

REVIEWS

Published on January 7, 2022 — Leave a comment

Ko Sin Tung 高倩彤

written by Fizen Yuen



An acute manner 更尖銳的方式 / Kiang Malingue / Hong Kong / Nov 11 – Jan 15, 2022 /

If something is sharp, the edge is often outward facing. For instance, sharpness can be used to describe piercing speech or sharp questions. But in changing times, when all sharpness has been blunted, how can one maintain one's sharp edge? When the world squabbles about what to say and what can't be said, Ko Sin Tung quietly conveyed what she considered to be a sharp edge in her solo exhibition at Kiang Malingue.

Memories of the artist's last exhibition are still fresh: for that, she turned the gallery space, in a Grade A office building in Central, into a construction site. For this new exhibition, the gallery has temporarily relocated to an old industrial building in Aberdeen. But the exhibition space inside the gallery is suffocatingly clean, and cool tones pervade the venue and the works. There are only two pieces, and Ko's signature allusion to spaces in construction is nowhere to be found. At first glance, the minimalistic furnishings have made the white cube even whiter.



Installation view of *An acute manner* by Ko Sin Tung at Kiang Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, 2021.
Photo: Wong Pak Hang.

Ko has always been attracted to the visual forms and aesthetics of man-made objects and urban construction work, at the same time exploring the latent violence hidden beneath them. Her minimalistic approach to this show wasn't solely an aesthetic decision, but was also related to urban development

Her recent work also features numerous allusions to surgery. In *Dust and Trivial Matters* (2019), she cut up and broke objects and placed them in a sterilised, segregated space; in *Guardian* (2019), part of the group exhibition *Borrowed Scenery*, she put on a pair of surgical gloves to weave wire loops under the protection of a medical screen.

Surgery is the process of externally treating pathological conditions, changing the structure of or implanting foreign objects in the body or other organic matter using

instruments. Construction work and surgery are both intrusions into a specific site to improve the whole based on certain aspirations – healing or development. But the operating procedures of the two are the complete opposites: the former emphasises construction, while the latter is about elimination, eradication and preservation. If Ko's previous works have focused on the way everyday objects are handled – for example, *Adaptation* (2019) remains a construction site in progress – this new exhibition was closer to how a site nearing completion would look, with the artist skipping all illustrations of the production process.

Cut-up pieces of plastic containers are scattered around the venue, metal barriers running through them. The venue is divided by a slowly moving screen down its centre made from metal wires. A white cube seemingly does not have a position or character, providing an artist with a blank sheet of paper. But through minimal interference, the artist has divided the exhibition space using metal barricades, subtly disrupting the movement of the viewer to create a slight difference between the experiences of the exhibition and of daily life.

Ko's latest exhibition has shown great restraint in not creating any points of interest for viewers (or potential buyers). Social media photo-sharing enthusiasts will probably be unable to find anything Instagrammable in this exhibition. With everyday objects and ordinary materials placed by Ko in a spanking clean space, evoking daily life, minimalism and cleanness of form, while at the same time pretending to be mundane, she alludes to the latent oppression beneath everyday life. The pandemic has been ongoing for two years. Under the hyper-awareness of hygiene and cleanliness, Ko draws attention to the numerous tiny restrictions currently in place. Consequently, her sharp edge is also inward facing, its sensitivity a contrast to the numbness often felt towards the constraints of the new normal.

From the unfinished holes left in construction sites in her previous works to the wounds that punctuate objects and are dabbed with iodine, the artist has broadened her visual vocabulary in the past two years, with her concerns moving from urban construction to what is inside our own bodies. Amid the coolness of the exhibition, areas of warmth stood out; the iodine on the punctured objects might be the only warm colour in the entire exhibition. The artist was probably well aware that the iodine is not a treatment but a symbol of grief. The slight ache reminds us of the existence of the wound, the silent blind spot in our memory, while telling us everything about the current state of affairs.

「尖銳」往往是外向的，例如辭鋒尖銳、問題尖銳，但時移世易，當一切尖銳都被壓平，「更尖銳的方式」如何再尖銳下去？當世界在「說什麼」和「不能說什麼」之間喋喋不休，高倩彤在馬凌畫廊喃喃地道出了她心目中「更尖銳的方式」。

仍記得上次藝術家的展覽將畫廊在中環甲級商業大廈的空間，改造成一個有如施工地盤的狀態；這次畫廊暫時移居至香港仔的一座舊式工業大廈，畫廊內部的展覽空間卻乾淨得有點令人窒息，冷色調貫穿展場和作品，作品只有兩件，幾乎不見高倩彤創作中常見的建築工地意象，驟眼看來充滿極簡主義氣息的陳設，令畫廊原有的「白立方」特性變得更「白」。

高倩彤創作一直被城市發展中的人造物和建築工程的視覺形式和美學本能性地吸引，但同時吊詭地研究背後隱含的隱性暴力。因此，這種極簡主義的氣息，除了是美學上的取態，也和她一直關注的城市發展相關。而如果有留意藝術家近期的創作，就會發現「手術」的意象開始出現在她的作品。在《塵埃與瑣事》（2019年）中，她在無菌的隔離環境中，以切割和粉碎的方式處理物件；又或是2019年在「借景」展出的作品《守護者》，她戴上一雙手術手套，在醫療屏風的保護下編織鐵絲圈。

手術，意指凡透過器械，進入人體或其他生物組織，以外力方式排除病變、改變構造或植入外來物的處理過程。在此邏輯下，其實「建築工程」和「手術」兩者，同樣是因著某種盼望（痊癒和發展），介入特定範圍，完善宏觀的整體。但兩者的運作方式恰恰相反——前者強調建造；後者則關於省略、去除、保留。而如果說過往的作品側重處理這些日常物件的過程（例如「適當反應」仍然是一個施工中的工地），顯然這次的展覽則接近完工後的狀態，藝術家省略了所有製造過程的呈現。

在今次展覽中，我們可以看見：膠製容器被切割，散落展場；金屬圍欄洞穿這些容器，配合中央緩緩移動鐵絲簾將展場分割。白立方本來看似不具主張與個性，為展示藝術品提供低干擾的展示空間。但在有意無意之間，藝術家透過最小的介入，用金屬圍欄和將展場分割，含蓄地干擾觀眾遊走的動線，將展覽經驗和日常經驗製造纖毫之別。

而高倩彤今次的展覽克制在，她彷彿不打算製造任何觀看（或購買）的對象。如果你是熱愛打咕的觀眾，大概不會在這個展覽中找到任何可堪奇觀的焦點。這些日常物件和平凡材料，在她小心翼翼的處理下，擺放在乾乾淨淨的畫廊裡，散發著日常、簡約、潔淨的形式感，同時偽裝日常，暗示了隱含在日常生活中的隱性壓逼。疫情至今已經兩年，在不斷強調衛生的潮流下，高倩彤作品營造的隔閡和壓逼，令人敏感當下種種小程度的規限。因此，「更尖銳的方式」尖銳之處在於，它並不往外刺而向內刺，以敏感對應人們對新日常規限的麻木。

由舊作工程地盤未完成時的洞，演變至今日貫穿物件、塗上碘酒的傷口，在其中我們可以看見藝術家這兩年開始拓闊自己的視覺詞彙，而其關注亦開始由城市建築轉移至內在的身體。在一片冰冷中，我總留意藝術家創作中有溫度的部分——藝術家在有洞口的日常物上塗碘酒，或許是整個展場中唯一的暖色。而大概藝術家也清楚知道，那點碘酒不是療傷，只是哀傷，微微的疼痛感提醒我們傷口的存在，記憶的盲點沉默，同時道盡當下的一切。