**Tsang Kin-wah: "It would be better if you have never been born"
by Gérard Henry**

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"It would be better if you have never been born” is the title of the latest work of Tsang Kin-wah at the exhibition of “Louis Vuitton: A passion for creation". Tsang Kin-wah is one of the seven young artists from Hong Kong participating in this exhibition as Stars-artists of Contemporary art from the Louis Vuitton Foundation.

Born in 1976 in Guangdong province, Tsang Kin-wah moved to Hong Kong in 1982 and studied art in London and at the Fine Arts Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Tsang Kin-wah is very dedicated to his work, hard thinking and hard working, not too preoccupied with his fame and not pretending. In a word, you will notice his work but not the guy. And it is one of the reasons that I am attracted by his art, which has been consistent in quality for the last five to six years, especially since “White Cube”, a big installation he did in 2005 at John Batten’s Gallery.

If you visit a Tsang Kin-wah exhibition, you will think at first sight that the artist works with wallpaper or beautiful flowery wall patterns in blue, white or red. His previous installation such as the one at the Hong Kong Biennale 2005 gives you the impression with its blue patterns to step up in a mosque. But when you get closer, you discover that this pattern is not flowers but words, words in lines, broken lines and sentences. A fifthly language which appears to be made of crude words and insults in English or Chinese. Through this rude aggression of a huge variety of “fuckings” you discover that the artist is questioning the relationship between art and language, artists and galleries, art and commerce etc - a kind of thought about the place of the artist in the modern society. A lot of reviews have been written on these exhibitions. But the new work at the Museum of Art is quite different, it is going one step further. It is more about place and meaning of human life in this universe. It is a kind of philosophical and spiritual thought, very interesting, but, to my opinion, from a very pessimistic point of view on humanity.

First of all, it is a new art form experimented by this artist, a video and computer installation of moving images. You enter into a dark empty room. You stand and the show is on the ceiling. Some words appear, one by one, at different places: first single words: THE ONE, THE KISS, THE LOVE, THE BODY, THE SOUL, THE GOODNESS, THE EVILNESS.AND THE MONEY. The artist, like in a game, places his components. Then comes a list of big temptations, like the ones in the bible: THE LUST, THE GLUTTONY, THE GREED, THE SLOTH, THE WRATH, THE ENVY, THE PRIDE. This is the battle what you will have to fight. It becomes, as the words running on the ceiling, YOUR BODY, YOUR SOUL…AND YOUR LUST, YOUR PRIDE AND YOUR ENVY.

As the show goes on, the sentences get longer, the speed goes faster. You become trapped by a swirl of words: YOUR CONTENTION AND YOUR ROBBERY, YOUR DESIRES AND YOUR BETRAYAL… WHY IT IS YOU, WHY IT IS ME… EAT HIM, CHEW HIM, DRINK HIM, FUCK HIM…

The sentences squirm like snakes at high speed on the ceiling, your body seems crashing toward death, you have betrayed yourself: HANG YOURSELF, HANG YOUR SOUL, HANG YOUR FUCKING NATURE…goes the words.

Tsang kin-wah explained his intentions about this installation:
”I try to describe the psychological condition of a person when he/she is in a state of confusion and when all the rules, beliefs and norms about good and bad, right and wrong, etc. are broken down. The work, in fact, makes some reference to Judas, a tragic figure who has no choices in his life but only to be a betrayer right before the birth of Jesus. The flash of evilness, the painfulness of being a betrayer, the helplessness and absurdity of life, etc. make living become meaningless. Life is not yours and it is not decidable or controllable.”

But when I questioned him on the ending he was a bit confused:
“About the ending, I don't have a very solid, clear and singular meaning about it but I feel like it's a bit like death but not physical, kind of like a spiritual death. The loss or the end of one's ego which leads you free from dilemma and struggle ... “

In fact you can regard this exhibition as a true spiritual experience, the last words could be seen as an annihilation of the ego and a kind of renaissance or redemption: THE DARK SIDE OF GOD AND THE DARK SIDEOF YOU, HE IS FINISHED AND YOU ARE FINISHED. VICTORY OVER MATERIALIST WORLD, VICTORY OVER SPIRITUAL WORLD.

On the ceiling the words disappear and are replaced by a luminous white light which goes stronger and stronger. Death or Ecstasy?

It was a long time since I have seen such a deep and meaningful artwork in the Hong Kong young art scene.

Exhibition: ?Louis Vuitton: A passion for creation?
Date: 22.5. – 9.8.2009
Venue: Hong Kong Museum of Art
Website: http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Arts/chinese/exhibitions/exhibitions01\_apr09\_01.html