

Hong Kong artist Ban Zhang Zhe says he prefers to work in a collective environment

香港藝術家張哲表示他喜愛集體創作環境

Comfort zones 創作天地

Three artists talk about the spaces that help – or hinder – their creative urge

三位藝術家暢談啟發創作靈感的空間

TEXT/撰文 JO BAKER

Ban Zhang Zhe

“I like to live in different art villages. I think the community spirit can give you a better look into questions of life – whether economic, social and so on – and from these thoughts come new ideas about how to express these in artworks.”

Ban Zhang Zhe became interested in sculpture during his early years in Hong Kong while working as a photographer, before a grant from the Taiwanese government took him to Kaohsiung's Pier 2 Art District to be part of a community programme. There he found a new, surprising level of inspiration and support. “They provided enough space and money for basic living so that I could reflect on my identity as an artist without pressure – and express the differences between myself as a Hong Kong artist and a Chinese artist in Taiwan,” Zhang says. He credits the government's progressive attitude to art development for the cosmopolitan, communal vibe he found in the repurposed art complex that hosted regular international exhibitions and undertook projects with local college students.

Although Zhang, 47, has worked in solitary studio spaces since, he still prefers the collective environment and can now be found among a host of artists at the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC) in Hong Kong's Shek Kip Mei. Here he creates vast metal installations, incorporating graphics and photography, and most recently participated in an exhibition with five other Hong Kong artists called *Primitive Craftsmanship, Contemporary Sculpture*, in the C&G Art Garden C&G in Yuen Long, using materials found on the site. While Zhang likes to explore themes of economic and social change in the city around him, he provokes emotional responses through the surprising use of materials. As part of the opening exhibition at the JCCAC, which celebrated its transformation from a factory estate into an emerging art hub, Zhang manipulated an abandoned tangle of plastic hangers to explore the relationship between substance and space, art and industry.

Zhang's requirements of a decent art space are relatively modest, and he points to Beijing's 798 Art Zone as a comfortable combination of community elements, space and convenience. Nevertheless, he feels that the Taiwanese continue to raise the bar for artists. “Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China each have different art ecologies, and if I had to choose which place was most comfortable for me, I prefer Taiwan. A government that supports arts development is of paramount importance.”

Zhang focuses on vast metal installations, such as his Big Hanger collection (above right, and below)

張哲主力創作大型的金属裝置藝術；Big Hanger系列(右上圖及下圖)是他的作品之一



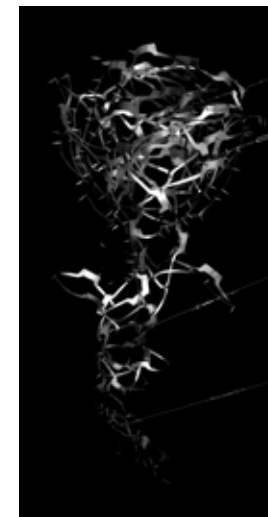
張哲

「我喜歡住在不同的藝術村裡。那種社區氛圍讓你更能夠深入地探討人生的課題，不論是經濟、社會或其他問題，而這些思考可為藝術創作的表現形式帶來新意念。」

張哲(又名張志平)早年在香港從事攝影工作時已迷上了雕塑，其後獲得台灣政府的資助，前往高雄參與「駁2藝術特區」的社區藝術計劃。這個由倉庫改建而成的藝術特區，會定期舉辦國際性展出，以及與當地大專院校學生聯合舉行藝術活動。在那裡，他獲得前所未有的支援與靈感，令他喜出望外。他憶述：「他們提供了足夠的空間和讓我們維持基本生活的金錢，我可以毫無壓力地投入藝術創作，將香港藝術家與住在台灣的華人藝術家兩種身分表達出來。」他把功勞歸於政府對發展都市藝術的積極支持，以及駁二的社區氛圍。

現年47歲的張哲在駁二之後，已搬進獨立的個人工作室，但他仍偏好集體創作的空間。現在他已進駐石硤尾的賽馬會創意藝術中心，成為其中一位藝術家，作品以結合圖像和照片的大型金属裝置藝術為主。最近他還聯合另外五位藝術家，在元朗的C&G藝術花園就地取材，舉行「原始刻劃·當代雕塑」展覽。張哲習慣從城市的經濟和社會變化中尋找創作主題，並且擅長利用令人意想不到的材料來激發人們的情感。由舊工廠大廈改建而成的賽馬會創意藝術中心開幕展上，張哲利用糾纏在一起的廢棄塑料衣架，探討物質與空間、藝術與工業之間的關係。

張哲對於心目中的理想藝術空間，要求相對簡單，他認為北京798藝術區融合社區氣氛、空間和便利，感覺相當不錯，不過，他覺得台灣在這方面仍不斷作出提升。他指出：「台灣、香港和中國內地各有不同的藝術生態，如果要我比較哪一個地方最讓我感到舒適，我會選擇台灣。因為一個政府對於藝術發展的支持至關重要。」



Photos: Portrait: Timothy O'Rourke. Big Hanger collection: Ban Zhang Zhe

Kacey Wong

“What are the components of a perfect studio? Object Factory is my sanctuary and my dojo. I called my studio Object Factory to remind myself art is often undefined and art is about production. Whenever I am inside my studio, the big problems of the outside world seem like small problems and I am one with my universe.”

Since he left the formal design industry 12 years ago, Kacey Wong has curated and participated in exhibitions that explore the social implications of the spaces people inhabit, particularly in cities. His *Drift City* photo series, embarked upon in 2000, involved the artist dressing up as a lonely skyscraper and visiting different spots around the world “in search of utopia”. Another project, *Famiglia Grande*, saw him design stylish capsule-like abodes for people who had lost their homes in the Asian economic crisis. “Although I try to approach different concerns and cover different themes, I guess the common ground is space, the city and its relationship to the people who live in it,” he says. “Particularly, how surreal different places can be, and a sense of loneliness and belonging.”

Following years of juggling part-time jobs and sharing a studio with another artist, Wong, 41, found the space and solitude he craved in his Object Factory – a converted industrial space in Hong Kong’s Ap Lei Chau. Located between a large gallery space, a small workshop, a cosy loft space and a concealed storage unit, it gives him the room and functionality to have a number of large installations on-the-go. Although many of his projects start with a sketch on A4 paper, often completed at home, much of the experimentation takes place during his building phase. “I do this deliberately to leave more room for the project to develop and leave space for problems and mistakes to emerge,” he says. “I call this method ‘fix it while you are running’, which often produces amazing results outside of my expectation.”

Yet Wong realises the difficulty finding spaces poses to most young artists, and he points to both unscrupulous developers and the lack of government support as key challenges to artistic development in Hong Kong. “Some artists at the moment have to create out of their flats,” he says. “The government definitely needs to think about ‘software’ for the city and start to view the creative world as an asset.”

Wong's *Drift City* photo series took him to places such as Cairo (below) and London (bottom) dressed as a lonely skyscraper

黃國才在「遊離都市」攝影系列裡穿上摩天大廈紙板，在開羅（下圖）和倫敦（最下圖）留影



Kacey Wong, with *Memory of the Forest* that he constructed with students, says young artists face a tough challenge to find creative spaces

黃國才與學生合力製作的作品《森林的回憶》；他表示年輕藝術家難以找到從事創作的空間

黃國才

「一個完美工作室必須擁有什麼元素？Object Factory 是我的聖殿和道場。我把工作室命名為Object Factory，是要提醒自己，藝術通常是沒有明確的詮釋；藝術是一個生產過程。每當我置身工作室內，外面世界的大問題全都變得渺小，我獨自身處在我的宇宙之中。」

黃國才自12年前離開主流的設計行業後，便參與和協助策劃了不少展覽，主要探索居住空間對人類社會的影響，特別是城市裡的居住空間。在2000年展開的「遊離都市」攝影系列裡，黃國才穿上摩天大廈紙板，獨行於全球大都市「尋找烏托邦」。而在另一項創作計劃「顯赫家族」裡，黃國才特別為在亞洲金融風暴中失去家園的人，設計了外型時尚的摺疊式箱形住所。他指出：「雖然我嘗試探索不同的關注點和涵蓋不同的主題，但總有一個共通點，那就是空間，即城市與居住在其中的人類之間的關係，特別是不同地方的超現實感，以及它所產生的孤獨感或歸屬感。」

過去多年，41歲的黃國才一直忙於各種兼職工作，還要跟另一位藝術家共用工作室，因此直到他的個人工作室Object Factory成立，他才在這個位於香港島鴨脷洲工廠大廈的單位內找到獨處的空間。工作室內設有寬敞的作品展示區、小型工作室、舒適的閣樓和密封的儲物室，有足夠的空間和多元功能，讓他得以隨心所欲進行大型的創作。雖然他每一個創作意念都從A4紙上打草圖開始，而這部分工作通常會在家裡完成，但許多構思和嘗試卻是在動手製作的過程中想到的。他解釋：「我特意這麼做，因為這樣才能讓我一邊動手一邊構思，讓問題和錯誤在製作過程中浮現。這種我稱之為『邊做邊完善』的創作方式，經常讓我有意外的收穫。」

然而，黃國才無奈地指出，這方法對大部分年輕藝術家來說太奢侈了。地產商壟斷和缺乏政府的支持，都對本地的藝術發展構成阻礙。他指出：「現時有很多藝術家都只能在家裡從事創作，政府必須思考如何為這個城市提供更多『軟件』，並且改變觀念，把創意視為一種社會資產。」

Photos: Portrait: Timothy O'Rourke. Drift City: Kacey Wong

Thomas Charvériat

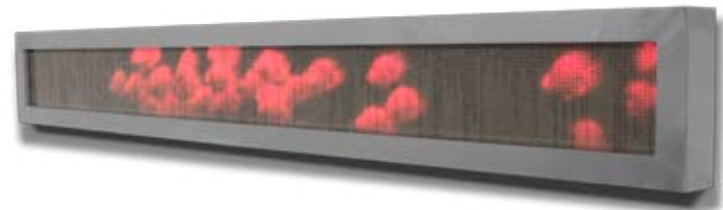
“It’s important to me to make art that is contextual to its time. We currently live in a landscape heavily marked and altered by technology and our relationship with it. Unlike the temporary-looking setups of other galleries that show different artists, we can change our physical space to suit the specific needs of our electronic art, like routing the wiring through the walls instead of along them, and controlling the gallery lighting so that our dancing LEDs don’t get washed out. And where else do you find a gallery that has housed a swing, a stripper pole and a giant human-sized aquarium?”

As the founder of two non-profit art spaces, Montcada5 in Barcelona and island6 Arts Center in Shanghai, it comes as little surprise that Thomas Charvériat is keen to promote artistic interaction. The exhibitions he directs in Shanghai tend to draw in their viewers with multi-sensory elements, often using humour or surprise – while in his own art he has experimented with sound, video, GPS-controlled animatronics and instant messaging.

The 37-year-old French-born artist has long been tuned in to the impact of the environment on artists’ work, and at island6 on Shanghai’s Moganshan Road, set up in 2006, he and his team – the Liu Dao art collective – have worked hard to craft a space that is inspiring and functional but, most importantly, conducive to collective work, pursued without individual ego. The international group of young artists and engineers that makes up the collective, and runs the space, experiments in different media and styles and, he believes, with fewer inhibitions.

Having relocated and shape-shifted a number of times, the studio’s office was most recently sculpted into a split-level transparent cube-shape, surrounded by the main space, with Zen-like white walls and rough factory-style concrete floors. This allows 360-degree vision for artists at work and for visitors to observe the activity. The shape, strength and versatility of the design has allowed greater collaboration and the use of heavier and more complicated technology. Charvériat gives a recent example: “In *Bodice Freedom*, we liked the sensuality of the bodice stand... we shot it against a chroma-key backdrop. This permitted us to digitalise the picture and cut it with our laser-cutting machine. We also shot the video animation of the pole dancer in our studio.”

The team of artists then used a variety of technologies, some old, such as Chinese rice paper soaked in tea, and some new, like digital animation, which ultimately produced a most unusual LED-animated installation. “During this process, technology becomes organic, digital reality comes alive, begins to speak, dream, conspire, and seduce,” Charvériat says.



The artwork 517 517, part of the island6 Arts Center’s underwater life forms series, is a comment on China’s fast-food industry. 六島藝術中心的水底生物系列其中一件作品《517 517》，是對中國的快餐業作出回應。

Mao Suit is a combination of LED display, papercut and paper collage, in a teak frame.

《Mao Suit》在柚木畫框上創作，糅合了LED影像、剪紙及美術拼貼。



托馬斯

「我深信藝術必須與所處的時代相融。今天，我們生存在一個被科技重重包圍和深受其影響的世代。其他藝廊會因應不同藝術家的作品而變換展廳陳設，但我們卻可以改動實體空間來滿足展出電子藝術品的特殊需要，例如將電線藏在牆裡而不是外露在牆壁上；也會透過調控藝廊內的燈光來確保我們閃動的LED創作不會被蓋過。此外，你還在這裡見過藝廊內放置了鞦韆、跳鋼管舞的金屬管，和跟人一樣高的巨型水族箱？」

托馬斯是巴塞羅那Montcada5和上海六島藝術中心這兩間非牟利藝廊的創辦人，對推動藝術交流不餘遺力。他在上海策劃的藝術展，傾向於使用各種感官元素，加上幽默和令人意想不到的手法，以吸引觀眾。在自己的藝術創作上，他運用聲音、錄像、GPS遙控的電子動物和即時訊息等方式進行實驗性創作。

這位37歲的藝術家出生於法國，一向關注環境對藝術工作者的影響。2006年，他在上海莫干山路創辦六島藝術中心，在中心內他和工作人員致力於打造一個充滿啟發性的實用空間，但更重要的是營造有助藝術家進行集體創作的環境。他相信，組成和管理六島藝術中心的年輕國際藝術家和工程師，可以在較少束縛下，利用不同的媒介和風格從事創作。

藝廊的工作室經歷多次搬動和改頭換面，最近被改造成錯層的透明立方體，設置於主建築中央。工作室的白色牆身充滿禪味，並鋪上類似工廠的粗糙水泥地板。這個設計讓工作中的藝術家可以看到四周情況，訪客亦可觀賞藝術家的一舉一動。新設計的形狀、優點和靈活程度，有利於更大型的共同創作，以及應用更複雜的科技。托馬斯以一個近作為例：「創作《Bodice Freedom》時，我們很喜歡半身模特兒衣架所產生的感官刺激，於是將它放在藍幕前拍攝，方便將照片數碼化，然後利用雷射切割機將衣架的紙樣剪下。此外，我們也在工作室內拍下鋼管舞的影像。」

接下來，協作的藝術家利用古今科技，如將宣紙浸在茶裡和數碼動畫等，製作出獨特的LED動畫裝置。托馬斯說：「在過程中，科技變成了有機生物體，賦予數碼作品生命，讓它開始說話、做夢、變化和散發誘人魅力。」■

Photos: Portrait: Steven Harris. Artworks: Liu Dao art collective, island6 Arts Center



Thomas Charvériat says space at the island6 Arts Center in Shanghai allows 360-degree vision for artists to work in and for visitors to observe

托馬斯表示上海六島藝術中心的空間，讓工作中的藝術家擁有360度視野，也讓訪客可以觀看他們的工作情況。