

“Heavy Head Drama (Chong Tau Hei)” by Ellen Pau

Nov. 25th - Dec. 30th, 2003



Ellen Pau is a major figure in the world of video art in Asia. Her work is on display at numerous international art-shows.

“Heavy Head Drama”, her solo exhibition at PLAY, assembles three video and installation works that never before have been shown in Germany:

Not Yet (2003)

For Some Reasons (2003)

Recycling Cinema (2000)

“Nam-June Paik subverts the information content of his imagery by a strategy of over-load, but Ellen Pau achieves the same end by moving in the opposite direction.” David Clarke, 2nd Asian Pacific Triennial, catalogue, Brisbane.

Ellen Pau’s strong sense for aesthetics and rhythm forms the base for her skilful transformation of political news, events and emotions into artwork. Hong Kong born Ellen Pau can be seen to mirror the history of her hybrid hometown, or - to use the modest Chinese way of saying - a little part of history, that, by means of her video and installation work, finally turns his-story into her-story.

The title “Heavy Head Drama” is the literal translation of the Chinese saying “Chong Tau Hei”, a fixed term to describe the main plot or the most important scene of a dramatic story. It refers to a style of translation which draws its ambivalence and manufactures its puns from the curious mixing of levels, like the sound of the pronounced Cantonese, the use of western letters to describe the sound and the original meaning of the Chinese characters. “Chong Tau Hei” could for example as well be read as “Plenty Beginning Play”. “Heavy Head Drama” is about literal translation, mixing language and sound, stories and real lives, misunderstanding and communication.

The complex qualities of Chinese language carrying sound, form, structure and meaning, are usually only selectively represented in the translation. “Hong Kong”, for example, usually was translated to a sound



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while it does not say anything about the meaning, “Fragrance Harbour”. Yet the loss of meaning in the process of translation is often the mysterious flare of the text. Still images, movie language, as well as motion graphics also have complex qualities of their own. “Not Yet” is the post text, a kind of translation of “For Some Reason”. It is an exploration of translation between image, text and sound, of the transaction of interpretation.

“For Some Reasons” starts with the exploration of the figure of speech. Every Chinese character is a face, each face has a story. Put the faces together you end up having another story. As a reaction on public demonstrations the title of the work copies a phrase that has been liberately used by Hong Kong government officials, when talking about the recently issued national security laws in China’s Special Administration Zone. The text of the story responds to the new controversially discussed Article 23, mixing with the hot topics of Hong Kong People. The pictures is made up of animated still frame pictures that is resembling the Chinese still frame character.

The third work included in the show is the installation “Recycling Cinema”, a continuation of Ellen Pau’s longstanding interest in exploring different ways in which to frame the spatial and temporal aspects of mobility and location in an urban context. Addressing the theme of observation and participation, reality and representation, the installation is a subtle, restraint critique of the use of hypertransgressive metaphors--idealizations of extreme and incessant mobility - in the representation of global cities such as Hong Kong. In contrast to electronic travelogues that merely record the fast-paced rhythm of everyday life in the city’s busy streets, it patiently excavates the banal act of observing traffic passing through a lonely highway by the sea. It attempt to reduce the excesses of speed, information, and media flows, to come to an alternative peaceful, quiet cognition of space and pictorial organization of the moving image. Mesmerizing and captivating, the temporal and spatial shifts created within the video image, as well as by its projected movement back and forth along a wide arched screen, calls for a heightened awareness of individual vehicles rushing past as objects of desire.

Composed by Elaine Ng, Dorotea Etzler and Alice Ming Wai Jim.