

OUT OF CONTEXT RESEARCH PROJECT

Lau Gukzik Interview Transcript

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Lau Gukzik's home

Interviewers: Alan Chan and Di Liu

Signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984

Lau: When the Declaration was announced, the entire society was devastated and worried. Many people were planning emigration.

Lau: In the cultural sector, some people gathered to discuss what issues need to be made known, but these meetings were all official, i.e. organised by the Chinese government with the purpose of getting into contact with the cultural sector, to warm up. I remember going to one such meeting and I never went to another one, mainly because I didn't feel interested and found it meaningless. No conclusion came out of the meeting. And I was busy with work, so I didn't attend any other of those meetings.

Chan: What impact do you think the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the cultural atmosphere had on the landscape of art exhibitions in Hong Kong at that time?

Lau: I think there began to be, for example, exhibitions like 'Out of Context'. You could see the desire to transmit the feelings about the political reality. Like the work of Ricky Yeung, he made a cage. He was like an animal inside the cage. In the opening, he crawled out and yelled, as if he was trying to express the desire to break free. At that time, my impression was that he was responding to the reality of the changing society. But I think the reality had not reached such a stage, so I feel that he exaggerated.

Chan: So did the cultural atmosphere at that time have any impact on your works or career?

Lau: Actually no, because I worked as usual and was busy as usual. I didn't attend any of those meetings, as I was too busy and did not find them meaningful.

Usually I only go to meetings with interesting content, that is just my personal preference. So I didn't see a lot of differences.

Working as art editor at Ming Pao Weekly in the 80s

Lau: Because of work, I started a column. I was a so-called art editor in *Ming Pao Weekly*, and at the same time started a column called 'Ming Pao Weekly Town Hall', which focused on introducing exhibitions or performances in Hong Kong. Sometimes if I found an exhibition interesting and I was also interested, I would write a more detailed introduction, which perhaps would include some of my own views on the work. I didn't consider myself an art critic, but I sometimes wrote about how I look at certain things as an artist.

Lau: At that time, exhibition space was scarce. Hong Kong Arts Centre had just opened, and more groups and organisations had exhibited there since 1982. Arts Centre was quite a good exhibition venue. There were some exhibitions at the University of Hong Kong. These were the more substantial venues, and other venues were getting more interesting as well. After 'Out of Context', around Aberdeen Street, in Central and Sheung Wan, some bars and small restaurants were suddenly opened and they would invite artists to do exhibitions there. I did that as well. I went to the UK in 88. Between 87 and 88, I did a solo exhibition in a small bar called The Twelve Bar on Aberdeen Street. Another interesting thing was that, maybe due to the handover, there were more bars opened in Lan Kwai Fong. I don't know why. One of them was Club 64, now Club 71. I think the meanings of '64' and '71' are quite evident, which are related to politics.

Chan: Did you read any books or magazines on art?

Lau: Yes, both, for example, *Crossover*. *Crossover* was published by a group of visual artists. I don't remember who the chief editor was. Anyway, it was quite an avant-garde magazine. They liked to show a mix of disciplines of arts in one magazine, and it carried quite a contemporary message. I read them but not every issue. Another one is *Dislocation*, founded by Lee Kasing. The Chinese characters of its name can be separated into 'nui', 'naa', 'wo', 'doh'. I find that quite interesting. I like to see people thinking from different perspectives, so I think this magazine is quite good.

'Out of Context' (1987)

Chan: You participated in 'Out of Context' in 1987. Can you tell us about how you got involved in this exhibition, and who invited you?

Lau: It was a friend called Christine Loh. We know each other very well. She appreciates my works all along. Sometimes she will collect my works and is a very supportive friend. She thought, why didn't we get together artists active in Hong Kong to do something together? So she made the call. Later she invited Sandra Walters to co-organise it.

Chan: The exhibition was in October, when did the preparation begin?

Lau: We were called up already over the summer, to recruit the participants. I remember that we had a meeting in that old mansion on 15 Kennedy Road. People called it 'the ghost house', which no one dared to enter at night. It was worn out on the outside, but it was nice inside. The wooden staircases, stone floor and windows were very sturdy and beautiful. We thought it is wonderful to hold an exhibition in such a beautiful mansion.

Chan: When you met the other artists, did you already know any of them before?

Lau: Yes, Lee Kasing and Holly Lee. They do photography, not just with passion but of very high standard as well. I am particularly fond of Holly Lee's photography, her work is world-class. Another one was Wong Yankwai. He has always been doing acrylic abstract paintings. There was especially a deceased sculptor who I respect very much, that was Antonio Mak. I think he was the best sculptor at that time.

Lau: His work was very interesting. It was like a flying book made of feathers, hung overhead inside the mansion. It was an interesting installation, which was quite novel at the time. Another artist called Josh Hon returned to Hong Kong after studying in the U.S. He put a block of ice, about twice the size of this table, on the floor, and let it melt. I didn't know how many days it took. This kind of conceptual art. Or like Antonio Mak, who had been making elegant sculptures, but instead his work there was an interesting installation, like a flying book spine. There were both new and old stuff, like my little prints that showed the colour separation method I used in magazines. There were great contrasts. Some works were big, while mine was small.

Lau: My work was not big. It was a square on a page of a magazine. I think there were eight of them, framed and hung on a white wall.

Chan: Before the opening of 'Out of Context' there was a magazine called *Art Currents*. It has several interviews of the organisers and artists of the exhibition, and it published a special issue on 'Out of Context'. Did the publication of this issue generate any discussions among the artists?

Lau: I think this magazine founded by Fung Manyee... because he was a person of vigorous thoughts. His perspective was very biased, as if centred around him and observed from his perspective. I think it was prejudiced, but I think it was actually quite good, because even being prejudiced is still a form of freedom of expression. I don't think there are any problems with the existence of this kind of character.

Chan: What was your impression of the opening night?

Lau: It was a bustling scene. Firstly, it was Ricky Yeung's performance art. He came out from a cage and yelled, so everyone was shocked. It made an emotional impact on the audience. It was quite intense. Some people were following him.

Lau: Contemporary artists came together to do something, some of them were local and many had studied overseas. Many people were curious of what Hong Kong contemporary artists were doing, beyond what was taught in the general education of art. Actually quite a few people came to see it and found it interesting.

Lau: There was our inclusiveness towards works of art, which were very diverse and with all kinds of sizes. There were different concepts, and some were inconsistent. There were classical works, and there was photography. There was intense performance work like that of Ricky Yeung, or Fung Manyee's unorthodox rebelliousness. I think it was a miniature of society, very interesting.