

Curator's Statement

Recalling the Present

by Wai Kit Lam, August 2005, Ambrogio, Italy

"Recalling the Present", which is the title of this exhibition, is a self-contradictory argument. "The Present" implies "now", which is in the present tense; it belongs neither to the past nor to the future. But "recalling" is an act of recollecting those things happened in the past; the objects of this action must exist in the past. Therefore, "Recalling the Present" is self-contradictory as we regard the present as the past, confusing the two. It is obviously an illogical statement.

However, I named this exhibition "Recalling the Present", blending these two different tenses together. I didn't intend to play with the usual conception of time, nor to bluff and bluster. On the contrary, this kind of confusion is simply what we can find in many art works. Artists transformed their feelings of the present, like photography, turning the present into the past, turning this particular instant into some images or objects that can be recalled, and freezing memories and feelings for future contemplation and introspection.

These five exhibitors came from Hong Kong, China, Italy and Singapore. Their different backgrounds exert great influence over them, which we can easily find in their works. Ellen Pau was locally born and bred in Hong Kong. In her works, she honestly expressed her thoughts and feelings towards the political situation of Hong Kong, and towards homosexual love, a sensitive topic even in Hong Kong today. As part of the society, as an active pioneer of the cultural sector, in line with her desire to contribute to the society, she strives to present her works of sincerity to all of us. Tam Wai Ping Lukas has been living in England for some years. His works sufficiently reflect the mode of thinking that he saw and learned from the Western trends. Such mode also affected the way he associated people with places, and how he identified this association. All these are showing themselves in his works silently, without a trace while clearly visible. Bo Zheng is always a global citizen to me. When he speaks in his flawless English, I always forget he is a member of a minority race in China. But when we talked about the art sector and the political system of Hong Kong, I would suddenly realize that he had been living in Hong Kong for some years. He handled the problems faced by homosexual love in his works in a way as daring and expressive as when he dealt with his identity and environment. Living in Italy, the paradise of sunshine, fine food and beauties which is yearned by many people, Paolo Mascolini's works slightly reveal a sense of sadness, which is unmatched with the place he is living at. But with a closer look, we can see that his works simply expressed something that is common to every race and every region. How can those feelings and expressions towards one's environment be distinguished according to national boundaries? As in the title he set, there is no specific time and space, but only specific sentiment. I have known Yew Seng Heng for over a decade since 1993. Though living in two different places with our different lives to live, we are always connected in this communication-booming era. Our meeting in 2004 in Singapore not only refreshed my memory of his enthusiasm towards artistic creation while he was in London, but also granted me the chance to appreciate his creativity and cleverness. He always surprised us with his insights into the surroundings, so did the way he expressed them. It was just like hitting the nail on the head, not just being tied down by scrappy fondling.

It was in 1997 at the Hong Kong Art Centre that I first saw the works of Ellen Pau, when I had just come back to Hong Kong from England, without knowing much about Hong Kong art, let alone Hong Kong artists. But I did know one name, and that was Ellen Pau. Many large-scale, co-organized exhibitions around the world had shown the popularity of video art in Europe. But at that time, it was not as popular as other media in Hong Kong. Certainly, I was just being ignorant. When I knew Ellen and Videotage, I realized that they had been working hard on this for over a decade.

From her early individualism to her later criticism of politics and labeling, Ellen's works are always impressive. They are consistent with their different topics. Ellen clearly expressed her critical opinions and value judgments, especially in her discussions about identity. This is different from a majority that indulges in empty talks. But there is no less sensitivity hiding behind her criticism. It is said that the emotional expression of Chinese is just like a hot-water bottle: cold on the surface while boiling inside. If we just take a glance at Ellen's works, we will surely miss her fervent

emotions. The longer we acquaint with each other, the clearer I see her impetuous side. Just like what her works do, she stands up to the powerful and the authority. Blending life with arts, her down-to-earth works are the testimonies of all these.

The works of Tam Wai Ping Lukas always remind me of the Taoist discussion about the two extremes: two seemingly opposite things being interdependent. We recognize light because of the existence of darkness. We discover substance because there is emptiness. This kind of two-way relationship goes on until equilibrium is achieved. Also, the Taoist concept of man being integral part of nature teaches us about the bonding between human being and nature. We should care about our surroundings and our relationship with them while we pay attention to our own lives.

Lukas has made a most telling exposure of these relationships. It can already be seen from his early conceptual works. But now, his works are more mature and the ideas stronger. They are not only games of the mind. A good example is one of his public/installation art works Temple (2005) at Taipei Xia Hai Temple of the City God, a plastic, helium temple floating above a real temple. He has put reality and simulation, past and present in the same place. However, we find these two extremes not contradictory but parallel to each other. The plastic temple made us re-think about the existence of the real temple and its relationship with society and culture. Also, it forced us to contemplate the materialization and briefness of current culture. Last but not least, we can also see the inseparable relationships among man, land and environment from Lukas's plastic temple.

Bo Zheng has great interest in documentaries. Families and friends, society and individual are the usual topics to him. Language is a significant element in his works. Maybe we will find his works personal, without any direct relationship with the society. But these seemingly trivial experiences are exactly the reflection of society.

Language and narration are important to Bo Zheng's works. For example, in his latest work, Family History Text Book (2005), the sitters expressed their feelings in the form of soliloquy, scattered with personal histories and social changes. Like being written on a plain white background, the complexity of their words and thoughts was similar to a delicate network. How could we say that these sitters were lonely and helpless, being trapped in an empty room? On the other hand, Bo Zheng's critical opinions are macro and detached, though not inhuman. The sitters trusted him whole-heartedly. They were not facing an impersonal camera, but someone that could express what they wanted to express. However, Bo Zheng did more than this. As he retold the narrations of the sitters with his own voice, he gave documentaries a new definition. It was no longer cold and objective. It was blended into life, sentimental and critical at the same time.

The works of Paolo Mascolini are not simply photographs. They have been scraped, washed and bleached, putting in feelings towards the objects. When these were done, what we saw in the photos were different from what we saw in reality. They had lost their original outlooks. These fake, idealized images were the products of the photographer's transformation of subjective presentations into objective receptions. Reality and illusion, present and past, the relationship between the two extremes is inseparable and interdependent.

Paolo has his own definition of reality. First of all, what he saw and what he felt in front of those sights in the photos, which no longer existed, were a kind of memory, the memory of the past. This is the essence of photography. The instance being photographed is transient. It goes in a blink and what remains is something already disappeared. Paolo confronted this memory and expressed his own idealized sympathy. We can see how he transferred this feeling into his works from those damaged, washed images. These feelings are more authentic than any substantial things, and closer to the artist's feelings and experiences. Although his works have their roots in reality, they are realer than the real. The damaged images stand alone; the silent photos have a soft touch of sadness.

The works of Yew Seng Heng reflect his skepticism and criticism of the surrounding environment. His videos reveal his confrontation and compromise with the times. The elements of his works are concise and complete. Without using one extract word, they appropriately express the main theme. His reception of the present state is sensitive, unique and penetrative. He is able to make use of the transient chances to express those opinions that the others dare not express or are unable to express.

Heng's works also show the impacts of cultural shocks. His four years in England not only taught him arts, but also brought him cultural shocks. The similarities and differences between cultures became the muse of his works. His grasp of the knowledge about art in life made him stand out among other artists, and made his works transcend the boundaries of regions and nationalities. We can easily see how these five exhibitors feel about their surroundings. Experience is a significant element of art, whether it is explicit or implicit. The shocks that it brings to us are something that we cannot overlook.

Translated from Chinese to English by Lois Li.

策展人的話

追溯現在

林慧潔，8.2005，意大利安波祖

是次展覽題目「追溯現在」乃一自相矛盾的議論：「現在」理解為目前的、現在時態的；它既不屬於過去，亦不屬於將來。但「追溯」乃是對過去的回想，這行動必然是針對已發生的事情。所以，「追溯現在」是矛盾的，當我們把當下變成過去，把兩種時空錯置，理應是一個不合理的駁論。

但我以此為是次展覽的題目，把兩個本屬於不同時空的時態放在一起，不是為了把玩正常的時間觀念，亦不是為了虛張聲勢。反之，這種時空錯亂的情況，正每每發生在很多藝術創作中。藝術家們轉化當下的感覺，如攝影術般，把現在變成過去，把當下變成可被追溯的影象或物件，凝固了記憶與感受，以待我們的審視及對現狀的再思。

五位參展的藝術家分別來自香港、中國、意大利及新加坡。我們不難從各人的作品中發現不同的背景對他們的影響有多深遠。鮑藹倫是土生土長的香港人，她對香港政局的所思所感，對尚未獲得所有香港人接受的同性愛的看法，都於作品中表露無遺。作為香港的一份子，作為文化界的活躍先驅者，她本著為這社會做一點事情的心意，努力不懈地送上她的誠意之作。譚偉平於英國生活多年，他的作品充份反映他於西方思潮中所見所學的西方思考模式。這亦影響了他看人與地域間的聯繫，以及對人與地域的關係的認同。這一切都在其作品中悄悄流露，雖不著痕跡，但清晰可見。而鄭波在我心目中是一位「國際公民」，當他說著流利的英語時，總讓我忘記他是中國少數民族的一員。到與他談論香港藝術界與政制時，才恍然發現，他已於香港住了幾個年頭。他在作品中對同性愛所面對的問題的探討，如同他對身份與身處環境的關注一樣，無畏、敢言。至於馬伯樂，生活於眾所嚮往的意大利，以陽光、美食和美食為代表的國家；他的作品卻淡淡地流露著憂傷，與他身處的環境不大相同。但細看之下，他的作品表現了每個民族、每處地方都會出現的共通性。對身處環境的感受與表達，又豈能以國界來作分野呢？正如他的題目一樣，沒有特定的時空，只有特定的情感。自九三年起，與王有成已相識了十多個年頭，雖分隔兩地，各有各忙，但總能於這通訊發達的年代保持聯繫。零四年於新加坡一會，不單讓我想起他於倫敦的創作熱誠，更令我欣賞到他的創作力與聰慧。他對周遭事物的見解總令人驚喜，如同其演繹手法一樣，一針見血，不拘泥於零碎的把玩。

我第一次觀看鮑藹倫的作品，是九七年於香港藝術中心。當時的我剛從英國返港不久，對香港藝術認識不深，更別說香港藝術家。但對一位藝術家的名字印象深刻，那便是鮑藹倫。從各國大型藝術聯展中得知，錄像藝術在歐洲已經非常盛行，但在當時的香港，相對地不及其他媒體普及。當然，那只是我的愚昧見識，因為從那時開始，我認識了鮑藹倫與錄影太奇，得悉他們已在香港努力了十多個年頭。

從早期傾向個人化到後來對政治與標籤的批判，鮑氏的作品令人印象深刻。儘管題材有異，它們都很一致。尤以對身分探究這問題上，鮑藹倫給我們很清晰的批判及價值觀，有異於一般只求呼喊而不實幹的大眾。在批判之聲下，鮑氏又不失感性的一面。聞說中國人的情感，如暖水壺般，外表是冷冰冰的，但內裡卻是沸騰非常。若我們只忽忽觀看鮑氏的作品，又怎能體會到那熱切的情感呢？！與她相識久了，令我更體會到她率性的一面：不畏權貴的個性，與她的作品一樣，貫徹始終。她把生活與創作溶為一體，實而不華的作品見證著這一切。

每當我觀看譚偉平的作品時，不其然令我想到道家思想中的兩極關係：兩種看似對立，但必然互相依存的關係。沒有黑暗，我們又怎能知道光明的存在呢？由虛見實，自無形中見有形，這種雙向性運行不息，最終達至平衡。再者，道家思想的天人合一，使我們明白人與自然是不可分割的。在我們關注自家生活狀況的同時，亦應關注身處環境，以及相互之間的互動關係。

譚偉平把這些關係發揮得淋漓盡致，從他早期概念化的作品中已可見一斑。他的近作愈趨成熟，不單意念更趨穩固，而且不僅僅是思考上的玩意。最明顯的例子莫過於「廟」（2005），此乃於台北霞海城隍廟的公眾／裝置藝術，塑膠氫氣廟漂浮於真實古廟之上，把真實與模擬、過去與現在，同時並置於同一空間中。兩極間不但沒有產生矛盾，反而平衡並存。塑膠廟不單令我們再思古廟的存在意義，以及它與

社會文化形成的關係；它更令我們審視當代文化的物質化與短暫性。再者，人、土地與環境間不可分割的關係，也在譚偉平的膠廟中表露無遺。

鄭波對紀錄片甚感興趣，作品題材離不開家人與朋友，或社會與個人。在他的作品中，語言是一重要元素，所圍繞的個人經驗，瞥見是個人的、與社會無直接關係的。但這些看似微不足道的生活體驗，正是社會現象的一個大反映。

語言、述說等是鄭波作品的重要元素，以他的近作「家庭歷史教材」（2005）為例，各被攝者以獨白形式表述個人感受，個人歷史與社會變遷穿梭其間。所言所想，如寫滿在白背景上，其複雜的層次，如一組精巧細密的網絡不可分割。述說者又豈是孤獨無助，獨困於無他人的房間中？再者，鄭波的批判思考是宏觀的，是冷靜的，但同時又不失其人性化的一面。被攝者對鄭波絕對信任，他們所面對的不是冰冷的鏡頭，而是能把他們感受表現無遺的至親。然而鄭波不單以此為終點，當他再以自己的聲音重新演繹被攝者的表述時，他把紀錄片推到另一新層次：紀錄片不再是冰冷和客觀的，鄭波把它溶入生活，時而感性時而批判。

馬伯樂的作品不是單純的攝影作品，他的相片經過磨刮、洗刷、漂白，主觀地加入對被攝物的深切感受。作品完成後，相片中的景物已與實物有所差異，或許失去被攝物的原貌。而這些假作的、理想化的影象，是作者把客觀表象變為主觀感受的產物；現實與假象、過去與現在，兩極之間的關係相互依存，不可分割。

馬氏對真實的定義有其獨特的見解：首先，當他面對相片中那已逝的景狀時，他所看到、感受到的，是一種回憶：一種對已逝景物的回憶。攝影的本質正是如此，被攝的一刻只存在於電光火石間，它隨即消逝，而所保存的即是已逝的景況。馬氏不獨游離於思考上的玩意，與此同時，他與這種回憶對峙，加入主觀及理想化的深摯感受。我們從那些被破壞、被洗去的影象中，可看到他這感覺轉化於其作品中，他提昇被攝景物至更深遠更內斂的境界。這些感覺比任何物質上的事物更為真實，更為接近作者對現況的感覺與體會。雖則他的相片源於現實，但比現實更為真實。被損毀的影象孤寂而立，無言的相片滲透著淡淡的悲哀。

王有成的創作充份表現他對周遭環境的懷疑與批判，他的錄像作品反映他與時代的衝撞與妥協。作品元素簡約且完整，不花多餘過剩的言詞，已能把作品的中心思想恰當地表現。而且，他對現況的觸覺是敏感的，是獨特和尖銳的，他把握瞬間的機會，坦然地表達其他人不敢或不能表達的意見。

文化衝擊所帶來的影響，亦出現於王氏的作品中，四年的英國留學生活，不僅是學習藝術知識的過程，同時也帶來文化衝擊。文化上的類同與異樣，都能成為其創作泉源。王氏能把握已有的藝術知識於生活體驗中，不單使其創作有別於一般藝術家，更令他的創作超越地域與邊界的局限性。

從五位參展藝術家的作品中，我們不難發現他們對身處環境的深切體會。生活體驗是創作的重要元素，不論它們是明顯的，還是隱晦的，我們都不能忽視它們為我們帶來的衝擊。