

Time Out

Hong Kong

Winter tan

Local designers take leather up a notch

SHOPPING & STYLE P.40

TIME OUT INTERVIEW

DONNIE YEN

IS READY TO CRACK HOLLYWOOD

"IP MAN 3 IS GOING TO BE MY LAST MARTIAL ARTS MOVIE. I WANT TO MOVE ON"

Out with a bang

Your essential NYE
countdown guide

FEATURES P.22

Most amoosing

Udderbelly comedy
festival hits HK

ART & CULTURE P.54

KNOW. YOUR. CITY.

December 16–29, 2015

Issue 197 **HK\$18**



9 771998 385004

LGBTI

Edited by Arthur Tam
arthur.tam@timeout.com.hk

CALVIN SIT



Bamboo and buns
Wu Tsang is rewriting history

Poetry in motion

Gender fluid artist and director **Wu Tsang** talks to Arthur Tam about her film, tracing the history of Chinese feminist revolutionary and poet Qiu Jin and her (possibly overlooked) lesbian relationship

Feminist, LGBTI champion, club kid, director and progressive performance artist are just a few words to describe Chinese-Swedish American artist Wu Tsang. But if you know Wu, you know that she shies away from any prescribed labels – especially when it comes to gender. “Labels don’t really exist in my universe,” she says. So, it might just be easier just to describe her as being awesome. Awesome for shedding light on the marginalised and the overlooked; awesome for throwing amazing fringe parties (check out her documentary *Wildness*); awesome for creating a dialogue on misunderstood LGBTI

topics like transgenderism; and awesome for wanting to forge a space for LGBTI people to embrace their history. That’s the focus of her latest work *Duilian*, a film exploring Chinese revolutionary, writer and poet Qiu Jin and her not-so-talked about lesbian relationship with calligrapher Wu Zhuoying.

For anyone not familiar with Qiu Jin, she is a heralded hero of Chinese history, executed at the young age of 31 for trying to rebel against the Qing Dynasty – basically a badass bitch, very much like Wu. She has been the subject of a slew of books, TV shows and films dating back all the way to the 1930s and up to the recent 2011 feature *The Woman Knight of Mirror Lake*.

She’s an important figure, but the history of her and her alleged partner are often overlooked, something which Wu aims to rectify. “She’s like China’s first feminist or Joan of Arc,” she exclaims. “She was also very lonely and didn’t have anyone to connect with except her friend who she wrote poems to. It was a ‘you’re the only person that understands me’ type of relationship. I’m really fascinated by the legends, but queer history or mythology rarely exists. My agenda is trying to let people understand that queer people didn’t really have official histories.

They weren’t written, so we have to interpret the past.”

Wu plays the part of Wu Zhuoying, and her longtime collaborator Boychild is playing the part of knife-wielding, revolutionary martyr Qiu. Apparently Qiu was quite the martial arts enthusiast and there exists a famous portrait of her posing with a short sword, a rare depiction of a Chinese woman. “She was an early icon and a strong woman,” says Wu.



Queer people didn’t really have official histories, so we have to interpret the past

“I wanted to explore this idea, and during my trips to China I found a group of female wushu practitioners from Shanghai University of Sports to be part of the film. It made sense since my film is set in Hong Kong and the city’s cinematic history is rich in wushu.”

But as integral as wushu is to the film, the real exploration within stems from the interpretation of Qiu’s poetry. The script and martial arts moves are inspired by excerpts from Qiu’s poems. “Her poetry is actually the most inspiring thing to me,” says Wu. “I invited 30 people to translate the poems with me, making our own interpretation. We wrote and re-wrote our own fun, contemporary poetry based on the originals.”

Wu plans on having her film translated into as many languages as possible to reach the diverse audience in HK. Even as we speak to

her at the Spring Workshop cultural initiative (where she’s doing her artist’s residency), she has a friend from the Indonesian lesbian group in Hong Kong helping her translate the work into, well, Indonesian. “HK is such an international and diverse place with different segmented communities,” says Wu. “I feel it’s a great opportunity to have the film translated and interpreted in a way that can reach different communities. Hong Kong is definitely very distinct from mainland China and I’ve never been anywhere else with such a unique character in regards to how people constitute their identity.

“It’s a really interesting place to pose a complex question about what it means to be a hero, a revolutionary or Chinese revolutionary within the context of Hong Kong. It enables me to have a lot of conversations about identity.”

Wu is in the final stages of her project, which is scheduled to make its debut at the Spring Workshop during Art Basel 2016. What Wu really wants audiences to take away is a feeling of Qiu’s struggle and perseverance. “She was ahead of her time,” claims Wu. “The society she grew up in didn’t enable her to be who she really was, so she always fought against that. I guess that’s something I can relate to and appreciate, and I hope that emotional content resonates.”

Wu Tsang Check out more work from the LGBTI affirming artist at wutsang.com.



Ready to be gutted
Qiu Jin

LGBTI



Want more? For more things happening around town, visit timeout.com.hk/gay-lesbian