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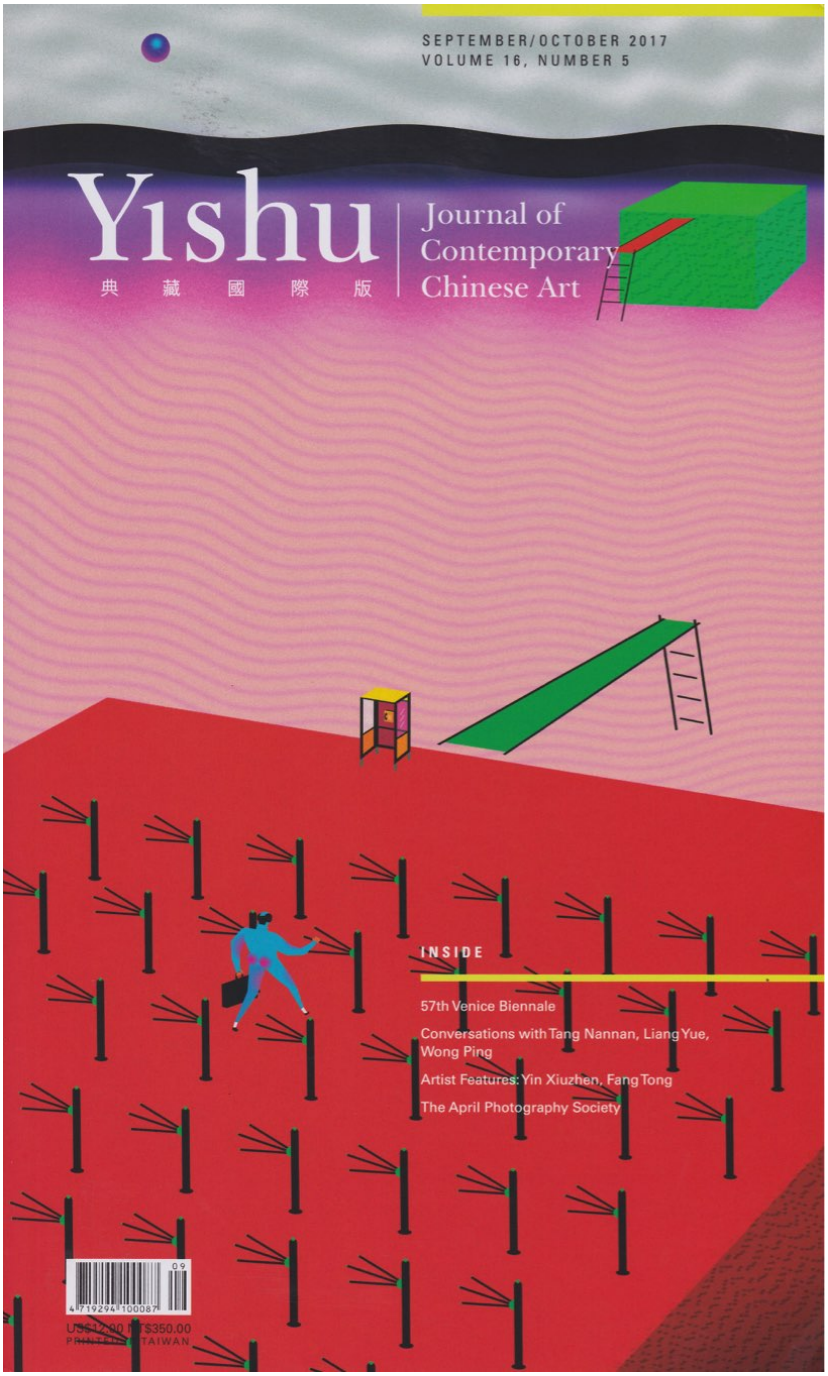
Yishu
"Sex in the City: Wong Ping in Conversation"

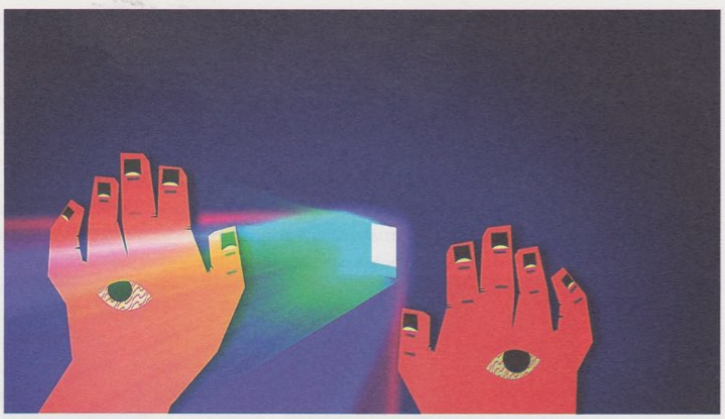


Stephanie Bailey

Sex in the City: Wong Ping in Conversation

Wong Ping, *Who's the Daddy?*, 2017, single-channel video, 9 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Wong Ping's work is about mining the textures and depths of life in a metropolis like Hong Kong, where the artist was born and now lives and works, in order to extract the latent desires, peversions, traumas, and ticks that run wild behind and below concrete covers. The artist specializes in short, single-channel animated videos that tell of hidden obsessions and secret compulsions, all distilled into stories expressed with a measured and deadpan intensity. *Who's the Daddy?* (2017), for example, tells the story of a man with "daddy" issues; he was told from a young age by his mother to kiss his father "passionately," and the protagonist understands his own behaviours as having emerged from that experience. He ends up meeting a woman on Tinder with whom he begins a non-penetrative sexual relationship that involves plenty of fisting, only to have his eye poked by his lover during a frustrated rage. Aesthetically, the work is constructed according to the style that has come to characterize the Wong Ping Animation Lab: adopting an 8-bit aesthetic that pays homage to the visuals from 1980s and 1990s Sega and Nintendo video games, formalized into a twenty-first century visual language. This speaks to the artist's training when it came to developing the format he has since come to be known for. With a background in multimedia design—he studied at Curtin University in Perth, Australia—and work experience in post-production at Hong Kong's TVB studio after graduation, (and a three-month period working in a printing house), he admits to teaching himself how to animate, which explains his specific aesthetic. On his visual



Top: Wong Ping, *Stop Peeping*, 2014, single-channel video, 3 mins., 48 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Bottom: Wong Ping, *Doggy Love*, 2015, single-channel video, 5 mins., 59 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

language, he once noted in an interview: "I think it's funny people see it as my 'style', because it's basically all I can do."[1]

But no matter how far Wong Ping takes the themes in his work, there remains a level of innocence and sincerity to the stories he tells, in part due to the sense that the artist is basing some of them on personal memories and experiences. *Stop Peeping* (2014), for example, is described as a story about his neighbour during one hot summer. In brief, the film follows the protagonist as he begins peeping through a hole in the wall at a young woman who lives next door, then starts to sneak into her home to collect her sweat and ends up making ice lollies out of the liquid he amasses, consuming them before the summer ends. The work provides a good introduction to the dynamics that are constantly at play in the artist's narratives, in which desire as a form of consumption is explored on a level that feels at once familiar and alien. With *Doggy Love* (2015), a commission by the online platform *Nowness* that was released on Valentine's Day in 2015, Wong Ping won the Spirit of Hong Kong Award for best animation at Hong Kong's Third

Culture Film Festival in 2016. In this short film, the artist tells the story of a teenager who falls in love with a girl who has breasts on her back, a tale that is recounted with a level of adolescent cruelty balanced out by a pubescent innocence, in which a young, sexually frustrated boy learns how to love only after participating in some schoolyard bullying as an outlet for his objectified desire. This teenage perspective, steeped in naivety, proves effective when it comes to the social commentary that seeps out of Wong Ping's work, some of which is searing and uncomfortable. Consider the artist's description for the *Jungle of Desire* (2015), a video that "illustrates the perfect ecosystem of a concrete jungle: an impotent husband, an unsatisfied wife, and a megalomaniac policeman."[2]

Wong Ping, *Jungle of Desire*, 2015, single-channel video, 6 mins., 50 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

In this conversation, the artist describes his journey into animation and the ways his narrative style developed, discussing early music videos and early animations that grounded what has since become his established visual language. He also discusses themes that recur in his work and his transition into the art world, commenting on the first solo exhibition he staged in 2015 at the Hong Kong space Things that can happen, and *Jungle of Desire*, a version of which was presented with Edouard Malingue Gallery as part of the NOVA Sector at Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2016.

Stephanie Bailey: You taught yourself animation after graduating from Curtin University. Could you talk about how you started?

Wong Ping: I'm an under-prepared and passive person, so I never thought it through when choosing an area of study. The decision to specialize in creative media at univeristy, despite a total lack of interest in design, art, or animation, was because the course did not involve any exams. All my classmates were so committed to mastering 3D animation, which was very popular then, but I could never work out the complex software and, out of frustration, I gave up after several failed attempts. I remember attending a colouring lesson in which the teacher literally lectured on the rules of colour matching. I found the formal treatment too bizarre and decided to skip school and surf the Internet at home instead. Perhaps even more bizarrely, I managed to graduate despite my poor grades. Before that, one of my teachers at university used to play weird short films and music videos in every class; that was the first time in my life I actually felt mind-blown.

After graduating, I couldn't find a job because of my poor techniques in multimedia design so I went to the library and self-studied with the aid of some software guidebooks. I did eventually land a job in post-production before I could even manage the basics, working through each frame in films to remove things like pimples on people's faces or enlarging the chests of female celebrities, and so on. It was an emotionally oppressive environment to work in; once, a director made a mistake and the entire crew had to spend one week to rectify a three-second scene. I began to question my life and my work and took to writing stories every night as an emotional outlet.

I was oblivious to the rules of animation at the time; I wasn't even equipped with basic drawing skills. Out of nowhere, a sense of vengeance against the world of formalities emerged for me, so I began to create animation with the few post-production techniques that I did manage to have. At first I just made some music videos for my friends in a band, and then I began to visualize the nonsensical stories I was writing. A new routine emerged in which I would come up with a story at work and then create and upload the animation online at home. This process proved to be a better catharsis than masturbation; I was truly happy.

Stephanie Bailey: What were the main influences in developing your visual language?

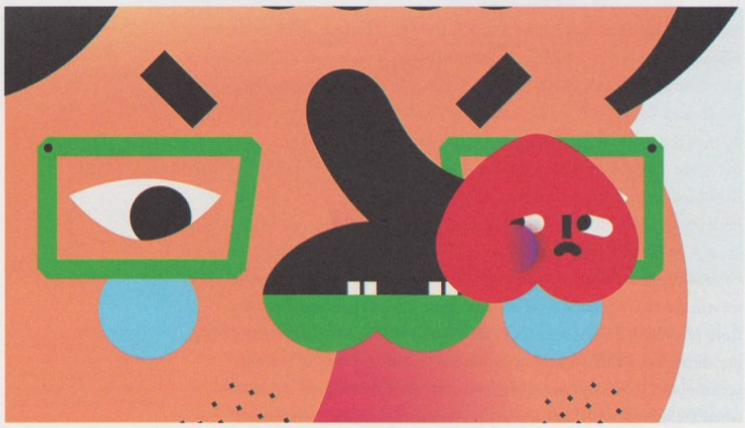
Wong Ping: I especially love short films—like the ones on Vimeo—for their straightforward and experimental nature. They are a highly flexible medium. Even watching a crap film is only a waste of a couple minutes, so there's not much to lose. As for my visual language, there weren't any particular sources of influence; it took me a while to develop an interest in film. To a certain extent, I am merely working against the rulebook in creating my own system of techniques. I've even been told a few times that my animation is too flat and somewhat lifeless, and the use of colour is too crass.

Stephanie Bailey: How did you develop your approach to storytelling, and what influences did you have, if any?

Wong Ping: To be honest, the jobs I got after my graduation, which include working in post-production at TVB, and also a three-month stint in a printing house, really drove me mad. One day, while at work, I resorted to my imagination, and after that a new story would emerge every day; I would get sweaty palms just by being carried away with those ideas! The only thing that mattered was posting them on my Xanga blog as soon as I got home. The stories had to be precise and within a certain word limit, because writing too much at the expense of sleep would make the next workday even more miserable—I would have to nap in the restroom. I guess that's how my approach to narrative developed; I had little interest in films, poetry, and novels back then, but I had read quite a lot of Japanese manga.

Story-wise, there weren't any influences per se, but I do have some favourites that emphasize dialogue, like Woody Allen. Minoru Furuya's later manga also had a huge impact on me, as I find traces of my own thoughts in his protagonists' monologues on the futility of a suicidal life. I remember reading *Shigatera 6* (2003–2005)[3] when I was younger and feeling very despondent for a whole week. It's a shame that marriage and children have made Furuya much more optimistic; it's probably good for him, but a bit disappointing for readers like me. I also love watching stand-up comedies for their meaningless thoughts on life and sarcastic rhythm—kind of like my recent creative thought processes. Come to think of it, a few years ago I declared myself a comedian in my Facebook bio. Ha!

Stephanie Bailey: There's a real sense of Hong Kong in your work, both visually and thematically. Aside from the video-game aesthetic that brings to mind smoky arcade halls, there is, for instance, a reference to Anita Mui's Canto-pop song in the title *Jungle of Desire*, and one scene in *An Emo Nose* (2015) shows Hong Kong's Bauhinia Flag with the petals withering and dropping off one by one. Could you elaborate on the way Hong Kong influences your work?



Wong Ping, *An Emo Nose*, 2015, single-channel video, 4 mins., 23 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Wong Ping: It's only from the feedback of others that I learned my work conveys a sense of Hong Kong, which surprises me as it's not my intention to study or describe Hong Kong's setting in particular. The city's iconic dense buildings and population never appear in my work; what does appear comes naturally as an elaboration of my living environment. Hong Kong is a claustrophobic city with a very high living standard, which can easily drive one mad. To calm the mind, I can only turn to a caricature of that madness as some kind of meditation.

To a certain extent, my work documents a state of living in Hong Kong at a particular time; rather than making reference to it, it's more like writing an autobiography. Take the making of *Stop Peeping*: I really was living in a subdivided flat in an industrial building, where a beautiful girl lived next

door. One day we met on the stairway during a power outage, and she told me that she's a singer; I was overwhelmed by that revelation.

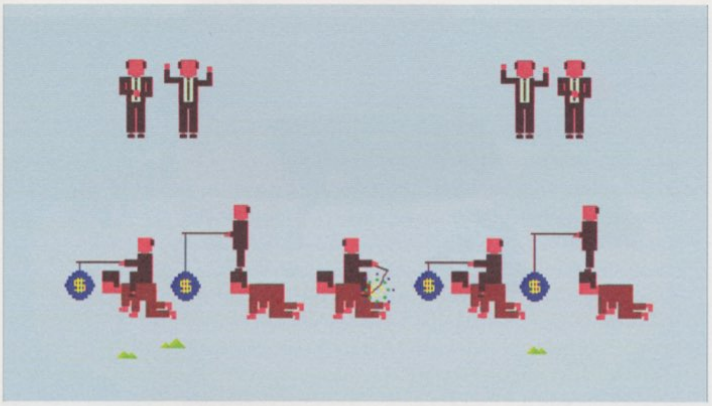
Stephanie Bailey: Was *Stop Peeping* the first animation short you made in the style you have become known for, and would you say that this was the work through which your visual language really emerged?

Wong Ping, *Stop Peeping*, 2014, single-channel video, 3 mins., 48 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Wong Ping: Yes, *Stop Peeping* was my first attempt at visualizing the stories I've been writing. Before that, I had made a few animation music videos, and *Slow Sex* (2013), an animation without dialogue, but never a narrative-based short, so it felt like something was missing. In the industrial subdivided flat where I used to live, once I had the guts to knock on the door of the beautiful next door neighbour to borrow a phone charger, but when I peeped over her shoulder as she opened the door, I saw a half-naked man in her flat. Out of that disappointment came *Stop Peeping*. Each paragraph of the narrative was accompanied by visuals, and they came alive like children's picture books. While I didn't like hearing my own voice at the time, to speed things up I just had to narrate the animation myself; the entire process took about a week. Then I tried to solicit help from professional voice actors, but they were too professional, as were the animation artists I tried to recruit to help with the visuals. Having accumulated more experience now, I usually start creating the animation when the narrative is about seventy percent complete, and I let the rest develop on its own course where it is beyond my control. Then I read the text aloud at my own pace and insert the recording into the animation with some edits, and it is done!

Stephanie Bailey: You created a music video in 2010 for the FRUITPUNCH song "We Want More," which represents a real precursor to where your work was headed visually and conceptually. In the animation, we see that humanity has been put on a treadmill and turned into an 8-bit computer game enacted within a closed or fixed frame—in one scene, a character collects college degrees that fall from above, while in another, arrows hit the backs of a man and a woman until they stand side by side, and then an arrow with a "love heart" pierces their heads and joins them together. How did you develop this video, and what impact did it have on your later practice?

Wong Ping: FRUITPUNCH's "We Want More" is one of my earliest animations—up to then I had only created one or two shorts. Frankly, I didn't care much about the lyrics whilst making the music video. I prefer working from my intuition as opposed to an approach that is descriptive; for instance, it's more interesting to visualize two completely irrelevant elements within a single composition. Upon learning that the demo was electropop, I immediately thought of 8-bit video games. As I mentioned before, I was harbouring many doubts about my life then (probably an effect of hormonal changes toward the end of puberty), so I decided to represent that sense of confusion and helplessness in the form of 8-bit, as though life were a video game. There wasn't much influence on my visual style, but content-wise it was the first time I projected my own feelings onto the work, and it opened up new perspectives about the possible ways of communicating myself visually.



Wong Ping, music video still from "We Want More," by FRUITPUNCH, 5 mins., 44 secs. Courtesy of the artist, No One Remains Virgin, and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Stephanie Bailey: You created the music video *Under the Lion Crotch* (2011) for the band No One Remains Virgin. This video depicts Hong Kong as a microcosm, showing people playing on an island—someone wears "I love HK" t-shirt, and another "HK love U"—who are attacked by a one-eyed phallic monster whose penis is a rocket that enacts devastation. When we see this "rocket" take off, a super-human woman emerges out of the sea to stop it, drenching the island with blood after inserting the rocket-phallus into her. The animation points to a wider theme in your work beyond overt references to sex that consider human relations and behaviour in general. Can you talk about that?

Wong Ping: Put bluntly, *Under the Lion Crotch* was made at a time when my generation decided to take their social discontent to the streets. I was one of them. The video conveys a sentiment in opposition to the spirit of Lion Rock, which my parents' generation has always taken pride in.

Stephanie Bailey: "The Lion Rock Spirit" being a phrase that emerged in Hong Kong in the 1970s around the television series *Below the Lion Rock*,

which documented life in the city. The phrase came to encapsulate a Hong Kong attitude, or identity, in which hard work across all levels of society, contributed to growth and prosperity in the city.

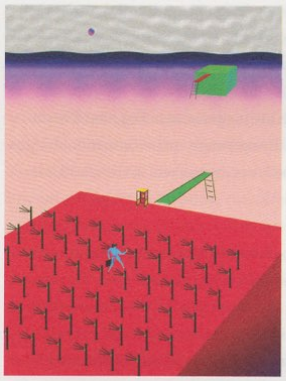
Wong Ping: Back then, people made their way to upward social mobility through hard work. To this day the government is still using this labour-intensive spirit to sugarcoat the injustice and biased policy-making of the establishment, employing this core value as an excuse for not setting standard working hours and minimum wages. This makes me wonder: what, then, exactly is the spirit of Lion Rock exactly?

Under the Lion Crotch begins with scenes from the 2006 protests calling to preserve Central's Star Ferry. People fought against the phallic lion's tyranny, ending its rule by killing it. They then try to leave their forlorn birthplace but are taken midway by a motherly figure, leaving the island in a sea of red. The animation was made seven years ago and unwittingly foreshadows today's circumstances, which, in reality, are even worse.

Top: Wong Ping, music video still from "Under the Lion Crotch," by No One Remains Virgin, 4 mins., 38 secs. Courtesy of the artist, FRUITPUNCH, and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Bottom: Wong Ping, music video still from "Under the Lion Crotch," by No One Remains Virgin, 4 mins., 38 secs. Courtesy of the artist, FRUITPUNCH, and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Around the time, young people in Hong Kong were increasingly involved in street protests; so were my friends and I. *The Other Side* (2015), created some years later, follows from this discussion. Many of my talented friends decided to leave the city; you could say it was a second-wave emigration after the 1997 handover. They encouraged me to do the same, but I didn't have the courage.



Wong Ping, *The Other Side*, 2015, 2-channel video, 8 mins., 2 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

As such, *Under the Lion Crotch* weaves a narrative between sex, men and women, relationships, and violence to convey my wish to leave this place, which I deemed futile because of my own emotional baggage. I wanted to invest this feeling in the music video, but being rebelliously unconventional, I despised the usual self-evident representations. I worked really hard to experiment with ways of expressing myself without being too visible in my work, hoping it would mean something to the viewer whether he or she understood it or not, even if only as a perverse story. In this sense, *Under the Lion Crotch* had a rather huge impact on my practice, since during the process of making it I had been struggling to find that balance between overly self-evident storytelling and candid expression. I wanted it to be an autonomous story in its own right. It would be meaningless for me to represent the social climate verbatim; you might as well just watch the news.

After several international screenings I learned that Westerners could more or less feel the messages in my work even though they didn't quite understand it. This has really encouraged me to express my feelings through a visual language, as opposed to simply making gorgeous images. I used to have doubts about this kind of creative approach, but the award *Under the Lion Crotch* received that year, as well as the acquisition of the work for the M+ Collection, made me realize the immense potential of narrative allusion and encouraged me to further develop this practice.

Stephanie Bailey: It's interesting how your work is so much about daily life in a city like Hong Kong—daily life being a real focus for artists working in the city in the late 1990s and 2000s. Yet, your practice takes less of a readymade approach or documentarian perspective in order to abstract the darkness of urban life.

Wong Ping: From Facebook you can see every day the frustration we all share; entertainment news has grown very grim over the years, and politics therefore becomes a source of public amusement to counter that misery. Yet we remain ambivalent about politics. The needs of most people are

actually very basic; they probably don't even want to bother with politics. When policy-making reaches a point where even the fundamentals become problematic, however, there's no alternative except revolution.

In recent years Hong Kong has consistently ranked high among cities in the world in price indices, social disparity, and the unhappiness index. Many elderly people have to work as scavengers in the streets, whilst the younger generation struggles with lower social mobility. These are all statistics that need to be confronted head on. I recently met a young British person who used to travel a lot, but after Brexit he's been saying, quite depressingly, that he has to settle down in Hong Kong. I asked him what is it about Britain that prompted him to leave for good; his answer was, in fact, that Britain was in more or less the equivalent of Hong Kong's current situation. It's just his sense of unease whilst being abroad, but everywhere in the world it is probably just as bad.

Stephanie Bailey: The consideration of human relations and social behaviour in *Under the Lion Crotch* is reflected in *An Emo Nose*. Bees are depicted throughout the animation, and at one point the narrator in the animation considers the fact that humans are inherently social animals. This recalls Virgil's fourth *Georgics*, in which bees are viewed as a model for society.

Wong Ping, *An Emo Nose*, 2015, single-channel video, 4 mins., 23 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Wong Ping: *An Emo Nose* is very interesting. It was part of a project that I was participating in, and it became my only work not narrated by me; also it does not feature any sex or violence due to regulatory constraints. In reality, I am eager for friendships but fear human connections because I cannot take the failure of relationships. Sometimes I find it difficult to fit in at social gatherings; afterwards I would blame myself for speaking so little and being so useless. Contrasting this with my argumentative personality, I start to question whether I'd prefer my own isolation or isolation as a result of the vulgar uselessness of my friends. I reflect upon this in creative dialogues with myself and ask whether mankind can, against its nature as social beings, live in complete solitude.

Stephanie Bailey: This brings to mind the sense of *otaku* culture in your animations: the idea of alienated individuals in the metropolis who are often invisible, or unseen, as reflected in the confessions you narrate through your characters—they are darkly private, and deeply personal. You once said that animation suits you because you are able to create another world in your work without even leaving your room, yet this isolation is countered in your narratives, which all have a very strong element of confession.

Wong Ping: I am an *otaku*! Everything is unintentional: I used to be very loud and proactive in school when I was a child, but studying abroad had slowly turned me into a self-abased introvert. Becoming an animation artist perchance gives me an opportunity to go crazy in my practice every now and then, and in my animations I see my younger self again. You're absolutely right; my life, thoughts, and creation are very secluded. From brainstorming stories, writing, and drawing through reading monologues and producing a soundtrack, I need not deal with anyone except myself until the work has been published online. This kind of freedom is genuine pleasure. It's like I'm writing a Facebook status, albeit a really long one, and you're free to hit "like" if you want.

Stephanie Bailey: You have said you like reading the comments about your videos when you post them online, since your work can get some strong reactions. Could you talk about the dynamic you have with your viewers?

Wong Ping: I've tried uploading my work to the Internet in mainland China; you know that YouTube and Vimeo have been blocked by the authorities, but they have their equivalent video-sharing websites. I've failed so many times and was told that my content was not granted permission to be published. Then I tried incorporating educational elements of truth, kindness, and beauty in the video descriptions, adding positive messages like "love your family and study hard, kids!" or "vegetarianism is fun!" but none managed to bypass the censorship system. That's when I realized the power of China's "human" firewall; they literally assess each film manually. I gave up. Then someone in the mainland managed to repost my work, which received lots of strong comments accusing me of sensationalism and calling me out as a perverse Hong Kong pig. Some thought my mother must have abused me when I was a child. Most of these comments are a subjective re-interpretation of my work and, to me, they are even more creative than the work in question itself. As long as the commenters don't hate me so much that they want to kill me, I do take pleasure in reading their responses.

Stephanie Bailey: At the time you made the animated music videos mentioned earlier, you were also making non-animation music videos that reflect the themes you are working with, such as sex and love. How might you compare those works to your animations?

Wong Ping: For me, sex, love, and violence have always been a topic of interest. Leave truth, kindness, and beauty to the moralists! I'll be the

villain and handle the filth. It's my work's language, though not necessarily the subject. I've also experimented with film as a medium and actually liked it. Making animations can be lonely, whereas filming can be completed in the company of actors and a bunch of friends, but resource-wise film is a lot more costly.

So after some time I returned to animation as my primary medium. After all, it's a very personal practice. I'm basically godlike—if I want my protagonist to be nude, he wouldn't protest. Another thing about animation is that however violent and ridiculous the content is, a lot viewers somehow find the presentation adorable and automatically filter the things I say. I guess the effect could, on the other hand, be appalling if I used another medium to present my stories, and I would hate myself, too.

Wong Ping, *An Emo Nose*, 2015, single-channel video, 4 mins., 23 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Stephanie Bailey: What is the relationship between sex and love in your work? The form of the heart, for instance, appears throughout your videos. In *Stop Peeping*, it appears as a tattoo on the girl that the male character is peeping at; in *Doggy Love*, a teacher in sex education class asks why a heart represents love, to which one student answers it's because a heart looks like the head of a penis, and another says it looks like a woman's rear (which later makes an appearance as an expression of love); in *Slow Sex*, it appears on the bed sheets; and in *An Emo Nose*, a man's heart-shaped nose slowly drifts away from his face in response to his negative energy and lives a much better life on its own.

Wong Ping: Sex in my work can be understood as a language and a rhetorical device, the way the Triads (the Hong Kong mafia) are used to talk about politics, or horror films about life. My work mostly takes myself as a departure point and revolves around my living environment and the city. Sex is full of happiness, love not so. Even now, frustratingly, I still don't understand what love is. Sometimes I think I don't need it, but without it I'd feel lonely. The need for sex, on the other hand, is constant. I realize I don't know how to love, but more often it's really a matter of not knowing what I need. I look in vain to creative practice for answers, whilst obviously most of the characters in my animations have got it figured out.

Stephanie Bailey: What about the political observations that take place with regards to love and sex, which you consider from pretty savage or crude perspectives? *Jungle of Desire* is a case in point: it follows the life a cuckold watching, from inside a closet as his wife worked as a prostitute. He eventually develops rape fantasies directed at the policeman who uses his power to have sex with his wife for free.

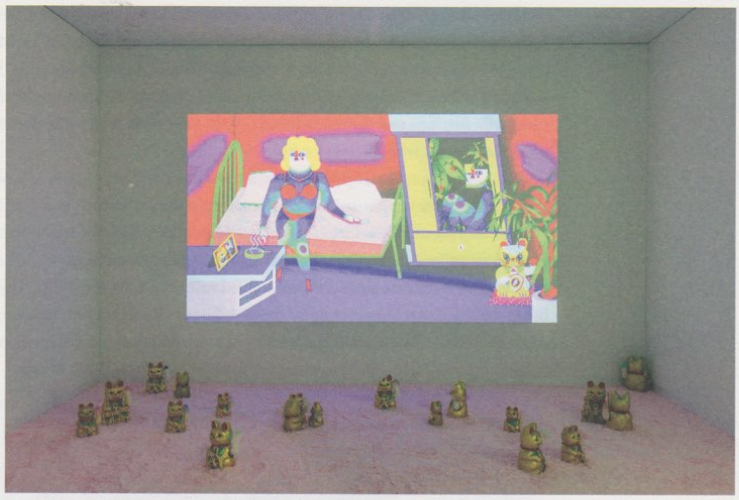
Wong Ping: Every work is an attempt to explore multiple dimensions, always touching on a little bit of love, hate, and politics. *Jungle of Desire* perfectly manifests my feelings about Hong Kong. Look at the concrete buildings; each claustrophobic cubicle is filled with carnal desire, whilst life in the city destabilizes everyone's mind and body. The exhibition venue of *Jungle of Desire*, Things that can happen, is located in working-class neighbourhood, Sham Shui Po, where sex workers are active. Two years ago I came across an article about police exploitation of prostitutes at a time when the public image of enforcement was hitting rock bottom; still, these women were too scared to report the incidents. Drawing upon this theme, a story about vengeance slowly developed. Simultaneously I was wondering: since love often happens out of nowhere, is there a kind of hatred that is inexplicable, too? Without morality, the impotent man, the nymphomaniac prostitute, and the corrupt police officer seem to live in a primal jungle, feeding on the reciprocity of their needs.

Stephanie Bailey: Could you talk about how your work seems to focus on a male experience, and how much of this is a self-portrait or self-reflection?

Wong Ping: To me it's all very sensible since I have virtually zero knowledge of the female perspective. If I were to tell the story of a woman it would come out as very unconvincing and futile, so for now I have no interest in that. It's like, I'm scared of dogs and my friends are always trying to explain that there's no need to be afraid, that a dog's every gesture means nothing but friendliness. To me, however, a human interpretation sounds hardly convincing; recently one of my friends was bitten by his neighbour's dog. Rather than stories about men, it's more accurate to say that these are stories about myself, or my self in my imagination, or the version of self I'd like to become. It just happens that I'm a heterosexual man.

Stephanie Bailey: In *Who's The Daddy?* the protagonist is accused of being phallocentric, and he is actually portrayed at one point with a flower attached to the head of his penis. Similarly, in the presentation of works around the animation of *Jungle of Desire*, you include a neon light showing a man with a palm tree for penis, and lucky Chinese cats with penises for arms. In *Under the Lion Crotch*, a one-eyed monster with a rocket cock attacks an entire island. Why the phallic focus?

Wong Ping: Yes, there are lots of phalluses; I guess I'm a nymphomaniac. Sometimes I think, since pornography is a rather popular contemporary consumer product, even though I'm heterosexual I must have seen more



Top: Wong Ping, *Jungle of Desire*, 2015, installation view, NOVA sector, Art Basel Miami Beach. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Bottom: Wong Ping, *Who's the Daddy?*, 2017, installation view, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

penises than my father has. Safe to say I've definitely seen more than my mother has. Now I'm digressing . . .

In *Who's The Daddy?*, one of the topics I want to explore with myself is that which concerns contemporary right-wing politics. Immediately I wonder if erect penises mostly tilt towards the left or the right. I found this interesting explanation: "the penis is usually curved. Of course it's hard to tell in its flaccid state. Once erect, however, it either tilts to the left or the right. There is no such thing as a straight penis in civilization." It's an excellent statement; why in civilizations only? Further research unveils that it all comes down to the invention of trousers; naturally the penis has to tilt to one side. So if an Asian man's penis is too short to tilt to either side, does society count

as a civilization still? Or are we basically non-existent? Incorporated as the opening of *Who's the Daddy?*, this is one of its central concerns.

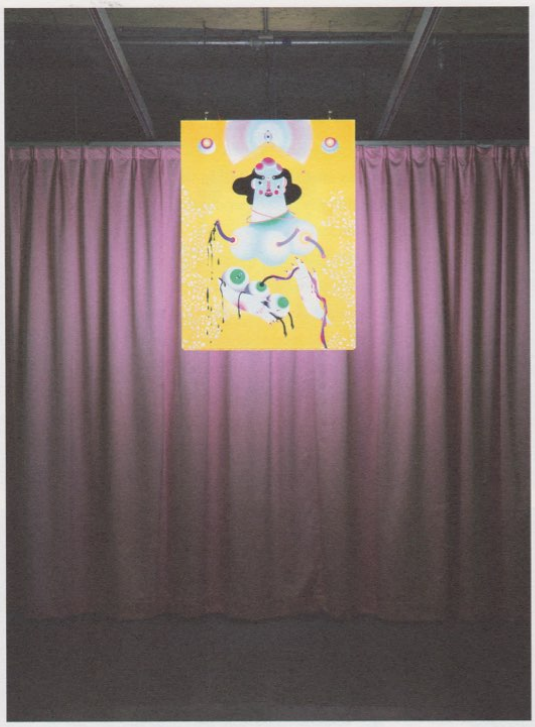
As for *Jungle of Desire*, lucky cats are very fitting for a sex worker's working environment. Essential to her business is not just fortune, but sexual desire too; hence the lucky cats' penis-paws. I contacted a sex worker organization and gave them ten lucky cats after the exhibition with the hope that it could benefit their business and that my friends would think of me when they visit a prostitute and see a lucky cat.

Stephanie Bailey: In turn, what role do women play in your narratives? In *Who's The Daddy?*, the female character comes across as a kind of anti-Saint: a contradictory figure radiating awesome, fearsome, or even cosmic energy, who wants nothing more than to get what she wants, and who loses her temper when she doesn't, only to feel sorry about it afterwards. In the exhibition you staged at Edouard Malingue in March 2017, you present an image of this woman on a yellow lightbox in a work called *Mammy* (2017), which depicts this woman as an icon of sorts.

Wong Ping, *Jungle of Desire*, 2015, single-channel video, 6 mins., 50 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong

Wong Ping: The appearance of women in my work mostly revolves around my crushes, lovers, intimate partners, and those I look up to as goddesses. Women are the muses that sustain my life. In terms of narrative, I'm basically using myself to instantiate the things I want to discuss. To a certain extent it's just a dialogue with myself. For instance, I use the female character's view on religion to elicit a paradox: despite the fact that abortion is condemned by religion as a sin, the aborted babies can still ascend to heaven, so logically abortion can be seen as a good deed. On the contrary, so many people's mortal endeavours to earn an afterlife are but a manifestation of their selfishness. Selflessness, on the other hand, knows that its consequence is condemnation, but it persists nonetheless.

I think I've said too much in *Who's The Daddy?*; it's like a stand-up comedy, even though it's not entirely gleeful. The theme song comes from a Cantonese nursery rhyme my mother used to play for me when I was young. I still listen to it on YouTube sometimes, and it never fails to soothe me, but it's the same with most pop songs. I just sing the nursery rhyme



Wong Ping, *Who's the Daddy?*, 2017, installation view, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

without ever fully understanding its lyrics. So I looked them up and realized the song actually had a terrifying message; the father keeps insisting that his son kiss him or it will be the end of the world, and compulsively asks the son if he understands. If this were a contemporary release, I suppose it would be pulled off Spotify. Curiously, though, back in the day, it was usually the mother who played this kind of song. As the narrative develops, I meet a sadistic woman and somehow take pleasure in being tortured by her, until one day I play the same nursery rhyme for my son and realize this pleasure all comes down to the servility my mother has instilled in me through the song.

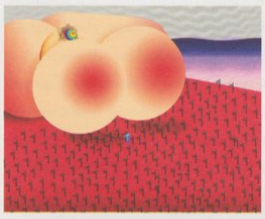
There aren't as many soothing nursery rhymes these days, though; they're replaced by classical music, which can allegedly improve children's intelligence. Ultimately it's a matter of functional and purposeful implantation rather than nurture, hence the small mechanical babies wearing VR goggles that I included in the exhibition.

Stephanie Bailey: Then there is the symbolism of the womb and vagina. In the music video for *We Want More*, one scene shows men in a line, like lemmings, going inside an opening that seems like a precursor to the way you would portray a woman's genitals in later work; for example, in *The Other Side* in which a man wants nothing more than to return to his

mother's womb, while in *Who's The Daddy?,* you talk about the labium being the borderline between criminality and legality. Could you elaborate?

Wong Ping: What I want to say is that men/women/penis/vagina is merely the artwork's language; sex and love might be the theme, but the narrative itself always takes centre stage. In *We Want More*, for instance, I want to express the idea that life is as boring as a video game; the vagina is only part of the game's opening scene. *The Other Side* features the vagina, too, but in the context of life's meaninglessness and the desire to reverse a kind of involuntary birth: parents are practically strangers to their children, who are forced into the construction of a familial relationship and the harmony it demands. Since I was a child I've always thought of being an orphan; that way I can build all my relationships at my own will. One of the issues I try to address in *Who's The Daddy?* is pedophilia: people tend to confuse "philia" (which denotes fondness) with sex as in the case of homosexuality, which is always associated with anal sex or AIDS, etc. It's weird how such fondness for a three-year-old, two-year-old, or one-year-old is criminal, but fondness for an unborn child in the womb enters a twilight zone where society's laws don't exist yet. The vagina can therefore be seen as the borderline between morality and criminality, as though the police are waiting outside ready to prosecute your thoughts. Within and without the womb, herein lies the fleeting moment of birth which, conceptually, changes everything. Hence like the work says, a pedophile need only push forward the love child's age with his willpower in order to avoid being stigmatized as a pervert.

Stephanie Bailey: Ultimately, though, it seems that in your animations, the narrative is not so much about separating the sexes as exploring their relationship with the other. Could you talk about how you navigate these relations, and how the condition of obsession and consumption feeds into it? In *Stop Peeping*, for instance, a man ends up collecting a woman's sweat to make lollipops he will later consume—the perfect distillation of the dynamics between men and women that you often portray in your films.



Wong Ping, *The Other Side*, 2015, 2-channel video, 8 mins., 2 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong.

Wong Ping: I think what you've mentioned just now is all about love, whose relational representations are not limited to sex; it has an expansive space for the imagination. I'm very interested in fetish. Viewers probably think my portrayals of women zoom in on their hostility and controlling ways, but from the perspective of fetish these are actually a kind of love and pleasure. There are too many types of fetish: whilst I like women's toes, some people prefer ASMR, watersports, voyeurism, vorarephilia, etc., which are equally fascinating. Once, whilst hiking with my ex-girlfriend, I licked the sweat off her skin as we reached the top of the hill. She was disgusted, but I thought it was love—the intense feeling of wanting to possess her whole. I never did it again after that.

Stephanie Bailey: *Jungle of Desire* in 2015 was your first official solo exhibition, when you produced objects to be presented alongside your animation, followed by *Who's The Daddy?* at Edouard Malingue in 2017.

Could you talk about how you have developed a relationship with the art object and with the exhibition space, and how you are using these elements as ways to frame or expand on the animations you create?

Wong Ping: There're too many things I want to say through animation. Most of the time I can only address each subject slightly, which has its strategic benefits, but sometimes I wish I could expand on my thoughts and engage with them in a real setting. I can't help but wonder: without my computer and software, or even electricity, what do I actually know? How should I express myself? I guess I'd just be nothing, totally worthless. Hence I believe craftsmanship needs to be revived, even though I think animation, the art of displaying images in twenty-five frames per second from scratch, is itself a kind of craftsmanship. But since viewing of the animation requires time, surrounding installation works can be treated as part of an immersive trailer, connecting the exhibition's thematic threads.

Stephanie Bailey: You were very much a regular on the film and animation circuit before you became involved in contemporary art. What is your relationship between these various worlds to which you belong?

Wong Ping: It took me a while to adapt to all the interferences outside of creation; sometimes it can be difficult to stay happy whilst making art. One thing that strikes me is the demarcation between animation/design/film and contemporary art, as though the two had their own modes of expression and, therefore, minimal communication. From past experiences and feedback, I've observed that whichever mode I choose to present a work, the other mode would always respond in some way with reluctance or bewilderment, holding on to its own creative vision. Sometimes I feel like I'm being torn apart between the two sides!

Translation by Nicole Go Ka Wing.

Notes

1. Sam Bekemans, "Interview with Animator Wong Ping," *Third Culture Film Festival*, June 17, 2016, www.tcff.tv/interview/2016-interview-wong/.
2. "Wong Ping's 'Jungle of Desire,'" *Juxtapoz Magazine*, January 11, 2016, https://www.juxtapoz.com/news/film/wong-ping-s-jungle-of-desire/.
3. Minoru Furuya, *Shigatera 6* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003–2005).