

Post Magazine

Mind the gaps and watch your steps at joint show of visual art

Two young Hong Kong artists get to grips with 'interstitial space' through the medium of video art, in an exhibition that rewards patient engagement

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12 AUG 2016

A decade ago, this city had only one government-funded fine-arts undergraduate course, offered by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and it produced fewer than 30 graduates a year. Since then, that number has jumped 10-fold, thanks to a substantial increase of public money in similar or cultural-management courses. Coinciding with the art world's interest in new media art and the influential view of some curators that "video is the new black", City University's School of Creative Media has benefited from expanded funding for its undergraduate, postgraduate and research initiatives.

Those extra funds are paying off, with graduates now exhibiting as mature video and new media artists. Alan Kwan Tsz-wai and Kenny Wong Chi-chuen graduated from the School of Creative Media and have also pursued overseas postgraduate degrees.

Show by young Hong Kong artists is one you can really get your teeth into

For their "The Interstitial" exhibition, the Pearl Lam Galleries SoHo provides an excellent high-ceilinged, two-level venue with space and synergy for both artists.

Interstitial space is the area between objects (e.g. the space between individual grains of rice). In this intelligent exhibition, each artist's work has a strong individual voice, but there is also another, influenced by the show's overarching atmosphere: the interstitial space "between the physical and the virtual to narrate emotion and memory". This is not a quick-look exhibition; careful viewing of each artist's video work slowly reveals that emotion.



Wong's *dist.solo* (2016).

A swinging video monitor takes centre stage on the gallery's ground floor and, as it approaches the bottom of its arc, a woman's full face or parts of her face are revealed. As the monitor swings upwards the image slowly disappears.

Titled *dist.solo* (2016), this kinetic video is one of a related series of Wong's work focusing on the distance ("dist") in a relationship as well as referring to the "mathematical or programming terminology for distance calculation". This embracing work depicts a changing video view of a single eye or blink, large lips, nose or a full face looking directly at the viewer.

Wong's *dist.intervene* (2016).

Placed behind this video, on a back wall, is *dist.visualcapture_2* (2016), a fixed light-box image of the same face that appears in the video. This is a depiction of a good interpersonal relationship, proved by solid eye contact and personable facial engagement. The swinging motion of the video has a hypnotic effect, drawing in the viewer and adding intimacy to the imagined relationship.

Why a Western gallery in Hong Kong is highlighting local artists

In contrast, the nearby interactive *dist.intervene* (2016) has a video monitor of a woman looking away from the viewer. It is a relationship under stress, and the viewer moving the monitor to elicit different images of the face cannot improve the situation: the screen shows only a face averted, disengaged.

Kwan also presents highly personal work. *The List* (2008) is a videoed suicide note that simply states: "By the time you see this / I am dead / Here are the girls whom I have ever loved". Presented on screen is a list of names of girls Kwan has loved. This simple and powerful work, completed when Kwan was an undergraduate, is a precursor of similarly compelling pieces shown in the upstairs gallery.

Alan Kwan's *The List* (2008).

The Hallway (2016) is an interactive, one-player video game inspired by the artist's experience as a five-year-old, when his father kicked him out of the family flat as punishment. Depicted in the video game is a frightening labyrinth of a hallway and doors that a player can open – but they only lead back into the hallway. Complementing this video is a series of photographs capturing a darkened hallway and a single, seemingly lost figure.

A still from Kwan's *The Hallway* (2016).

Kwan is afflicted by a stutter, although, as explained in his dark, dystopian video *The Stutterer* (2009), "afflicted" is how others see him. The disadvantages of stuttering are better seen in his complementary video *The Words After*, in which a small, concealed camera follows Kwan's daily movements – at dinner, for example. He then adds a layer of image manipulation to the video to emphasise his own conversations. The camera stutters and jerks in imitation of his on-screen stuttering. It is a disturbing intervention, but for the artist it is possibly more purging than purgatorial.



Kwan's *The Stutterer* (2009).

"The Interstitial" is on exhibition at the Pearl Lam Galleries SoHo, 189 Queen's Road West, Sheung Wan, until September 15.