

Kit Hung**ARTIST**

I think I started thinking about art when I was at university. I have a design background. I graduated with a design degree from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. So, my training is very much like a problem-solving base and I am a very visual person. When I was in year 2 of my studies in Hong Kong, I met this video artist, film maker, who came back from New York. Her name is Yau Ching and she has a very strong cultural studies background. So, she started to tell me all about queer theory, feminism ... this injected a lot of social sense to me. At that time I was also aware of my own sexuality. And then she started to show me a lot of queer art, queer video, independent video. I have different scales of works. Sometimes I have smaller scales of work that I can do just by myself. I have another work which is called "Breathe". It is basically a photo collage on how packed Hong Kong is and we cannot breathe at all. That one, I can do it by myself. And then in different scales I have different teams. For example last time in "Soundless Wind Chime", there is a camera man from Beijing and then I also worked with some Swiss actors and Swiss crew as well. And then I also mix some Chinese art director and the key co-producer is Chinese. The new project is also very mixed, French and Chinese together.

For authorship, I ... when I met new people, most of the people in my crew would know that the first things I talk to my crew is I do not ask them to come to do what I want. I ask them to contribute their creative idea or creativity in my set.

Then I integrate their story and integrate their creativity in my films, so the film becomes a hybrid of creativity that can be shown. I believe it actually can become more powerful when it becomes one piece. I always tell my crew and actors and actresses that I am – I how to say? – I am a Chinese doctor because Chinese medicine is a mixture of different herbs and different things. So, I am a Chinese doctor, I have maybe 1000 drawers that I can take. So, I take a little bit of here, a little bit of here, and make them become the medicine or it become the things that I want.

ARTWORK

Well let's go for my first short films then. Because I recently showed my first short film to my students. I made this short film when I was their age, 20-something. The name of this piece is "Invisible People".

It is about cyber identity. It was produced in 2001 which is more than 10 years ago. At that time, I still remember, I was the first student in my class who used internet for research. So, internet had just come up and we are still using this dialed-up internet which had these strange sounds when it connected and you hear the modem dialing.

And then I was pretty shocked or pretty confused about what is a cyber identity at that time because, suddenly, when you can only communicate face-to-face or verbally over the phone, suddenly there is a new identity called cyber identity. You can log in a website or log in a chat room and you can type your own description of yourself. Even if physically you are a man, you can type in your profile that you are a 17-year old girl. Whatever you want, you can make up an identity that you want to be, basically, or you want to explore. Because by responding to other people or how other people respond to you, you will be completely into your created identity. I was very curious about these new things. That you can actually be anyone after school when you are facing your computer.

Actually that was a course work I made. And then my teacher was impressed by what I wanted to do. And then the school helped me to send it to festivals and then it got quite a good response around the world. Then I started to think, "what is it? Why is it? Why is this work so interesting to other people?" And then I realized that it's this topic inside that I am working on or the points of views that I show people and how I present cyber identity and physical identity together, make people feel interested about my thoughts.

So, then I slowly generated an understanding of how a video or how my work would be meaningful to other people: the message inside is very important and also my personal point of view is very important. Then I started to go for this direction that when I create art or when I create a movie I must have a central message in the middle. And then this central message can be more defined and manipulated in an art form. So, it can be communicated as an individual piece to the audience. But even when I am not existing, when I am not besides the artwork, the artwork itself can stand alone and can communicate with the audience around the world.

Because of my own background and identity I ... a lot of my art is related to the queer community in Hong Kong or in Asian culture. I can see things from Eastern and Western points of view, I can mix culture and mix it in my art that people both from the Western world and the Eastern world will understand. For example, my last feature film "Soundless wind chime", is basically a story about a European man living in Hong Kong and a love story with a Chinese man. I was actually quite surprised when I was showing it in the Berlin International Film Festival 2009. Different people related to the film from different points of view because the story has two main characters from completely different backgrounds. So, I as a Chinese film maker produced the film from my Chinese point of view. But because of this position of me having lived in Switzerland and in America for a while, I am able to put a European character in my film that opens up a different market and opens up an audience to understand the film.

PRODUCTION

I try to work with the same team as much as I can because the language will be ... I spend a lot of time talking to my crew to make sure they understand my intention. To me, when I am on a set, I am more like a creative manager that may have the ultimate vision or the ultimate goal for a creative project. I need all these people's input inside. And I always tell them, "I am not treating you as clay, that I would mold you into a shape. You have to tell me what you think is good for this project as well. Then I decide whether I want it. I really have to find a way to attach my emotion on it first. For example, "Soundless Wind Chime" is the missing feeling of knowing somebody has already died but unconsciously, you don't want to accept that they have already passed away. So, this kind of abstract feelings become soundless wind chimes when I write the script. And then the new movie that I am working on is also about my relationship with my mother. So, this has very much come out from personal feelings. And I believe as an actor or as an individual living in the world, there are certain emotions or certain experiences that a lot of people can share.

For the last project, I made up a story of a daughter going to get married to a European man after she ran away from home for so many years. And then the mother was going crazy when she knew that the daughter would get married to a "non-Chinese" guy. So, this became the main theme, main plot of my next ... no, actually the project that I am working on. I started to develop the script and then I started to integrate all my sensitivity and I made it become a musical. I asked my friend to write some songs. And then I just started script-writing for almost half a year. Because this project is more considered on a commercial base the budget is a lot bigger than my first film.

So, I'll have to put in a lot of commercial considerations as well. We got celebrity actors and then known singer/songwriter ... things like that. And after I finish the script, I go to the finance market and I apply for different funding. This is what we call the film financing process. And then we got some money. Of course, we got a lot of rejections and then we got some money and then we finally could start making the movie and I just called my old friend, my old crew from my last production to see whether they were available to help me and then we have a lot of meetings. Storyboard is very important for me. So, I believe ... especially in Hong Kong, not a lot of feature films will get a storyboard. But then, I think story-board visualizes a lot of things for me. So, I have a long process of making storyboards shot by shot, picture by picture. All this regular film procedure becomes very normal, very routine to me already. Fitting, testing, auditions ...

When is an art piece being finished? It is not when the script is sent to the actors or whatever. I want to open up the script to be very dynamic so that all the people can participate, especially the actors. So, if they have improvisation on the set, I am very open. I only tell them, "the script only finished when I say 'cut'". And then the whole story will begin, the whole new creative process will begin in the editing room. That I may actually edit a whole completely different story out of the computer.

MATERIAL

What I am trying to produce ... It is more like a social ... I really have to have a social message – or a message – in my movie first. This is the material. Camera, lighting ... all this gear helps you to execute a film. But I think the content itself has to be very strong so, I always stick with social issues. I do put a lot of emotion and concentration on actors and actresses. I'll have to make them understand me and I have to touch them with the story first. I have to say I spend a lot of time with my actors. We share a lot of personal stories.

MEDIUM

I think film is a different type of language. We use a time-based medium which is moving pictures and sounds to create something for the audience to view. I think we are using this kind of language to talk to the people instead of ... Other people actually – like a writer – may have the skills of writing a book or releasing a book. This is the way of communication I am gifted with, with this technique or this sense of making movies to send the message to my audience. The main message is queer community and also all this hybrid and integration of different culture.

PROCESS

I think in general, the creative process requires a lot of re-thinking and discussions with other people. Because I think, as an artist, I very easily go into my ... or am trapped in my own world. That would make my art very easy to be isolated from other people. Sometimes I will tell my idea in different forms. For example, I will show the storyboard to people and ask them to read it like comic books and see whether they got it. Or sometimes, I break down the script into index cards and ask the people to play it like a poker card. So, when they read the card, they will re-arrange the story to me. And then sometimes, I give a lot of ... – even with friends, I just keep talking to them like a one-minute-pitch. I'll tell them, "ok, if there's a story in the newspaper, will you go buy tickets to see it?". Things like that. How the idea can exist in different forms actually really excites me. This is also part of the process that probably is not falling into the regular film-making procedure, but how I myself as an artist is trying to render a better idea or details in the movie.

Sometimes when I talk about, "oh, I am making a film about my mum", they will start sharing experience with their mums. For example, this new project of mine is a daughter-and-mother story. So, I try to remember some kind of experience with my sister and my mother. And then I sort of created this situation where the daughter was using her mother's lipstick when she was six years old and then, when the daughter returns – 30 years old –, then the mother will use the daughter's lipstick at the same time. That kind of change I was asking, "does it actually happen in real life? That when you were a child, you used your mother's lipstick and you got blamed or yelled at for using an adult item, but then, when you grow up, your mother will actually use your lipstick?" – And then every woman would tell me it always happens. The sentence and the communication that always happens is, the daughter will bring up the memories, "oh, when I was a child and used your lipstick, you weren't happy and now you use my lipstick". It's always like this. That is quite interesting to see how all these tiny little details become a common experience and common story with all the mother-and-daughter-relationships. And it is the details – and I think this is the real touch that I want to offer my audience. That they really can feel themselves in my story and in my piece as well.

PRESENTATION

I actually slowly realized that by putting ... if I have to position myself as a film maker or if I have to reach my audience, I really have to package my films.

I believe, because all of us are actually living in a world full of materialistic temptation – everything is so beautiful –, for a normal person, especially for film media, if you want to ask them to click a YouTube link, you have to get a very eye-catching photo. Or you have to print some very eye-catching materials – paper or printouts – in order to draw the attention. Because this world is already full of different information.

How to get their attention if you believe your film is good and has a strong message, is first how they first see the presentation – which is the beauty of it.

So, I think this is very very important to me. So, I consciously want to make beautiful pictures in order to make sure my image can be conveyed to my audience. This is why I think presentation is very important. Now, we as audience are experiencing a lot of different presentations from small mobile devices and this is also what I teach my students. I tell them, "I am living between 'small screen' and 'big screen'". But the student now is very much into the small screen. With the influences of the technology, people have different types of interpretation. For example, 50 years ago, nobody would have understood a Whatsapp messenger. Or even 20 years ago, nobody would have understood the presentation of a text messenger on screen. My grandmother will probably be shocked to see why there are subtitles and then there is typewritten work on the screen besides. But now, most of the audience already understand it. So, this is our job as artists or filmmakers. When we want to present social media or mobile messaging. How do you present it in an innovative or in a creative way that impresses people?

INTENTION

I believe that films are always manipulations of just a few basic human emotions. By putting different contexts or different situations you bring the audience to experience the same emotions in a different way.

I think I am not a very social person. I do not like to talk in public. I do not like to do a lot of social gatherings. When there are too many people, I become very silent. I only talk with very close friends. But then I do have a lot of things that I want other people to know. So, I use the medium film to say what I want to say, so I do not have to face them (laughs). But at the same time, they will know what I want to say.

What I want to say? That is a lot of things. I remember when I grew up, homosexuality was a very big issue for me. So, I want to tell people how normal we are as homosexual people. I know I actually had a big impact when I was in Switzerland. I actually know that it's a country where homosexuality is not a problem. But living in Hong Kong, or especially when I see the situation in China and other countries, it is important for me to tell people that we are no difference from the mainstream or the heterosexual people when we are in love with someone else.

Love is not about the gender. Love is just about love. Love is an emotion.

So, when I began creating movies, that was a very important message for me that I want to say. And then slowly, when I grew up, I became aware of other social issues. For example now the situation in Hong Kong, I think it is very important to let everyone know what is happening.

METHOD

For myself, I always have to have my own personal motivational ... own personal passions when I am creating the art because it is ... I know it is going to be a very very long process. And I always have to find a way to nail it, to make sure I always have the same emotion or same motivation on it.

To me, the most important things of my work is to give the audience an emotional journey. That they can follow the character or even put themselves as the character and go through all the ups and downs in their life. So, sometimes I would just tell myself, "oh, no, the characters have to be sad, and now the characters have to be happy," or how the characters have to experience different types of emotion. And usually my challenge or I said the creativity is: how do you create a situation for this character to experience?

And this situation will have to make the audience identify as well. Then, there are a lot of cultural references, social references I have to put in in order to create this event for this character to experience. And it has to make sense to the audience and then, this is usually my biggest challenge.

ART

Art ... I think art makes people different. Actually, art makes people think. Art is a process of thinking. Art is a kind of appreciation or a process of making awareness of something to me.

BIO

* 1977, Kung is an independent filmmaker from Hong Kong. He studied film production in the USA and Hong Kong. He attended the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for his BA in Design 2001 and a M.F.A. in Studio 2005.

Kit Hung is most notable for his film "Soundless Wind Chime (2009)" which won him several awards. He is teaching in the School of Creative Media in the City University of Hong Kong.

Credits

The interview was conducted on 29 November 2014 at a TV studio in the Communication and Visual Art Building at Hong Kong Baptist University.

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