

Time Out

Hong Kong

ANNUAL ART SPECIAL! featuring Women in the ARTS

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THE NON-PROFIT SCENE

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Issue 156 HK\$18

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FOOD & DRINK P.68

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AROUND TOWN P.20



Stepping into the Flow

In the context of Southern China, the discussion of history is particularly charged, given Hong Kong's shifting sands of identity as it unifies with the Mainland. In recent years, several artists have been charting a root-seeking course. Clare Morin profiles four who have been exploring tradition through innovation...

MING WONG | *Sci-fi xiqu*

Ming Wong has been meditating on our city's nature as a meeting point of the ancient and futuristic. "Hong Kong awakens something," muses the Berlin-based artist. "It opens up time for me – backwards and forwards."

The artist, who represented Singapore at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 and has been celebrated globally for his video and performance works, came to Hong Kong this winter for a residency with Spring Workshop. His mission: to study where Cantonese Opera, one of the world's oldest living art forms, intersects with the future and, more specifically, with Chinese sci-fi novels.

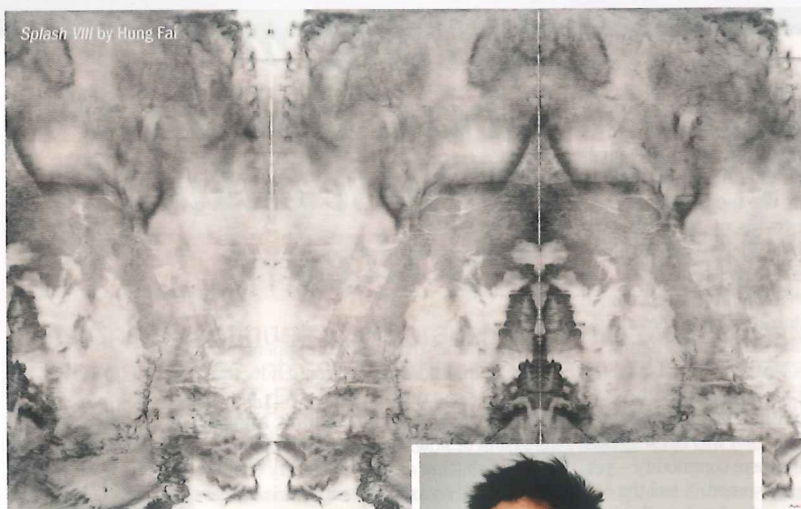
Wong has Guangdong roots and his aunt and uncle's opera troupe in Singapore allowed him to observe the ancient art form up close while learning Chinese painting at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He found a mystical space where humanity morphed in and out of myth. "I discovered this world of the backstage, between artifice and reality," he reminisces.

"These actors who are getting ready are running around, screaming and cursing. Then once they cross the line and go on stage, they transform into mythological heroes and Gods, kings and queens. They cross back, and back to reality, running, cursing and taking their costumes off."

From his base in Berlin, Wong is developing a project that takes as its starting point this question: how can we use Cantonese opera to talk about notions of the future? The question is particularly apt given the architectural plans for the Xiqu Centre set to open on the grounds of West Kowloon in 2016. The site that has played home to traditional, temporary bamboo opera theatres every spring is to see a new design by Bing Thom Architects and Ronald Lu and Partners descend on the land, a design that is astoundingly futuristic and could quite believably have come from an alien civilisation.

As a relative outsider, Wong has an edge in commenting on the city's most beloved art form as he punk-rockets it into the future. "I mess with icons," he says. "If you come from a country where an icon is sacred, it's really tough to touch it. A certain cultural restriction forbids one from touching something. But if I don't belong to that, I think it's a licence to look at it."

Ming Wong performs as 'an apocalyptic pop idol' at the Apocalypse Postponed Art Bar, May 13-17, 17/F, Soundwill Plaza II – Midtown, 1 & 29 Tang Lung St, Causeway Bay. For more, visit mingwong.org.



HUNG FAI | *Ink rebel*

At the age of 25, Hung Fai is one of the most exceptional ink painters to emerge in Hong Kong in recent times. The son of noted artist Hung Hoi, his personal style echoes the brilliance of the great Hong Kong ink master, Wucius Wong (he's already won numerous Wucius Wong Creative Ink Painting Awards amid his growing raft of honours).

"I studied at an EMI (English medium) school, listened to Western pop music, used modern gel pens, and 'ink' was a synonym of my father," explains the young artist. "But during my explorative journeys in art, I was astonished to discover my preference and core concepts towards art are very similar to the concepts of Chinese ink. That confronted me to think about the relationship of myself and my roots, traditional ink and contemporary art."

In Hung's solo exhibition, Movement, at Grotto Fine Art in April, several of the works were inspired by Chinese literary master Lu Xun, in particular the poem *Wild Grass* that speaks to those downtrodden in society, those with historical narratives marginalised by mainstream records. It reveals the depth of thinking permeating this young artist's mind – and a political consciousness emerging in Hong Kong's new generation. "Under the influence of globalisation, a monotonous and unified voice has substituted difference and diversity," he says. "A lot of the wisdom embedded in unique subcultures has vanished during the process. I believe every culture contributes important nutrients to art creation." ▶

For more, visit hungfaivito.com.