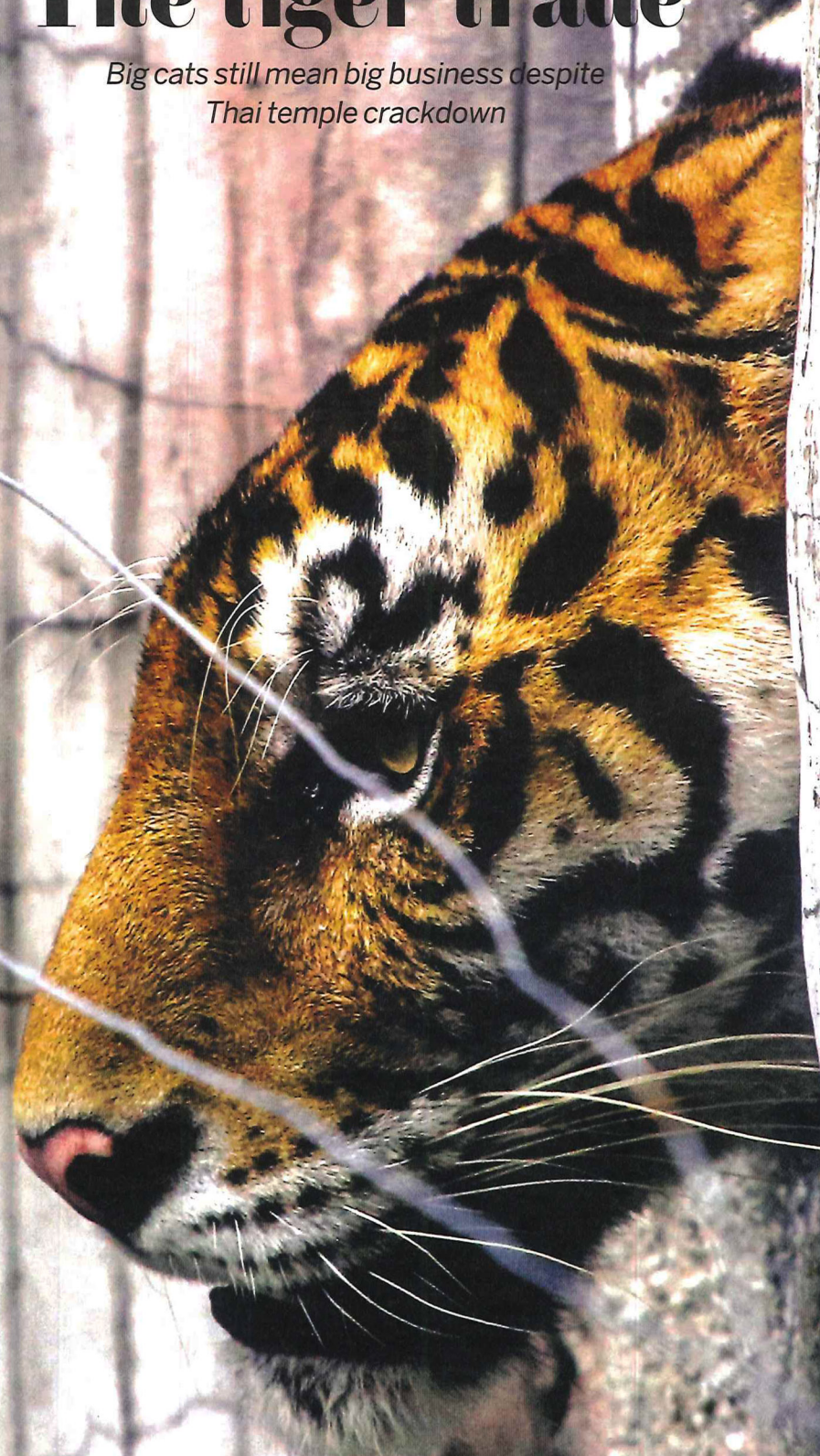


Post Magazine

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The tiger trade

*Big cats still mean big business despite
Thai temple crackdown*



JOURNALIST'S DEBT
TO BROTHER WHO
DIED IN STANLEY
INTERMENT CAMP
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SCMP

THE COLLECTOR | JOHN BATTEN

Mum's the word

Parenthood may have stalled Doris Wong's creative output but becoming a mother was the driving force behind 'Without Trying', her first exhibition in five years.

DORIS WONG WAI-YIN has long collaborated on art performances, installations and videos with her husband, Kwan Sheung-chi. Since the birth of their son, however, Wong has been quiet, artistically. "Without Trying" is a breakout exhibition, her first solo showing in five years, and features 15 works, all created this year.

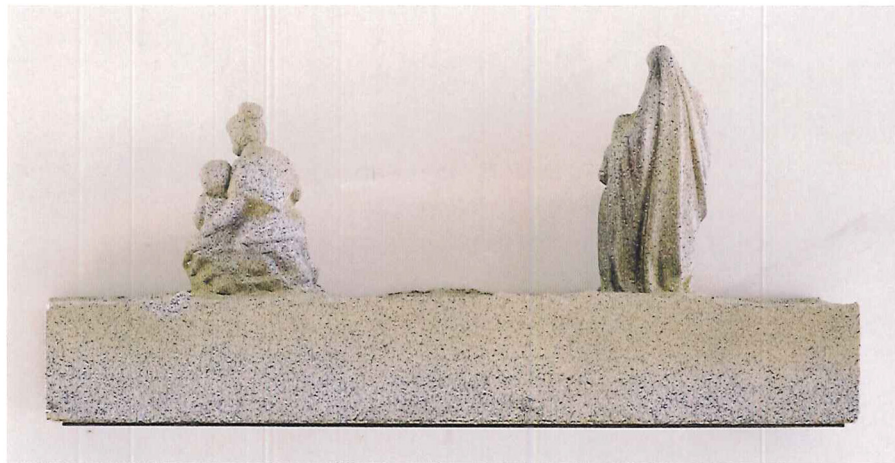
This is a deft show and introduces, with humour and gentle commentary, a serious aspect to why the exhibition has been delayed: her anxiety attacks and hesitation to work on her art.

Creative people, visual artists – and writers, actors, musicians, composers and so on – need to produce original ideas in their work. Australian writer Gerald Murnane explains that this endeavour is often "filled with failed beginnings, wrong turnings and abandoned drafts, and elaborate plans that came to nothing". For many artists, the pressures of creativity lead to feelings of inadequacy and even incapacitation.

In a corner of the exhibition, at gallery Spring Workshop, sits a rack holding a set of watercolours in clear plastic sleeves. The installation informs viewers of the adages Wong uses to help keep her motivated and strong: "be ambitious"; "don't compete with others"; "throw away the bad works"; "use the right tools"; "protect yourself"; "don't be naive"; and "celebrate nothing".

Motherhood may have initially robbed her of the time needed to create, but ultimately it has made Wong more confident. The birth of her son forced her to overcome many of her anxieties. A small cast sculpture, *Some missions belong to Grandmother, and some to the Virgin Mary*, shows Mary reading the Bible to a child alongside a grandmother reading a book to a child. The sculpture depicts quiet reflection and teaching, constant choices between the secular and spiritual worlds, and parenting as nurturing.

Alongside childcare, Wong has also undertaken self-improvement courses, to build her confidence and improve her skills. Sometimes the results have been farcical, but they have helped to feed ideas. Wong enrolled in a dog-training course, although she doesn't have a dog. During the first lesson, the trainer offered to loan her his own dog, but, as it had already been trained, all of Wong's instructions were immediately obeyed.



The resulting video, *The dog that won't be trained*, shows a single shot focused on a sitting plastic Alsatian, which is receiving instructions, in sequence: first a quietly spoken "sit", then a yelled "SIT"; "stay"/"STAY". The dog remains motionless, of course, no matter what is spoken or how. There is a parallel here with parenting: quiet instructions are too-often initially ignored until a yelled order prompts a response.

Wong's art is appropriately exhibited in Spring Workshop's part-domestic setting: her *Clearing ten thorns* sees the artist stamping on dogma and ideologies in the form of food next to a kitchen. The audience can relax on a sofa listening to an audio recording of her practising her ukulele and singing in French (after language lessons). The song "makes everything bearable" and is sung "to quell her nerves in difficult moments".

Taking centre stage is an installation of three wooden pyramids, *Wish you were eternal*, that captures the spirit of her personal renewal. Mirroring the pyramids of Giza, in Egypt, they are packed with the destroyed remnants of all of Wong's previous artwork. In an accompanying video, we hear that "there is life after [the Indian god] Kali's destruction" and, finally, renewal is not quickly achieved, so patiently "wait for it, for the slow unrolling of a painting". ■

"Without Trying" is on display at Spring Workshop, 3/F Remex Centre, 42 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, until October 16.



From top: Doris Wong; exhibits in Wong's latest show include *Some missions belong to grandmother, and some to the Virgin Mary* (2016); *The dog that won't be trained* (2016); *Clearing ten thorns* (2016); *Without Trying* (2016); *Wish you were eternal* (2016).

