

15 May 2018

ArtAsiaPacific

"Animated Contradictions: Interview with Wong Ping."

Link: <http://www.artasiapacific.com/Blog/AnimatedContradictionsInterviewWithWongPing>

ArtAsiaPacific Magazine Multimedia News [Blog](#) [Countries](#) [About](#) [Shop](#)

中文 عربي

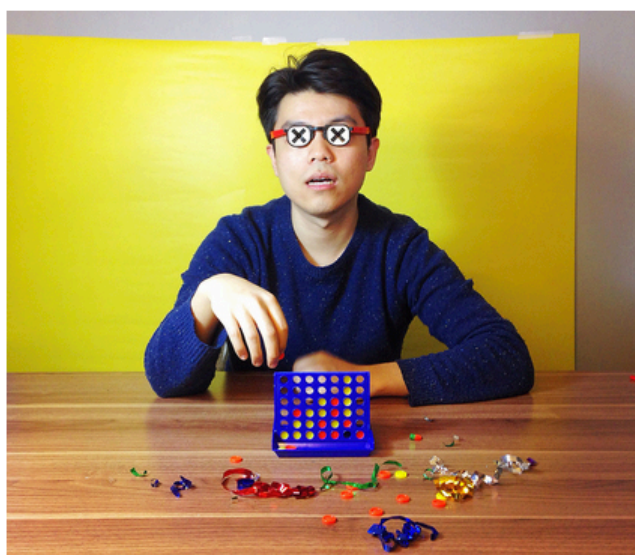


MAY 15 2018

HONG KONG USA

ANIMATED CONTRADICTIONS: INTERVIEW WITH WONG PING

BY MENGNA DA



Portrait of WONG PING. Courtesy the artist.

"A devout atheist. An optimistic pessimist. A slow living fast food waiter. A weekend vegetarian. Your silence neighbor [sic]." Hong Kong artist Wong Ping's Instagram bio is in line with the style of his work: fun, twisted and contradictory—qualities that shine through in his short animated films, installations, Instagram stories, and my conversation with the artist.

Wong, who defines himself as a comedian, is known for neon-colored, pop-inspired, and often lewd animated images, which tell stories from everyday life but through his uniquely distorted perspective. Inflected with dark humor and sarcasm, his work doesn't shy away from weighty subjects, such as social anxiety, repressed sexuality, and political turmoil.

Starting as an animation hobbyist, Wong quickly amassed a diverse following, from young netizens to major museums. This year, his work is included in two major exhibitions in New York: the New Museum Triennial, titled "Songs for Sabotage," and "One Hand Clapping," a group show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. When I congratulated the artist, he jokingly replied, "Poor New Yorkers—they have to see this Wong Ping guy's stuff for the whole year!"

In a fried-chicken shop in New York, Wong Ping shared with me details about his recent work, his approach to storytelling, his opinions on political correctness, and his bittersweet feelings towards Hong Kong and animation.

Let's start with your recent work shown at the New Museum Triennial: Wong Ping's Fables 1 (2018). Comprising three short stories, each followed by some sort of moral lesson, it's like a twisted modern version of Aesop's Fables. What led you to this concept? Do you plan to make it into a series?

I wanted to write something more real. During my research, I read *Aesop's Fables*, which offers moral lessons that make good sense but that most people cannot abide by in reality. That's why I wanted to write fables for children that reflect the true world. Another reason I chose this concept is that I like short stories, although I actually found *Aesop's Fables* boring—each episode is followed by another explanatory paragraph, so why didn't the author just use that last part? I still follow this common format in my fables, though, and I hope to continue this project and establish my own series. Wouldn't it be cool if one day, when people talk about fables, they immediately think of *Wong Ping's Fables*?



WONG PING, *Wong Ping's Fables 1* (still), 2018, single-channel animation, sound, color: 13 mins. Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong / Shanghai.

Your fables are also less sexual than your previous work. But as you've said before, you just use sex to talk about other things. What do you want to convey through your stories?

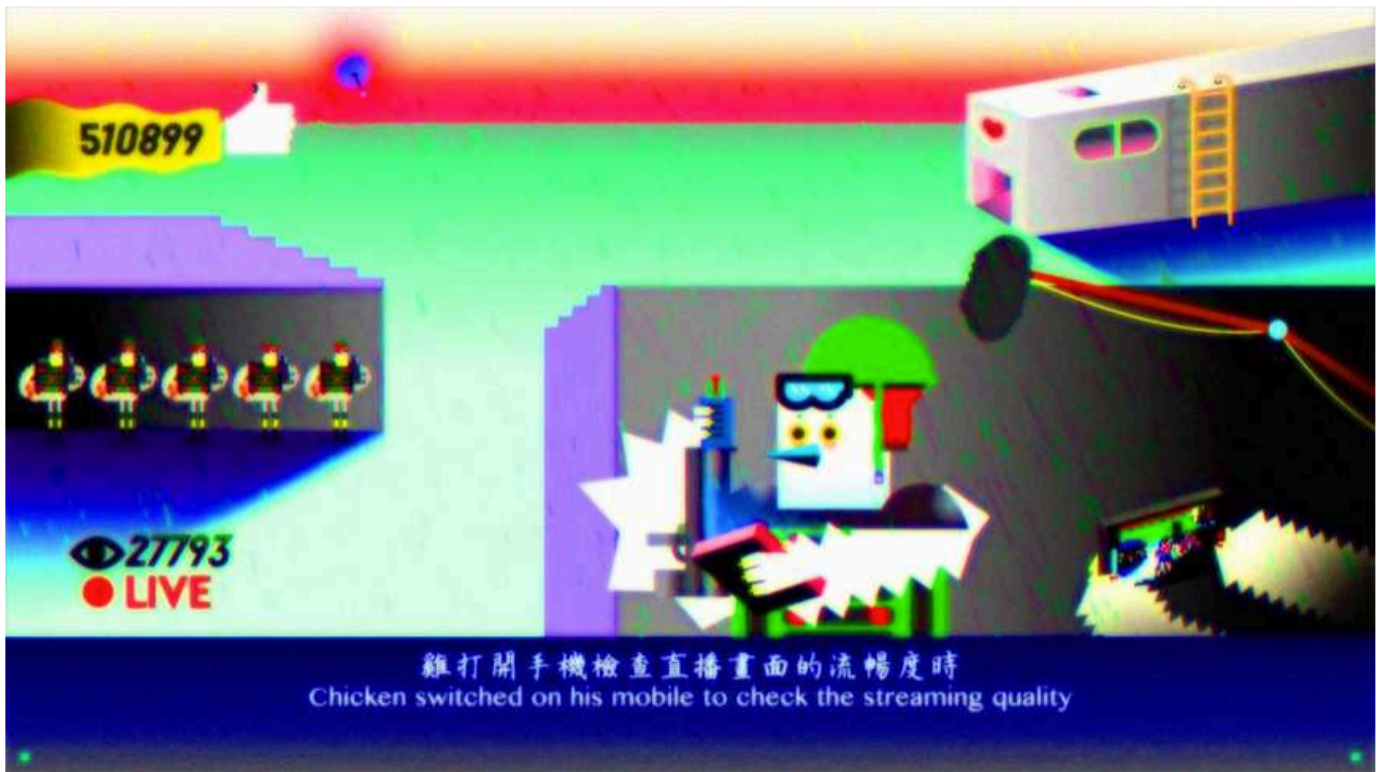
Some people said that once my work went into a museum, I stopped talking about sex. But it's simply because my fables are for kids.

I admire and sometimes even envy artists who have a clear research direction. Every time I make a new piece, I often feel disoriented. I am more free-spirited. I always say that each work of mine is a diary about me during that period of time. It's hard for me to tell you right now what I want to say in general, but I might know later.

The fables project is a new direction for me. My previous work is mostly about me and the stories around me. *Fables* is less about my life but more about some boring morals.

Your fables still seem to be drawn from daily life, like your other stories, which often turn slices of everyday reality and trivial facts into something more. How do you write these stories?

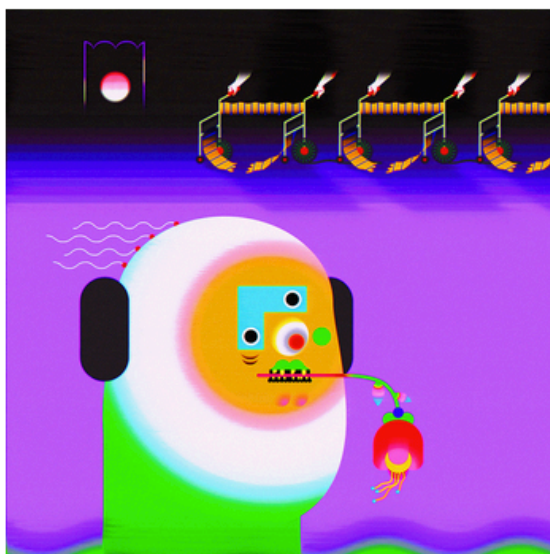
I can give you an example. I recently read that Marco Fu, one of the best snooker players in the world, suffered retinal degeneration and myodesposia, and at one point, he could see hundreds of black dots. In a snooker game, the black ball is worth the highest score, so snooker players are always chasing it. In a way, Marco got all the black balls that he could ever desire in his whole life! This reminds me of the law of attraction: what you wish for will come to you. So I might transform the story and combine it with this theory in my next fable, even though it might be offensive.



WONG PING, *Wong Ping's Fables 1* (still), 2018, single-channel animation, sound, color: 13 mins. Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong / Shanghai.

Are you concerned about causing offence? Your work touches upon sensitive topics, such as police scandals, feminism, standardized beauty, and sex, among others.

My work is often about resisting today's oversensitive era. Of course, some things need to be cultivated for a better civilization, and I don't think being sensitive is entirely wrong, but sometimes, it evolves into a sort of anti-intellectualism. My work mocks these phenomena, even though it's not easy to walk the fine line. For example, my new piece for the Guggenheim show talks a lot about sex, but behind the ridiculous "rambling" is carefully considered [content]. Some of my protagonists, like the chicken officer in *Wong Ping Fables 1*, have health problems because they are based on real-life people. I have no intention of laughing at them. I am just stating facts.

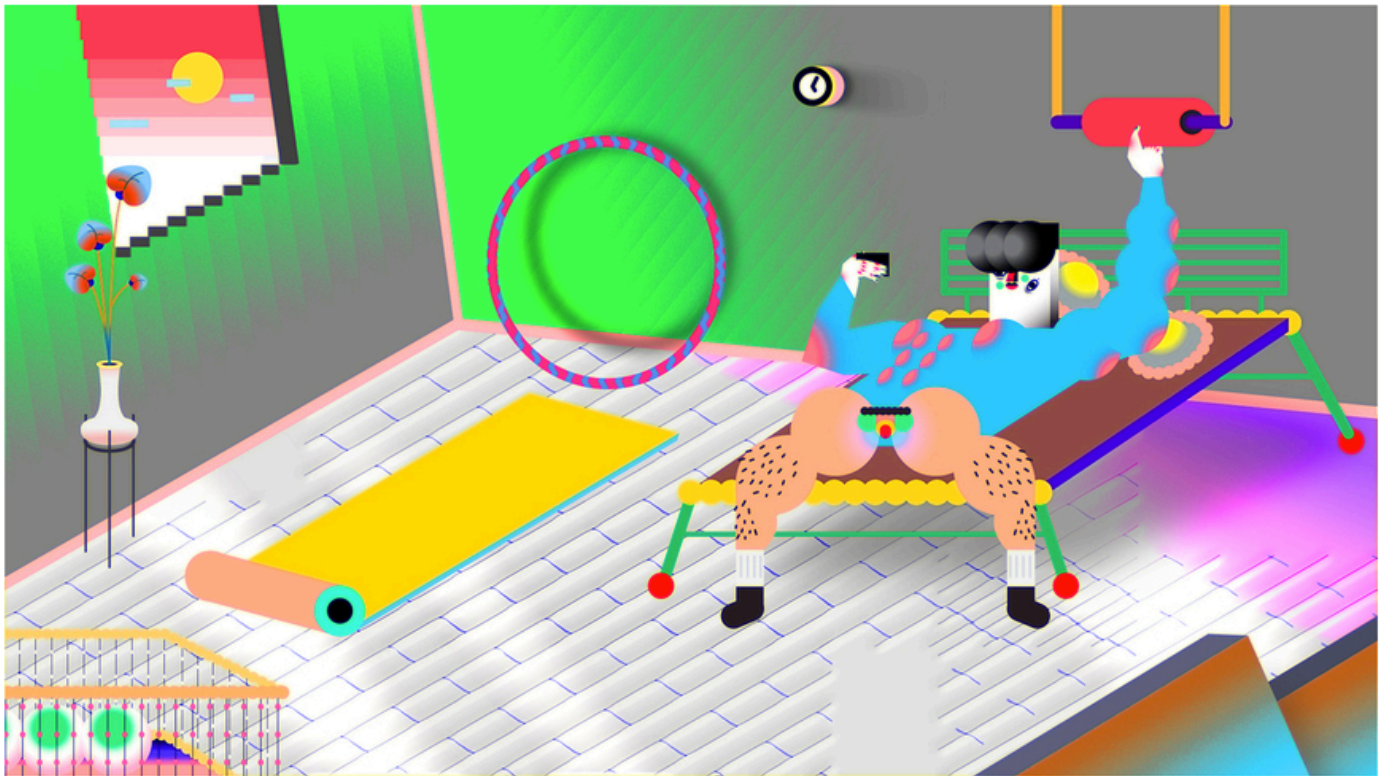


WONG PING, *Dear, Can I Give You a Hand?* (detail), 2018, animated LED video installation, color, sound, dimensions variable. From the Robert H.N. Ho Foundation Collection. Copyright Wong Ping. Courtesy the artist and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

So would you say that your work is neutral? Are there times when you want to be cynical? How does that connect to your methods of storytelling?

My work is not entirely neutral; it's more like a personal diary, with no overarching theme. There are things I want to criticize, but I don't want to discuss them directly on a superficial level. Some popular internet illustrators in Hong Kong talk about things bluntly since they need to post things on a daily basis. I want my work to be eternal and meaningful in the long run, so I try to connect fragments of reality to fiction, and I like to transform ideas and real-life stories into something else and link them together. If you see the cynical aspect in my work, great. If you see my work as funny stories, I'm fine with that too. I'm looking for some balance. I want my work to have two sides.

When I was a kid, my mom would play that song to me. But when I listened to it again recently, I realized how patriarchal and scary the lyrics are. It's not different from the cases you were referring to. In the last part of the song, the father says if you disobey and refuse to kiss him, the earth will be destroyed. That's crazy. When I thought more into it, I realized that I might have been brainwashed by these songs, and over time my personalities have been trained to cater to this patriarchal society. What's more interesting is that the person who kept playing this song to me was my mother.



WONG PING, *Who's the Daddy*, 2017, animated video, color, sound: 9 min. Copyright Wong Ping. Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong / Shanghai.

The mundane stories and black humor in your work remind me of Hong Kong cultural icons such as actor-comedian Stephen Chow and the indie band My Little Airport. What does Hong Kong mean to you and your art?

I'm not sure if it's a distinctly Hong Kong style. Hong Kong is a small place and we all come from a small world. Maybe that's why we tend to start from a tiny point in our lives, and open up to a bigger world, while people from bigger places might narrow down to more intimate and private aspects.

In today's Hong Kong, many things are at a standstill. People feel lost. How would you feel if you spent two months sleeping on the street and protesting only to find that nothing has changed, or that perhaps the situation is even worse? It's been almost four years since the Umbrella Movement. Many people have given up. People are not as active as before in voting, because they have learned that it's no use. Take indie music as another example. Ten years ago, there were so many interesting bands, but now they can't afford studios and they're losing live venues. I still love Hong Kong, but I think it's time for me to move to somewhere else for a while.

You first started your career by uploading videos to the Internet, and now you exhibit in major international institutions. Do you still see yourself as an amateur animator or a professional artist?

I don't like to call myself an artist, and animator sounds too mechanical. I would call myself a comedian. I recently watched many comedy shows on Netflix, and I found my working method and expression very similar to that of stand-up comedians. They also try to talk about bigger issues through humor, and they collect materials from their everyday lives and take notes, as I do.

To be honest, I find animation exhausting. When a writer's done with their writing, it's done. But after I finish writing the story, I need to draw characters, make them move, record voiceovers, and then edit my voice and the video again and again. It's like living in a karma loop that I create for myself.

Will you consider making a feature-length movie in the future?

Maybe, when I get a chance. I've always wanted to film something, and I've tried to make some music videos with my musician friends. I like things that are real. I don't even watch a lot of animations. But filmmaking involves too many aspects that I cannot control. I make animation because it can be done all by myself. I don't enjoy the process though; it can be lonely and miserable. But I still enjoy making animations. It sounds like I'm contradicting myself...

Your new work for the Guggenheim show deals with digital economy and Internet culture. What are your thoughts on the Internet? Does it make the world better or worse?

Half and half. If there was no Internet, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be able to upload my work for a wider audience. I think the biggest function of the Internet is to show your true self. The relative freedom of online spaces allows you to do that. The moral standards built up over centuries suddenly collapse in the Internet world. I think it's good that the most primal part of human nature is exposed. The fact that the Internet doesn't make any of us better is simply a reflection of human nature. This is who we are.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

The New Museum Triennial: Songs for Sabotage is on view at the New Museum, New York, until May 27, 2018.

"One Hand Clapping" is on view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, until October 21, 2018.

To read more of ArtAsiaPacific's articles, visit our [Digital Library](#).