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"Modern Fables for a Dystopian World"

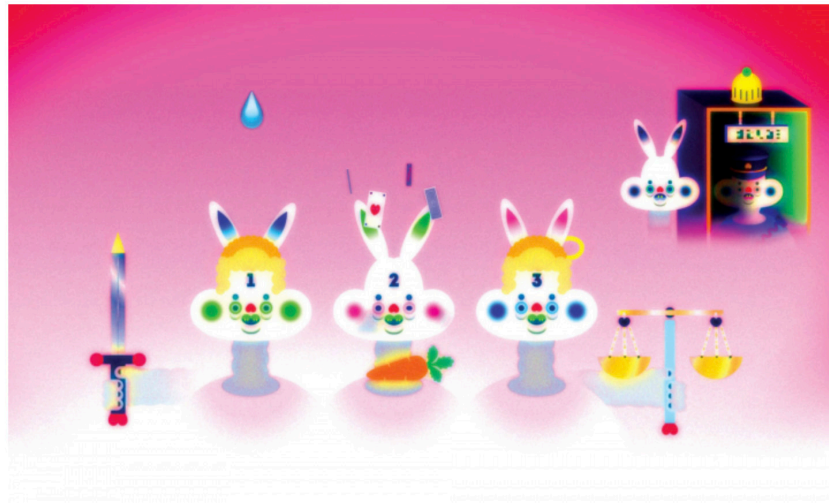
link: <https://hyperallergic.com/516512/wong-ping-heart-digger/>



Installation photo of *Dear, Can I Give You a Hand?* 2018, film, and "The Ha Ha Ha Online Cemetery Limited" (2019), toy dentures from *Wong Ping: Heart Digger*, Camden Arts Centre, 2019 (© Wong Ping, photographer Luke Walker)

LONDON — In the world of Wong Ping, hues smoothly blend one into another, creating a technicolor mirage. This dreamy landscape, encompassing sky, architecture, and characters, dominates *Heart Digger*, the artist's debut UK solo show, currently at Camden Arts Centre and its off-site location at Cork Street.

A self-taught animator, Wong Ping started to realize his projects while working as an editor for a commercial TV station. The handmade character of his animations, results of experiments with popular animation software, contrasts with the polished imagery presented in commercial media. The pixelated screen, interrupted footage, and white noise are reminiscent of the early days of the internet and video games.



Wong Ping, stills from Wong Ping's *Fables 2* (2019), single channel video animation, 13 min. (image courtesy of Edouard Malingue Gallery and the artist)

Wong's newest films, *Fables 1* (2018) and *Fables 2* (2019), showcased at the Camden Arts Centre's Cork Street location, are inspired by fables of Aesop and the Grimm Brothers. While maintaining the core elements of the source material, such as anthropomorphic animal protagonists, he restaged the stories within the contemporary framework. The dystopian cast in these stories includes homicidal conjoined triplet rabbits, a telepathic tree, and a chicken obsessed with social media. While the characters and their behaviors may seem odd and illogical, the absurdity of their surrounding world exposes the often-ludicrous nature of the consumerist mindset.

Both shed light upon modern capitalist desires and the subjects' helplessness in navigating their fate. In one of the stories in *Fables 2* (2019), the protagonist, a cow, is arrested after accidentally killing a policeman during a protest. While imprisoned, it develops a successful business and thrives financially. The story presents a typical rags-to-riches scenario, yet over its course, the protagonist develops explicitly selfish qualities. Eventually, the cow is exploited by the very system that helped it achieve success. After it is found dead, its rotting body enters the capitalist consumption cycle as a luxury meat item. The story ends with a bittersweet cliché: "Happiness is only real when shared."

Sexually explicit imagery and erotic content are integral to Wong's animations, and they speak to the social lives, habits, and anxieties of a wide audience. *Who's the daddy* (2017), for instance, uses sexually explicit scenes and elements to comment on online dating and our increasingly intimate relationship with technology. The film begins with a Yahoo Answers quote stating that in a civilized society, a perfectly straight penis does not exist. Shortly after, we meet the hero of the story, who defies the statement and who segues into a relationship with a woman met through a dating app. Eventually, he surrenders to his desire and takes satisfaction in his submissive role.

*Dear, Can I Give You a Hand?* (2018) is a video installation surrounded by dozens of toy dentures piled on the floor. They are hand-painted with gold enamel and have plastic eyes attached to them. Resembling cartoon faces, they conjure an eerie feeling. The video tells the story of an elderly man who struggles after the death of his wife. His situation only deteriorates when his son and daughter-in-law move in, and the man is haunted by the daughter-in-law's sexuality. At the end of the video, the man is instructed by a young woman on recycling his old VHS porn tapes. Their brief encounter allows the two to communicate knowledge and life experience, but this exchange does not diminish the man's sexual frustration. Here sex symbolizes the isolation felt by a man neglected by his closest family and the wider world.



Wong Ping, stills from Wong Ping's *Fables 2* (2019), single channel video animation, 13 min. (image courtesy of Edouard Malingue Gallery and the artist)

The story of a giraffe, *Organic Smuggling Tunnel* (Chunk 1 & 2) (2019), an installation featuring an inflatable giraffe, split between the Camden Arts Centre's two locations, is a metaphor for the longstanding colonial relationship between the United Kingdom and Hong Kong, where violent protests against laws proposing extradition to mainland China continue. According to the artist's fictional narrative, the inflatable giraffe's neck, stored at Cork Street, is accommodating Hong Kong's officials, who were treated by the artist with tear gas "so they can have a taste of the suffering they've put hundreds of thousands through." In an imagined conversation with Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Wong Ping criticizes her indifference to the suffering of the Chinese protesters. When the artist shows her photographic documentation of the protests and graffiti condemning Hong Kong's authorities, she reacts by saying "Art truly moves my heart! Are these the works of Banksy?"





Installation photo of "Organic Smuggling Tunnel (Chunk 1)" (2019) from *Wong Ping: Heart Digger*, Camden Arts Centre, 2019 (© Wong Ping, courtesy Edouard Malingue Gallery, photographer Luke Walker)

Wong Ping's video animations are truly fables for the modern age as they contemplate the networked world. The combination of sex, violence, and humor merge in his socially and politically engaged works. They present human and animal characters as psychologically complex, as well as fallible and unable to fully control their lives and desires. They battle against the antagonistic forces ruling their fate, but ultimately, they fail. *Heart Digger* is a multidimensional show. It does not offer the viewer an easy spectacle, but expects engagement, compassion, and contemplation. Wong proves himself not only to be a skilled animator, but also the kind of fabulator we need in this lonely, flawed world.

Wong Ping: Heart Digger continues at Camden Arts Centre (Arkwright Road London, UK) and *Cork Street* (5-6 Cork Street, London, UK) through September 15.