

[ART JOURNAL]

Splicing and dicing



Tony Chun-hui Wu delves into the essences of the different formats he uses to make experimental films

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Images of Parisian buildings and streets hover, falter, are superimposed on each other and multiply. Sometimes they spiral into an unrecognizable swirl; other times, they stutter at an almost imperceptible speed. Resurrection (甦醒), the solo exhibition by experimental filmmaker and academic Tony Chun-hui Wu (吳俊輝) currently on display at Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), is the artist's latest attempt in his ongoing exploration of images in states of metamorphosis as they move through different formats and technologies.

Wu, an assistant professor at the department of radio, television and film in Shih Hsin University (世新大學), has shown his works shown at some of the world's foremost art institutes, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Centre Pompidou in Paris and San Francisco Cinematheque. His videos from before 2003 are generally made from collages and footage from 8mm and 16mm film and explore the aesthetic possibilities of various film formats. In 2005 he turned to digital

filmmaking with Taipei 4-Way — exTAIPEIit (台北四非—遠離台北), which was exhibited at the Taipei Biennial at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (台北市立美術館). His 2006 exhibition Europe Resurrection saw Wu expanding into multimedia with a study that combined still photography, film and digital imaging.

A natural progression from Europe Resurrection, Resurrection comprises four new filmic works building on color sides that Wu photographed last summer in Paris during his residency at the Cite Internationale des Arts. Still images are cut, split, reconstructed and reprinted on 35mm film, which is then digitally edited. The result is infinite combinations of images that seem almost desperate to return to the original medium in which they were captured, an impossible task as segments and details are lost and omitted in the process of conversion from format to format. "The stills are animated and transformed by the filmic time and then (re)frozen in digital imaging. But such freezing can only be possible in a state of ambiguity, as the images are engraved with the sense of time inherent in still photography and film," Wu said.

Resurrection can be divided into two themes, according to content. *Paris Resurrection* shows 15 famous locations in Paris that disintegrate, fuse, accelerate and freeze in a visual experience that mimics the perspective of a traveler passing through the city.

But I Couldn't See Her Face focuses on the perception created by shifting the relationship

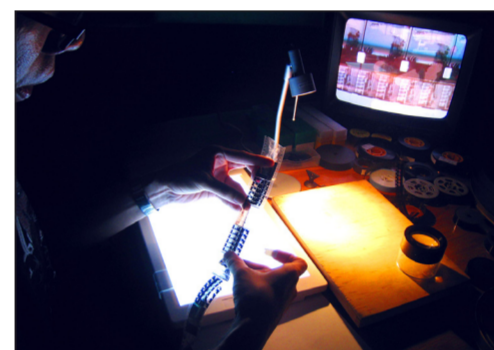
between the artist and the places he films. "Say I took one photo of the Notre Dame de Paris every 10 steps as I walked toward it. When translated into film, the architecture would appear to oscillate because the relation between us changed," Wu explained.

Standing in contrast with the above two, *Bonne Paris* and *Last Night, I Had a Dream About Our Mother* are made from images of empty streets the artist took in Paris' 20 arrondissements, or districts. The inspiration came from Wu's perception of Paris in the summer as a ghost town haunted by ghostly tourists.

Hoping to show not only the end result but also the creative process, Wu will use the gallery as a studio from time to time, starting new projects in a dimly lit room at the end of the gallery. Visitors are welcome to sit with the artist and ask lots of questions.

Wu believes an artist should have the courage to challenge prevailing ideas. Recalling the raised eyebrows and general disapproval when Europe Resurrection was first staged, he noted that experimental cinema isn't well received by the contemporary art scene in Taiwan, though the artistic form has long been part of the fine-arts tradition in the West. In Taiwan, he said, the Golden Harvest Awards (金穗獎) and Urban Nomad Film Festival are the only remaining venues that support experimental filmmaking.

"I see an incredible amount of creativity and energy in my students' works, but there are no



Experimental filmmaker and academic Tony Chun-hui Wu traverses genres to produce his films. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TEAM

venues to show them," Wu said. "I am planning to organize a showcase for experimental films with my students. It will begin with the campus, of course, but may grow into an international venue someday."

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Resurrection — Tony Chun-hui Wu's Solo Exhibition (甦醒—吳俊輝個展)

WHERE: Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), 17, Alley 51, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷51弄17號)

WHEN: Until Oct. 19. The gallery is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 1pm to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2578-5630

ON THE NET: www.changsgallery.com.tw

"The first thing I want to do when I get to Guangzhou, is leave," said Norman Ford, curator for the Hong Kong pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale, after visiting the southern Chinese city's biggest art festival.

This year's Guangzhou Triennial, the city's third attempt to lure the art world, is a fair too far. Never mind that it runs at the same time as the triennials in Nanjing and Yokohama or the Taipei and Singapore Biennales.

Those it could probably cope with. But Beijing and Shanghai have also just held flagship art shows. Even in the nation's gravity-defying contemporary art market, there are only so many collectors to go round.

Guangzhou is not the sexiest destination in Asia to hold an art show. The Guangdong Museum of Art, its new satellite, The Time Museum, and the Vitamin Creative Space are the only venues for the show. While Museum Director Wang Huangsheng (王璜生) deserves recognition for his ambitious exhibition program, it's hardly enough to create an arts capital.

The quality of the art on offer was hit or miss and the distribution awkward. Too many rooms on the first level had documentary-like installations of the kind French artist Christian Boltanski was doing 15 years ago. Too many video pieces were crammed into a single room on the third level.

Perhaps sensing the weight of competition, curators Gao Shiming (高士明), Sarat Maharaj and Johnson Chang Tsong-zung (張頌頌) broadened the triennial from earlier versions to try to avoid being just another showcase for the next new thing in Chinese contemporary.

LONG EXPLANATION

For this year's show, Farewell to Post-Colonialism, the curators give a 650-word explanation of the title — largely to do with freeing artists from the "political correctness" that has enveloped modern globalization and multiculturalism.

"The triennial's curators give elaborate explanations about the aim of the exhibition, but much of the art simply does not fit their intentions," said John Batten, a Hong Kong-based curator. "It only gets in the way of the mostly excellent art on display."

The Guangzhou Triennial is an attempt to bring together the whole Pearl River Delta

One fair too many

This year's Guangzhou Triennial, the Chinese city's third attempt to lure the art world, suffers from a number of problems — not the least of which is bad timing

BY JULIA TANSKI
BLOOMBERG



Faith on a Horse, an installation by Liu Dahong, on display at this year's Guangzhou Triennial. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Region — including Hong Kong and Macau — to make a mark on the international contemporary art scene.

"The opening was a debacle," said Ford, who is also a professor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. "It was overcrowded by visitors and by work. The Times Museum, where the second part of the show was held, wasn't even finished. Some of the work was set up in rooms with water leaking in."

Chang said the main problem was a shortage of funds.

"The interior of Time Museum by Rem Koolhaas could not be finished on time and some of the artworks designated there could not be installed," he said. "The museum needs to raise sponsorship. This is still a fair trade-off for not having to answer to official policy."

AFRICAN ART

Still, the event is more international than many Chinese art shows.

"The fact that quality Middle Eastern, African and Mexican artists were represented

was unusual for Asia," Ford said.

The tented video installation by Liu Dahong (劉大鴻), *Faith on a Horse*, is the starting point — you have to walk through it to get in to the show. Chinese folk-style paintings decorate plastic windows and cloth walls of the tent, leading up to a video projected gong with accompanying sound.

Sculptures of a horse's head crown the two exits of the tent. The ensemble is meant to put us in the shoes of a Chinese person having lived through Chairman Mao Zedong's (毛澤東) reign.

"Contemporary art is diverging in the strategies taken," said Chang. "One level maintains a heady theoretical track and the other is breaking into a more gutsy, intuitive one."

CHINESE DEMON

Amy Cheung's (張韻雯) sculpture-and-sound installation *Ashes Unto Pearl* is part of the latter category. A deep purple meteorite-like sphere lets off sparks of light that draw the viewer in to look through holes in the surface to a Chinese demon-headed figure, while voices and sounds play around the work.

Behind Liu's tent are 16 paintings entitled *China Painters* by Christian Jankowski from Germany. He depicts the ideas Chinese art academies taught students — examples of Western art, landscapes, Chinese portraiture and theater.

The works were done at Dafen Painting Village in Dafen (大芬), a town near Shenzhen known as the art-forgery capital of the world, and mounted on cement and scaffolding to evoke "the hierarchies of art, the range of artistic production," said Chang.

Just as Dafen's output has exploded in the past few years, so China seems to be adding more and more art shows. Guangzhou will need to get better organized to stay in the competition.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Farewell to Post-Colonialism, the Third Guangzhou Triennial

WHERE: The Guangdong Museum of Art, Time Museum and Vitamin Creative Space in Guangzhou, China. For information, call +86 20 87351261

WHEN: Through Nov. 18

ON THE NET: www.gdmoo.org/zhanlan/threeyear/shannianzhanlink



Celebrity Interview

Apologies

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Did he feel like he did something special by coming out so frankly? "Oh shit, no, I'm the worst gay person ever!" Young cackles. "If it helped some people, then great. Thing is, though, I never wanted to be in a box. I still don't. I mean, if an issue is prevalent, then I'm happy to make a comment about being gay, middle-class, or a singer, whatever. It's not like I'm a big gay campaigner picking up my mantle and charging towards Soho."

Nevertheless, last year Young wrote an elegant response to a Matthew Parris column in the *Times*, in which Parris told his "fellow-queers" to remember that "there has been no better, luckier, time or place to be gay than Britain in 2007." Young agreed with his point, but also described his own experiences of homophobia, drew attention to the invisibility of gay sportsmen and actors, and talked about how homosexuality still had to be equated with normality. Or, as he put it: "Coming out should just be a statement of fact — I have red hair, I drink tea, I sleep with the same sex."

Were you proud of the piece? "I was. Because I did agree that things were good for us, but ... the very fact that we're talking about me being gay now says everything, doesn't it?" He smiles cheekily. "Matthew wrote a very charming letter to me afterwards. We were just like two academics sparring across our periodicals."

Young also wrote a piece for the *Guardian*, about being nominated for both the Brits and the Baftas in early 2006. The Bafta nod came for his role in the Judi Dench-led musical, *Mrs Henderson Presents*. Then, in 2007, came something he had always craved: his first role in theater. Young spent four months playing Nicky Lancaster, the protagonist of Noel Coward's 1924 play *The Vortex*, at Manchester's Royal Exchange. The London *Evening Standard's* theater critic, Nicholas de Jongh, loved his performance, saying it had "taken more than 80 years and the performance of Will Young ... to bring out the full truth about Nicky Lancaster."

Young is clearly energized when talking about that time, though he adds: "It was shit-scary — living in Manchester on my own, constantly conscious of what people thought of me getting the role. And being angry eight times a week. My friends said I looked like shit." He hasn't had any roles since, and worries that it's because of people's prejudices. "But if I have to graft like I did with my singing, I will."

The toughest thing Young has had to deal with in recent years, however, concerned the mental health problems of his twin brother, Rupert. A constant presence during the *Pop Idol* tryouts, Rupert grappled with alcoholism and self-abuse, even slitting his wrists during the auditions. In 2005, he was diagnosed with dysthymia, a depressive disorder triggered by trauma, and since then has set up the Mood Foundation, which provides mental health treatment for the less financially sound.

"I'm so proud of him," says Young. "It's been so fucking hard seeing someone you adored being so very unhappy, trying to reach out, then not letting you in." He had to cut the strings a few years after he got famous, which was particularly hard given the differences in their lots. Did he feel guilty? "Of course I did. But it got to the stage that I was like, no, I can't feel guilty about it. Because I loved him to death, but I had to wait for him to help himself."

Young is still angry about the mistreatment of depression in the UK, though. With a laugh, he adds that he is equally angry about post offices closing down, the nanny state and the lack of mutual responsibility being promoted by the government. "I'm growing older and grumpier. Next tour, I'm taking a soapbox and a loud-hailer."

Young has always been straightforward. Proud that his music follows similar lines, he has recently been getting into the "simple, direct messages of folk music and country" and talks passionately about the recent Robert Plant and Alison Krauss album, *Raising Sand*, and a compilation on a small Manchester label, Finders Keepers, called *Folk Is Not a Four Letter Word*. He makes me write down a list of similar things he might like, and reveals that he's desperate to go to Nashville to make his next album. "I feel like I can, you know? Because it feels like another one of those transitional times. I used to feel I had to apologize for what I was doing — and I don't any longer."

He laughs and clinks his bottle against mine. "I mean, I've been around for years now, haven't I? I've done my time. And it feels good."

Let It Go was released on Monday.