Looking at Rosanna Li’s works, one will be easily lost in her matrix of translation. It is upon seeing Li’s works that one comes to realize there are many twists and turns in language. Manipulation, is often very crafty. Li’s two sets of work are conceived by picking words that relate to Man and Woman in the English and Chinese dictionaries. She creates her own version of visual dictionaries with her clay figurines. In the Li version, English words like “menstruation” are illustrated by the man’s fashion of “sanctuary napkins” worn by the Japanese Sumo wrestlers; whereas Chinese words like “po” (nanny) are deconstructed by their radicals – “bo” (ball) and “nu” (female), together form a new meaning of “woman with big busts [bust is ball in colloquial slang]”. In producing these unusual pictograms, Li questions the conventional signifier-signified relationships and consensus of meanings. She reverts solely to her intuition and inner logic, without submitting to the so-called scientific or rational thinking. For her, these frames of reference are arbitrary constraints that suffocate the individual and need to be unlearned. It is with a new form of visual literacy that one disconnects with these “non-sense”. Each of her visual transcripts, each mis-recognition is a chance to regain free thinking.

Li is a non-conformist in language as much as in taste. For her, fat and rough is beautiful. Her plump figurines, that are barely glazed after biscuit firing, remind one of the fat beauties of the Tang dynasty from which she draws her inspiration. Her seemingly naive but wise fatties represent her love of her folks and her celebration of “minor” culture. Like everyone in Hong Kong, her heroes and heroines are indulging in all kinds of popular activities including leisure, dining, business, etc, with both Oriental and Western touches and flavours. They are vivid representations of the internationalism that is the life of Hong Kong people.
【程展緯】

English is the dominant language in the world and with the widespread of the Hollywood culture, even the British is starting to preserve their English accent in face of the over-powering American-English. In Hong Kong, many of the Cantonese phrases used in daily conversations like “bye bye” and “thank you” are also gradually replaced by English. In view of this, Luke CHING gives Cantonese classes to people as he believes the best way to preserve a language is to store it in the human body. He also makes phone calls to countries like Japan and Korea, places that he considered less polluted by English, to learn their indigenous language and hence regain some sort of first-hand encounter with these indigenous cultures.

With technological advancement, the world is united by the phones and the computers. Contacts may have been made easier, nonetheless, learning a language cannot take place in a virtual space, nor can it be extracted from the living people and the living environment. CHING video-taped people’s repetition of the foreign tongue and the seemingly objective, documentary records captured the learners’ moments of doubt, of uncertainty when they are actually coming into encounter with a different culture. The documented learning process mirrors the “museum-ification” process of preserving a vanishing culture. When mimicking phrases like “I love you”, “sorry”, emotion is extracted from the pure sounds and the words become mummies without a soul. After all, when things that belong to daily life now find their way to the museum and become “mummified”, do they actually find an “existence” out of context?

【Luke CHING Chin-wai】

Backpage:

Language Centre : Easy To Learn Cantonese Chapter One: <I Love You> (Classes in New York) 2002
Other exhibits:

Language Centre : Easy To Learn Cantonese Chapter One: <I Love You> (Classes in Japan) 2006 & Chapter Three: <Sorry> 2002
Language Centre : Wrong Number 2007
【曾建華】

粗口是否一定是壞東西？外表漂亮的東西又是否一定有優秀的內涵？甚麼叫美？甚麼是醜？何謂好壞？真假？雅俗？高低？正常與變態，關係其實可能十分脆弱。曾建華的作品對這一切人云亦云的定義，提出了嚴厲的質問。他把偌大的空間，鋪蓋地的貼上了美侖美奐的花紋設計。藍白的紋理彷彿中國傳統陶瓷的青花紋樣，但裝飾性的圖案造型卻又像十九世紀英國著名設計家威廉・莫里斯的牆紙設計，仔細看清楚，美麗的花紋是以一句句廣東話粗口組成的。仿古風格的優雅冷不防給污穢的語言顛覆得體無完膚。視覺與意識型態之間巨大的落差，令人產生不安。孰是孰非，叫人摸不著頭腦。曾的作品就好比那件分辨美女與巫婆的理測驗，所揭示的答案正是潛藏在觀者心裡種種矛盾的價值觀念。

香港文化某程度上也像粗口文化一樣被視為不能登大雅之堂的次文化，掉落在中英陙縫間。無論它有多奪目，別人看見的只是它裡面或中或西的東西。所謂香港藝術，一直只在中與西之間的盲點中存在。它被忽略，被輕視。在安靜平和的表面下，它發出了叫嘰。語言混雜了一切的憤怒、激情。它雖不在世界的主流，可是相比起那些古老的、機械化的紋樣，它是充滿真實的感情和生命力的。

【TSANG Kin-wah】

What is pretty and what is ugly? Who defines true and false, high and low, good and bad? To TSANG Kin-wah, none of these value-loaded labels carry any absolute standards to be observed, they are but relative judgment that is absurd and fragile in nature. In his installation, he encloses his audience in a gigantic space full of floral decorative patterns of his own design. The beautiful wallpaper decorating the space has the dual visual appearance of the traditional qinghua (blue-and-white) floral patterns on Chinese ceramics, and simultaneously, the appearance of the decorative floral design of the 19th century English designer William Morris. When in close scrutiny, audience is given a head-on visual attack discovering the foul language that constitutes the patterns. In the collision of pragmatic and decorative, Chinese and English, tradition and modern, pre-colonial and colonial, pre-industrial and industrial, arty and filthy...all values, tastes and boundaries are mingled in one single, encompassing space. This conceptual mix and abrupt shift of values is like the psyche test in which some discern a witch and others see a beauty in the same picture. To TSANG, the answer defines not the thing that is defined, but the beholder who makes the differentiations.

To a certain extent, Hong Kong culture is discarded of a proper place in the world's cultural map as is foul language in the mainstream arena. Hong Kong culture is caught between the clichés of East-and-West and albeit how appealing it looks, people only see the East and the West in it. If “normal” perception is made possible by ignoring the “noise”, that which is considered irrelevant, a new kind of visual literacy is called for to make justice to this long “abstraction” from sight. In TSANG's piece, he addresses to the disregarded and gives it such a prominent presence that the “noise” now becomes a roar.
【Blue PUK Yuk-chun】

What cannot be translated in a language represents the uniqueness of a culture. In the work “English in Chinese”, Blue PUK collected Chinese words transported from English which may look weird to a non-Hong Kong Chinese. The words are mainly direct translations from English terms based on their phonetic resemblance. Hence the reverse of the term would mean a totally different thing as in the case of “dick-see (taxi)” and “see-dick (stick)”, “see-dor (store)” and “dor-see (toast)”. The spontaneous and direct translation of English is a manifestation of the readiness of Hong Kong people to accommodate alternative ideas and their flexibility in coping with new concepts. Many of the imported cultures had already been synthesized, so much so, that they have become an integral part of local culture.

The work “English in Chinese” was done around 1999, a time when Hong Kong people were at the crossroad of a significant historical moment when the place and its people were re-defined. The artist made use of traditional Chinese classical designs and incorporated modern design and digital printing technology to create a contemporary version of “classics” in the local tongue. Her work serves as an interesting reminder to people of the unique complexity of Hong Kong culture.
【 WONG Chung-yu 】

WONG Chung-yu believes in the magic formula: “One plus one equals more than two”. The same formula is celebrated in daily life of Hong Kong people as much as in art. Take a look at the Cha-chang-tang food culture of Hong Kong and you will know. Given its international character, Hong Kong people embrace all cultures and accommodate diverse ideas with an open mind. This “great synthesis” is perhaps the essence of what we call the “Hong Kong spirit”.

Like his folks, WONG mixed techniques and conventions of different time and space to create a new visual language that mirrors his place and people. In “The Chinese Cyclical Years”, WONG combines the long-scroll format of Chinese painting with paper cut folk art, modern design, digital technology, etc... translating Hong Kong history into a visual timeline that bears individualistic marks of the place. In his work “Spiritual Water”, WONG reinterprets the Chinese ink spirit incorporating viewer’s interaction. Traditional Chinese painting comes to live in the virtual space where fishes swim and raindrops fall. Calligraphical text can be vaguely discerned in the “living” pictures. To unearth the text, viewers have to move their hands over the scroll like a brush and the simulated ink-wash effect would unveil the words underneath. The words come to sight are actually made up of illegible “Chinese characters” that combine Chinese strokes with numeric signs. It is a new language that discourages any “normal reading”. WONG’s works tell us that nothing is new under the sun, but there are still a lot in the shadow.

背頁圖片 ︰ 中華長卷 (局部) 2002
其他展出作品 ︰ 靈水 2007
Image Overleaf ︰ The Chinese Cyclical Years (Partial) 2002
Other Exhibits ︰ Spiritual Water 2007
【李慧嫣】

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【Rosanna Li Wei-han】
The spoken language in Hong Kong is interspersed with Chinese and English. The written language is a mixture of Traditional and Simplified Chinese characters. With the United Nations announcing the abolition of the complicated characters as the official written language starting from 2008, HUNG Keung took it as a warning signal for another disappearing collective memory. On their way to becoming global and cosmopolitan, cities are revolutionizing their appearances as quickly as their history is being erased. This speed of “deconstruction-(re)construction” has become the common denominator in almost every aspect of life. In the case of the body, people are also “demolishing” the unwanted parts and “(re)building” artificial body parts to “bench-mark” the world standard.

In his work, HUNG gives a visual analogy of his time in the most advanced language. He uses motion detectors and tracking systems to capture movements of the human body. The devices then generate interactivity between the body parts with the written words. Strokes of Chinese characters are deconstructed and reconstructed following human movements. At times, the characters go along with the body, whereas at other times, they escape from it. Deconstructed words, like little organisms, come to life and die and live again in an endless continuum. The visual dilemma of the two images of the same body in the screen is metaphorical of the schizophrenic human psyche in the absurd city space. It mirrors the conflicting desires of human beings in the face of city development. “To be or not to be, that is the question”.