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The ART ISSUE

Hong Kong's bright young things



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The Art Issue

audience was banned from climbing inside the installation, as the smoke machine repeatedly set off the fire alarm.

In 2007 Cheung was invited to be one of three artists to represent Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale in the Norman Ford-curated show *Star Ferry*. Cheung created *Devil's Advocate: A Song and a Landscape*, an installation of frozen sculptures of elderly beings suspended in Plexiglass balls. The balls are slowly turned in a Ferris wheel illuminated in the darkness of a refrigerated meat locker. "It was about a desire to preserve our history," says Cheung. "Are you just going to unplug it? How do we preserve something so vulnerable?"

She professes to be concerned with the darker aspects of the city. "I think Hong Kong is a city of contrasts. It is a beautiful

"It was about a desire to preserve our history"

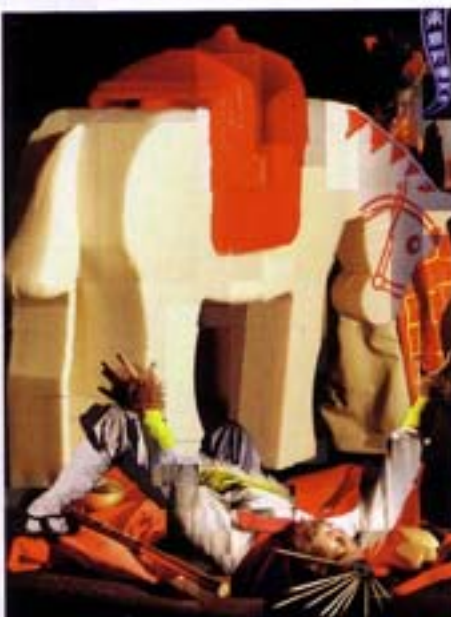
façade but there are some not so nice things happening underneath." In 2005 she created *Ivory Parables amid an Amnesiac's Skin*, a house made from reflective glass that was staged in the Cattle Depot. During the day the glass was reflective, so passersby could not see in. But with the twilight the glass reversed and the image of the artist lying on a bed was revealed. To add to the drama Cheung wore a beast-like mask. "I lived there for three days," she explains. "I had been inspired by *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Walking through Central I was wondering how many beasts are there? They dress well in suits, but inside they may be beasts."



Public art *Ivory Parables amid an Amnesiac's Skin*



Deadly toy Wooden tank at the Heritage Museum

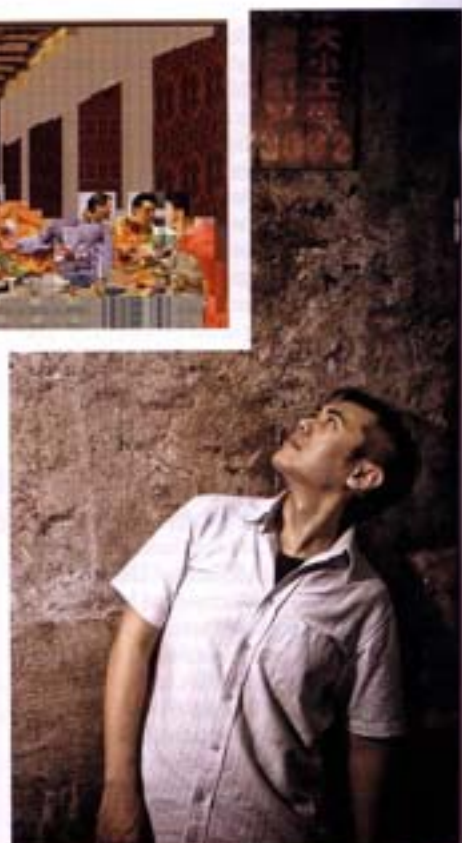


Last Supper (top) and Conversion of Monkey King

Chow Chun Fai

Chow Chun Fai is an artist whose star is on the rise. He has been one of the ring-leaders of the Fo Tan arts community organising their annual open days since 2003. This year Chow is no longer just a local lad, he's gone regional, and his twin studios in Hong Kong and Beijing now forms an axis of thrilling creativity. Having been picked up by Hong Kong's acclaimed Hanart TZ Gallery, the artist is actually running out of paintings to fuel the growing demand for his work. "I suddenly have two shows at the same time," he says. "I have done some shows in Europe before but this year I'm having more important, solo shows."

Chow creates iconic works that merge mediums – he paints scenes from Hong Kong movies, videos his paintings and makes photographic installations based on Renaissance paintings. "The jump from media to media is what I'm working at," he explains. He is perhaps best known for his paintings of stills of Chinese movies. Rendering the images in thick enamel paint, the subtitles imply themes of Hong Kong's hybrid identity. One painting titled *Fist of Fury, 1991, We are Chinese?* depicts a scene from Stephen Chow's film with a scene of Hong Kong police facing gangsters. "I'm trying to capture Hong Kong from the movies. It shows in all the



The medium master Chow Chun Fai

works. Sometimes I show how Hong Kong is, sometimes how Hong Kong thinks.

It is Chow's recent Renaissance Series that shows the artist's leaping mediums yet further, with impressive results. In *Last Supper* Leonardo Da Vinci's fifteenth century mural is adapted to photographs. Chow has recreated the classic work in a large photographic work with himself figured 13 times. "It is about the position of an artist in his work," suggests Chow. "From time to time artists start to disappear from their work, maybe because of the art market. I wanted to show that the importance of the artist, the creator."

"I'm trying to capture Hong Kong from the movies"

Conversion of Monkey King is an equally captivating work, a reworking of Caravaggio's *The Conversion of St Paul*. Capturing the moment when Levite Saul is struck blind by brilliant light and falls from his horse hearing Christ's voice – Chow has replaced the horse with a toy horse, and dressed himself as the Monkey King. "Maybe it shows Hong Kong culture," says Chow. "I chose a European classical painting to tell a Chinese story. Yet the Monkey King is also in many Japanese stories. I wanted to show how complicated the origin of knowledge is. There are so many perspectives." ▶