

18 May 2018

The New York Times

"Hong Kong's Youth Culture, Captured in Disturbing Animations."

Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/arts/design/wong-ping-guggenheim-one-hand-clapping.html>

The New York Times

Hong Kong's Youth Culture, Captured in Disturbing Animations



Wong Ping, 34, at the Guggenheim Museum, with an animation commissioned by the museum called "Dear, can I give you a hand?" George Etheredge for The New York Times

By Barbara Pollack

May 18, 2018

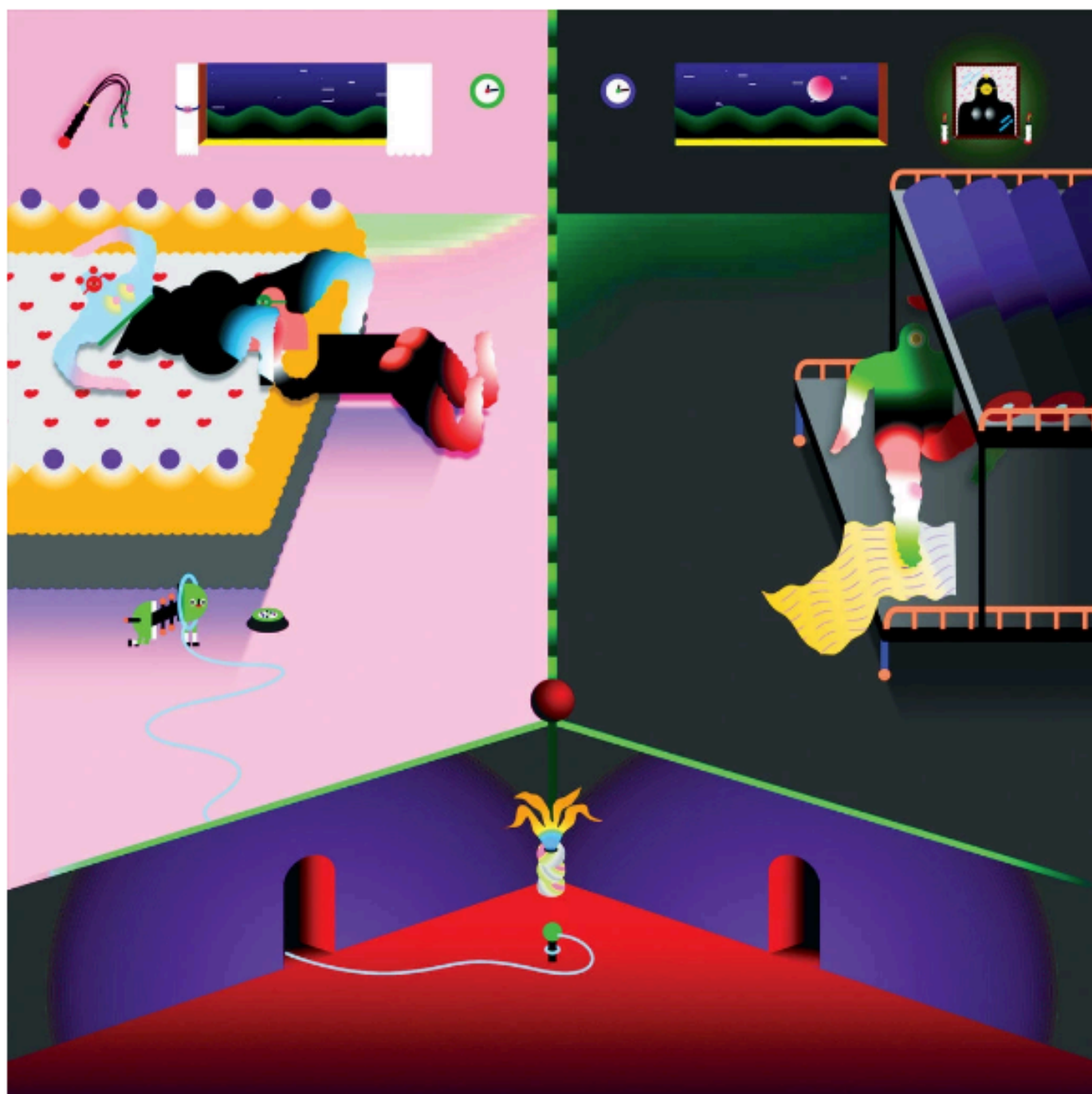


[查看简体中文版](#) · [查看繁體中文版](#)

Two years ago, as the Hong Kong artist Wong Ping tells it, he hadn't even heard of the Guggenheim Museum. A self-taught animator with an online following for his childlike cartoons on disturbing subjects, he had a scant exhibition record. Mr. Wong was new to the workings of the international art world when a gallery director suggested he visit the Guggenheim while he was in New York. His initial reaction was, "What an interesting name."

Now Mr. Wong, who is 34, is the youngest of five Chinese artists, including Cao Fei, Samson Young, Duan Jianyu and Lin Yilin, featured in the Guggenheim's exhibition "One Hand Clapping," through Oct. 21.

"[One Hand Clapping](#)" is the last of three shows sponsored by [The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Chinese Art Initiative](#), a program that allowed the museum to commission and acquire new works. With a virtual reality piece featuring the basketball star [Jeremy Lin](#) and a sound installation using imaginary instruments, this iteration will be the most playful. Its theme, as Xiaoyu Weng, the museum's associate curator for Chinese art, put it, is: "how we can come up with more imaginative ways of envisioning the future."



Detail from the 18-minute video installation, "Dear, can I give you a hand?" includes LED panels, fiberglass and polyester resin with motor and plastic windup toys. Wong Ping



An image from "Under the Lion Crotch" by Wong Ping. Edouard Malingue Gallery

As opposed to the increasingly homogenized visions of sci-fi movies, Mr. Wong imagines his own future in an animation, "Dear, can I give you a hand?," about a sexually frustrated elderly man and his seductive daughter-in-law. Inspired by an encounter the artist had with an 80-year-old man throwing away a stack of X-rated VHS tapes, this account of a perverted, yet ineffectual father figure, rendered in bright colors and naïve design, could be read as a metaphor for Hong Kong and its precarious, often humiliating relationship with the alluring yet authoritarian power of China. "He is the butt of the joke," according to Ms. Weng.

The curator said she was struck by Mr. Wong's "sharp, pungent, intelligent sense of criticality and humor" from the first time she encountered his work at Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2016. "He acutely responds to his surroundings on a micro level but also speaks to the social and political reality," she said.

The exhibition is his second appearance in New York this year; he was featured prominently in the New Museum's 2018 Triennial, "Songs for Sabotage." There, in a [single surreal animation](#) starring zany anthropomorphic animals, the artist offered three fables that imbue details of everyday life in Hong Kong — music clubs, military service, and public transportation — with a profound sense of social awkwardness. Even without the sexually explicit canoodlings that are evident in much of his work, this animation still managed to make viewers feel uncomfortably intrigued.

Holland Cotter of The Times [cited](#) the video as "one of the few pieces with obvious digital roots and with politics that feel as much existential as circumstantial."

Gary Carrion-Murayari, co-curator of the New Museum's Triennial, met the artist just over a year ago in Hong Kong, upon the recommendation of virtually every local curator, even though Mr. Wong had had only two gallery exhibitions. "We talked about the economic anxieties that are bound up in Hong Kong at this moment, the way they affect his generation most strongly and how they can fracture and isolate individuals," Mr. Carrion-Murayari recalled. He was very surprised by the meeting, saying there was a "disconnect" between this shy, soft-spoken young man and the often bizarre videos he was creating.

This double dose of museum exposure is a bit intimidating for Mr. Wong, whose first brush with the mainstream art world was only in 2015, with the inclusion of one of his animations in a group show organized by the M+ museum in Hong Kong.

“I had no idea what I was expecting because I didn’t know what curating means,” Mr. Wong said in an interview in March in Hong Kong, speaking in flawless English. “I never heard of this term. What does installation mean? I don’t know.”



Wong Ping at the Guggenheim. He is a one-man operation, writing short stories that he turns into scripts and then animates, without assistants. *George Etheredge for The New York Times*

Self-effacing in his delivery, he is a one-man operation, writing short stories that he turns into scripts and then animates, without assistants. He seems reluctant to don any mantle, most especially “representative of Hong Kong youth,” though he said he identified strongly with the sense of diminishing opportunities and increasing encroachments on freedom that many his age share.

By his own admission Mr. Wong was a lackluster student in Hong Kong when his parents — a cook and a homemaker — shipped him off to Perth, Australia, for high school and college. Even there, he preferred playing video games to attending classes. He managed to graduate with a major in multimedia design at Curtin University, in 2005, and later taught himself editing software to secure a postproduction job at a local television station on his return to Hong Kong. It was boring work requiring him to retouch images.

As an escape from the tedium he began writing short stories that he posted on his blog and later tried to animate using his limited skills in Photoshop and After Effects software. He posted his first animation on YouTube in 2010. Titled [“Lin Pink Pink,”](#) it depicted a bald middle-aged man commenting on his wife’s nipples. Soon local bands spotted his postings and asked him to make music videos, charmed by the way the low-tech look of his cartoons heightened the perversity of his adult-only psychosexual dramas.

In 2011 the Hong Kong band [No One Remains A Virgin](#), commissioned Mr. Wong to animate their song, ["Under the Lion Crotch,"](#) a reference to a poor neighborhood situated below the Lion Rock mountain in Hong Kong. He created a graphic nightmare, alternatively cute and vicious, with school kids wearing I Heart Hong Kong T-shirts jumping rope until their heads explode. With lyrics like "Our land is brutally torn apart by conglomerates, their thriving business had left us homeless," the video was seen as a direct rebuke to a popular phrase, "Lion Rock Spirit," embraced by politicians to boost Hong Kong's work ethic and promote urban development.



KLEX 2013: "Under the Lion Crotch" (Hong Kong), Wong Ping Video by KLEX Festival

Winning awards in Hong Kong, the video brought the artist his first national attention and the impetus to quit his job. Mr. Wong has been posting his animations online ever since.



《憂鬱鼻 An Emo Nose》 by Wong Ping Video by MrWongPing

Like many young people in Hong Kong, Mr. Wong and his friends were galvanized by the 2014 protests of the Umbrella Movement. They joined thousands who took to the streets, frightened by explosions of tear gas and thrilled by the energy of the crowds.

“It made us stronger, I believe, even though in the end the revolution kind of failed,” he said, adding that many of his friends have since moved abroad and he is considering joining them. “In the society, we all have doubts now and people have less emotional reactions to the politics. We are really disappointed and we are feeling powerless.”

According to Michelle Yun, senior curator of modern and contemporary art at Asia Society, Mr. Wong’s work is “very sophisticated, even though it looks as if it was made by the hand of a sweaty adolescent.” She points out that his retro cartoony style of animation diffuses the somewhat disturbing subject matter, engaging viewers in scenarios from which they may at first wish to recoil.

“Just as Picasso was shocking in his time, this may feel like it is transgressing the boundaries of art,” she said, “but it makes you question your own boundaries.”

A version of this article appears in print on May 20, 2018, on Page AR29 of the New York edition with the headline: Hong Kong Ennui, Animated. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe