct translation. PUK's work, which is an interesting study on Chinese slang, is an effective visual summary of the uniqueness of Hong Kong language and culture. In the past, "East-meets-West" used to be the dominant narrative of Hong Kong culture. However, as revealed in PUK's work, "non-Chinese-non-English" is perhaps a better description. The Chinese title of the exhibition is based on PUK's work, whereas "Chinglish" is used for its English version. By doing so, I hope to draw a parallel between the local *mélanges* of (visual) language that is characteristic of the Hong Kong approach. PUK's work was done around 1999 when people of Hong Kong were still torn between political and cultural identities. I think her work provides a very good starting point for dialogue. Other artists in the show are Rosanna LI, TSANG Kin-wah, Luke CHING, HUNG Keung and WONG Chung-yu. They are all award-winners and selected artists in from past Hong Kong Art Biennials, whose works chosen for the show are closely related to the theme and are provocative in vision.

The works of Rosanna LI are the by-product of "one country, two languages". Her pseudo-visual-dictionary mirrors the loopholes of mis-readings between languages. Her distinctive pictograms are creative re-interpretations of conventional non-sense, revealing the larger problematic ideological structures embedded in our daily life. LI's new visual signs are like a computer virus causing mal-functioning in the normal sense. It is in such moments of distraction that the individual has a chance to free himself from the pre-defined structures. LI is as unconventional in her thinking as in her taste. While it is commonly believed that art is a sophisticated craft, LI chooses to fall for the aesthetics of the banal. She loves to "speak" in a comic, caricature-like visual pun with her ceramic figurines. LI's playful speech, almost like a form of Hong Kong visual slang, is typical of Hong Kong people who always survive on their wits.

As with LI, art is no big deal for TSANG Kin-wah. If politics is our daily focus, while LI gives women and the ordinary people their rightful existence in her works, TSANG raises the despised, the forbidden, and the peripheral to centre stage. Like LI, TSANG's work re-examined our reading habits. What is interesting about both of their works is not what is portrayed but what is betrayed. For TSANG,

art and non-art, high and low, good and bad, etc. are all defined by the marked contrast between the powerful depiction of those in authority and the unfavourable appearance of the powerless. He confuses his audience with the seemingly pleasant wallpaper, reminiscent of the 19th century Victorian design, with its dual appearance of the Chinoiserie blue-and-white floral pattern. Trapped in the visual maze, the audience is further struck by a sudden visual assault of the abusive language that comprises the decorative pattern. The huge discrepancy between visual associations generates huge conceptual displacements, leaving visitors uneasy.

While TSANG gives a voice to those who speak in silence, Luke CHING tries to preserve the native dialect, which is in danger of dying out because of the infiltration of English. His two language projects are developed in the form of giving language classes to people, and by means of learning native language via dialing up to strangers in a foreign land. He is a collector of these interesting "moments of encounter" and in the (video) tapes he collected, meanings and emotions of words recorded out of the daily context are eliminated and transposed to become the learner's own emotions and experience. The clips are therefore evidence of a "new presence". The question is: are we actually witnessing the regenerating process or the dying process of a language?

If CHING sees language as a race, HUNG takes it as a particular time and space. CHING holds on to things that are dear to him, that he is unwilling to let die; HUNG wonders if the things we are living for are really worth dying for. HUNG believes that the world is developing out of its usual time and space, as exemplified by the transformation of cities. HUNG has a particular interest in language in its written form, and, knowing that the United Nations announced the abolition of Traditional Chinese and its replacement by Simplified Chinese, he feels that language, like the cities, is taking great leaps forward in the form of revolution instead of taking small steps of evolution. HUNG relates such development to the popular talk of the town – body fitness and plastic surgery. To HUNG, this is another form of human reformation. In his multi-media interactive work, Chinese characters come into contact with the human body in a virtual space. Visitors, whose images are doubled, interact with the characters in two opposite ways, on one hand engaging, on the other hand disengaging, just like the divided mind of the people and of the era.

Also in search of a multi-media visual language and a multi-dimensional approach, the works of WONG Chung-yu are an eloquent interpretation of the continuous negotiations between visual traditions of different places, as well as the human and the machine aesthetics of different times. Like many of his local predecessors and counterparts, WONG resolves the linguistic tension between different concepts and methods by synthesizing them. WONG believes that "one plus one equals to more than two". With this distinctive formula, artists no longer speak in Chinese, nor English, nor a combination of both, but in a universal language with a Hong Kong accent.

¹ The motto was originally phrased by a senior Hong Kong artist Wucius WONG, an outstanding local figure achieving great synthesis of Chinese and Western, modern and traditional, art and design in his works. WONG Chung-yu used to be Wucius WONG's student and he takes the master's motto as his own.

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鄧海超

編輯及策展
譚美兒
曹韻雯
胡倩雯
許欣玲

平面及展覽設計
關慧芹
吳惠群
邱平媛
駱瑞婷
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PRODUCTION TEAM

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Tang Hoi Chiu

Editorial & Curatorial

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Culture of "co-existence"

In preparation for this exhibition, I accidentally came across an interesting article on the same topic by Larry Feign. Feign observed that the common attitude towards "Chinglish" is: either taking it lightly as "a joke", or as "something to be remedied, like hay fever or a skin rash". To Feign, instead of being "bad translation" or "misuse" of English, "Chinglishisms" consist of "beautifully clever bilingual slang constructions". It is not a language that needs to be "corrected" for it is neither "random mistakes" nor "signs of lazy learning". "Chinglish" is "a distinct language" that does not confine itself to "conservative linguistic criteria". In merging the two "mega-languages", Chinese and English, the two languages that are most widely spoken or used in the world, Chinglish is "the most powerful language in human history, uniting billions of speakers in mutual comprehension". Feign ends by saying "And we here in Hong Kong will be at the vanguard, the Vatican of Chinglish, the New World Language."² Feign's remarks may serve as a meaningful perspective to evaluate "Chinglishisms" in visual arts.

After all, the identity of Hong Kong culture should not be reduced to the simple denominators of "The East" and/or "The West". Neither should Hong Kong's arts and culture be valued only for her "cultural mix". To me, the beauty of Hong Kong arts and culture is her "live-and-let-live" character. Her laissez-faire attitude, her willingness to embrace any cultures and her ability to achieve great synthesis of all as an integral part of her own where all cultures find creative co-existence is emblematic of the Hong Kong spirit. It is my sincere hope that the "Chinglish" exhibition will nurture alternative narratives of Hong Kong cultural identity. I also hope that the exhibition could arouse more thoughts on the way to globalization, and above all, more awareness of the significance of visual literacy in a world that does not speak in words but in images.

² Larry Feign, "Chinglish: The New World Language", Culture hongkong, no. 25. Jan/Feb 2007, pp. 4-6. Larry Feign is a former student of Applied Linguistics and a cartoonist born in America who is currently staying in Hong Kong.

康樂及文化事務署主辦 香港藝術館籌劃
九龍尖沙咀梳士巴利道10號

香港藝術館二樓 當代香港藝術展覽廳

查詢電話：2721 0116 網址：<http://hk.art.museum>

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