

## **An Unperturbed Outsider – Wai Kit Lam**

- Percy Mak, 1.2019

Ever since Wai Kit Lam's return from the U.K. upon her graduation in 1996, 'seeking' has always been the motif lingering in her creative path. In the early days, she employed a series of self-portraits that questioned 'Who am I?', a constant self-interrogation arisen since the very first moment of human self-consciousness. Soon she recognised the fictionality within, as she had edited out the ugly shots and exhibited only the good ones, just like the eternally picture-perfect CV or Facebook photos. Yet, I realised Wai Kit had an innocent smile at that time, unlike the expressionless face thereafter. Right before my first interview with her in 2012, I was taken aback by her solemn self-portraits. Not until I met her did I realise she was actually an ingeniously funny girl. She was also talkative, a quality rare among photographers. Wai Kit admitted that her aloofness was feigned for professional needs. Ha, both she and I are restrained by archetypes, finding them hard to shake off.

Wai Kit's initial self-portraits series later evolved into collaborative creations with friends. They constructed their own identities respectively before juxtaposing them. In addition, Wai Kit photographed her and others' faces in black and white, juxtaposing them with colour forms of the same size. Viewers would discover, no matter who the subject was, Wai Kit Lam was in it. Some might even find themselves in it. Wai Kit was glad; after all, finding oneself was not limited to her personally. Hereafter, juxtaposition of irrelevant bits and pieces has since become one of Wai Kit's favourite presentations. Not only is it fun, it also invariably stimulates unexpected imagination. She has started to create with sound effects, text, and video, whereas the number of juxtapositions is sometimes increased to three.

Road, lights swaying. People, alone or floating like ghosts. Mirror images keep recurring; doorframes and windowsills gradually darker; dim, cold corners; prolonged corridors leading to unknown places. Tree shadows are mottled; sunshine is rare; waves foam like frothy beer gushing forth time and again over a desolate beach. Heartbeats, clock ticking, women's heels rattling haphazardly, murmuring nonstop in obscure dialects... They have been reappearing in Wai Kit Lam's works for more than 20 years. Shades of lonely outsiders seeking their identities emerge.

Even though she often creates works and has exhibitions abroad, in addition to the occasional visits to southern Europe, Wai Kit never feels self-important being an artist. She is definitely down-to-earth. After returning to Hong Kong, she has a tea set for lunch at the same fast food restaurant every day. A cup of lemon tea after meal is enough to make her happy - so she repeatedly laments over lemon tea's raised price. Her sense of foreignness does not stem from the space in which she is physically present, but her mentality. Our city often disorients young people, who are submerged under a single voice. This makes people ineffably nostalgic. Bell sounds have been used in Wai Kit's recent works to the point of obsession - I like it. They might come from the bells of the chapel in Southern Europe. They carry metaphysical magic that wakes up the feelings and senses of people in the fog, letting them follow the rustling when stepping on dead leaves on the way home. Finding oneself in a foreign place, while seeing oneself in others' photos that she quietly joined twenty years ago.

In her solo exhibition *Accord/Discord* held in Lumenvisum early this year, Wai Kit made full use of the four walls in the box-like venue. On one side, the video playing images of ripples was mixed with the sounds from Hong Kong and different places overseas, as well as bell sounds from afar. The wall opposite the ripples was full of her handwritten self-questions and self-answers when inspiration had struck. The remaining two walls: one showed the photography of mountain roads in Spain; the other displays Japanese bare trees. Since her creative collaboration with Spanish artist Marcos Vidal Font in 2017, the loneliness, uncertainty and coldness in Wai Kit's works have been slowly paling. In 2018, her series of love letters written by a daughter to parents came with a touch of warmth. In this latest creation, the light and sound exude the gentleness of nature, reflecting the sunshine in the artist's heart. This year, Wai Kit is going to split her time between Hong Kong and abroad. No matter where she goes, she still feels like an outsider. Nevertheless, it no longer matters, as she is unperturbed.

## 安舒的異鄉人 —— 林慧潔

- 麥慰宗, 1.2019

打從林慧潔1996年從英國學成歸來，「尋找」一直是縈繞她創作心迹的母題。早期她藉一系列自拍詰問「我是誰」，一個人類一開始有自我意識就不斷生起的自問。很快她悟出當中的虛構，因為拍得醜陋的作品她都毀掉，只展現好，一如求職和臉書貼相永遠完美。不過筆者發現那時的慧潔笑得青澀，不同於此後的木無表情。2012年第一次訪問她，事前被她一臉嚴肅的自拍像嚇壞，及至見面，才發現眼前人是傻大姐，而且健談，攝影人少有。慧潔坦承酷是裝的，認為是專業需要。哈，我和她都受典型左右，不易超脫。

慧潔由初期的自拍系列衍生出邀請朋友加入創作，各自建構自我身分，然後把兩者並置，另外又拍攝自己和他者的臉龐黑白照，與大小相同的方形色塊並置，觀眾發現無論相中人是誰，林慧潔都在其中，有些人還見到自己。慧潔高興，畢竟尋找自我不限於她個人。並置相干與不相干的碎片自此成為慧潔愛用的手法之一，不止有趣，更常常激發意想不到的想像。接著慧潔的創作開始運用聲效、文字、錄像，並置的畫面有時增至三個。

路，燈火搖曳。人，獨行或飄蕩如幢幢鬼影。不斷出現的鏡像，門廊與窗戶每多暗黑，陰冷的角落，不知通往哪裡的最長地下走廊。樹影斑駁，天空鮮有陽光、如啤酒泡的浪花一次又一次漫過無人灘頭。心跳、時鐘嘀嗒、女鞋迷亂敲擊梯階、不明的方言持續呢喃……二十餘年間在林慧潔的作品裡經常出現，隱見寂寥的異鄉人一路尋找身分。

縱然常常創作與展出於外地，間中旅居南歐，慧潔從不以藝術家自豪，絕對吃人間煙火，回到香港，天天去同一間快餐店吃下午茶當正餐，餐後一杯檸檬茶已滿足，所以檸檬茶加價她一再悲鳴。她的異鄉感不是源於肉身所在的空間，而是心態上的，我城常常叫自己的孩子迷失，被淹沒於單一的聲浪下，令人生起莫名的鄉愁。鐘聲在慧潔近期的作品中運用至痴迷的地步，我喜歡。可能是來自南歐小教堂的鐘聲，帶著形而上的魔力，提振霧中人的五感六覺，讓雙足踐踏枯葉的細碎聲響帶領自己閃回來時路。從異地中尋回自身，暗合二十年前自他者的照像中看見自己。

年初在光影作坊舉行的個展《和弦/不和弦》，慧潔盡用展場小盒子的四面牆，一面播放波紋的錄像，夾雜採自香港與外地的各種聲響，鐘聲在遠處。波紋對面的牆，她徒手寫滿心血來潮的自問自答。剩下的兩面牆，一面是西班牙山路的攝影，另一面是日本禿樹。自2017年與西班牙藝術家 Marcos Vidal Font 聯合創作後，林慧潔作品中的孤寂、不確定與清冷漸漸淡出。2018年關於一個女兒寫給父母的情書的系列淡入了暖意。來到最新的這個創作，光影與聲音透著大自然的溫柔，照見藝術家心中的明媚。這一年，慧潔仍會一時在香港，一時在外地，無論去到哪裡，她仍然自覺是異鄉人，然而她不再在乎，因為她是安舒的。