

away

curated by Yip Kai Chun

away explores the subject of loss and remembrance. Drawing on his personal experience and following his distinctive curatorial line and interest in mixing disciplines and generations, the young Hong Kong curator presents a group show featuring one of his sound work, a video by Jolene Mok, an installation by wood sculptor Foon Sham, and paper crafts by Amanda Cheng of Soul House (Paper Art) Design Studio.

In the exhibition, creative disciplines that are usually separated are harmoniously blended together. The blurring of the boundaries of 'art', the combination of works by emerging and established artists, and the intentional confusion between curating and art making, reveal Yip Kai Chun's singular artistic and curatorial approach and desire to shake conventions: rules are not rejected but cleverly applied in unexpected ways.

Although the exhibition brings together emotionally charged artworks, feelings of distress or fear are suggested in a subtle and composed manner. With *away*, Yip Kai Chun explores an uneasy and unsolvable issue with a thought-provoking exhibition inviting visitors to quietude and distance.

This exhibition is the winning project of Mur Nomade's Open Call for Young Curators. Our special thanks go to the judging panel of the first edition of this program: Caroline Ha Thuc, Nuria Krämer and Kingsley Ng.

| Curatorial Statement |

away is an exhibition about death, and the invaluable and irreversible relations between the deceased and the alive. Using different media, the presented works delineate, in very personal ways, four encounters with death at various positions and stages of life.

Death is a taboo in Chinese and many other societies, enveloped in cultural and religious confinements and emotional distress, which deters people to talk or even think about this unavoidable and universal matter. Art has the courage, earnestness and sensitivity to inquire into this strenuous subject and to express the concealed sophisticated feelings behind.

With divergent imaginations of the being of after death (or afterlife), the exhibition illustrates the complex and at times indescribable emotions and memories triggered by death and loss, from remembering the past to hoping for the future.

Yip Kai Chun's sound object *Incomplete Finale* re-enacts the process of dying experienced by his mother and its entanglement; Jolene Mok's video *You Know Where to Find Me* expresses the feelings of not being present when her grandfather died; Foon Sham's *Vessel of Hope*, a wood sculpture and paper boats installation, transfers the emotions caused by the death of the artist's mother into a collective sharing of wishes; and in *Ash to Wish*, Amanda Cheng transposes the hopes of others for their lost ones as well as of her own afterlife into paper crafts offerings.

Artistic creation in *away* is a therapeutic and transformative process, reconstructing relations with and memories of the deceased, the alive and self. Each piece in the exhibition is an individual commemoration and rite, unbound to religion or traditional conventions, calling forth contemplation of death and life.

... *you* live on in here

Half a year after my mother died of cancer, I put up an installation titled 'Incomplete Finale' with the audio recordings of her, and invited my family and close friends to see the work. Many of them might have known about my mother's situation, but few had asked about it. I had rarely talked about it either. Even among my family members, little discussion took place.

Not exactly that I wanted to hide from the others, but somehow I was too choked up to talk: the foreseeable permanent loss of my mother, the strong tides of emotions, the unease of discussing about death, or simply the limitation of verbal communication as a way of expression. To me and perhaps many others, the feelings and emotions triggered by death are largely unspeakable.

Showing the installation dissolved the rooted choke and released death as a topic. Finally, I and my family, friends and others could openly talk about the feelings on death and cancer. It should not come as a surprise, but only by then, I realized many around me were experiencing or had experienced the dying and death of their close ones. The death that we could not speak out immediately connected us.

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It is very much the actual death I have experienced – its unspeakable nature and desolated process – that drives me to further explore the notion with an exhibition.

To me, the search for works on the remembrance of loved ones gives a similar connection effect that 'Incomplete Finale' generated: I instantly understood what these artists had gone through to transform their indigestible losses into the emotionally charged works. By exposing the mostly concealed and isolated experience of facing death, their works converse that unspeakable process precisely and wordlessly. They are all very personal yet sharing the same urge to release and express.

I wish to connect these isolated works – and the (once-)desolated persons – and amplify them through an exhibition.

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Death is a permanent loss and termination that defines the very existence of human. Compared to other losses, death is maybe the most traumatising as it reminds us the limit of life and anything we find important. Death is universal, yet the perception of it could greatly vary from a mere fact to a metaphysical quest. Death is a taboo in Chinese and many other cultures, enveloped in uncertainty, fear, mystery and other confinements and distresses. It is a taboo that deters people to talk or even think about this universal matter. This is perhaps why I find it inexpressible.

How the alive relates and remembers the deceased is a way to continue the once-close relationship – now an irreversible relationship in which the other end has expired in the secular world. The remembrance is a way the deceased lingers its existence in the physical world, and the alive expresses, releases and comforts oneself and others, reconstructing the relation, memories, emotions and self. The deceased could not really respond, however. It may be like, after all, talking to oneself. The imagination in the being after death (or afterlife) is one of the best antidotes to death.

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'away' includes four works that are about death and deceased. Each work represents an invaluable and irreplaceable relationship with the deceased, venting meditation of the deceased, death and life.

...*you* live on in this voice

I created 'Incomplete Finale', a sound object with the recordings of my mother's last days, inscribing the feelings of dying. My impression on her will gradually fade out, but her voice and everything about the period will live on in these recordings. They are the most genuine legacy of her.

...you know where to find me

Jolene Mok created 'You Know Where to Find Me', a video crystallizing her feelings of not being present when his grandfather passed away. She was reminded that the deceased would return to find his family members on the seventh day he died, wherever they are.

...you go to a faraway and peaceful place

Foon Sham created 'Vessel of Hope', a sculpture for his mother who died of cancer, wishing her to go to somewhere peaceful and quiet. The creation of the work involved Sham's family and invites audience to write down their wishes on paper boats. The work is a collective process of hope and therapy.

...you have a better life there

Amanda Cheng of Soul House (Paper Art) Design Studio created 'To Myself 100 Years After' and 'Come Back', two custom-made paper-craft offerings for their clients' lost ones and Amanda herself. Afterlife mirrors life – only in a better way.

While the theme of death recurs in the works, each of them was created with different artistic practices and media from sound, video, and sculpture to paper craft. Likewise, the participating artists experienced death at various stages of life, from young adult to midlife, from experiencing to mediating the death of close ones (and self for Amanda Cheng). The works delineate individual processes and perspectives of death, remembering the deceased.

Except 'Come Back' in which the artist deals with another person's remembrance on her late husband, the artists in the exhibition genuinely experienced the death of their loved ones and the deceased. It is the artists' very own torments and feelings they are examining and sharing. The artists took courage, earnestness and sensitivity to inquire into death, the deceased and the desolated loneliness and transform into creation. Artistic creation in this exhibition is a therapeutic and transformative process, reconstructing relations with and memories of the deceased, the alive and self.

Although the works were created directly due to the strong emotions triggered by death, the works have restrained the emotions and death to more subtle and composed ways of expression. Diverged from the usual perception of death as frightening and tormenting, the presented works offer tranquility and distance. Each piece is an individual commemoration and rite unbound to religious and cultural conventions, calling forth contemplation of death and life.

All the presented works show the potentially favorable facets of death – the relief of both the deceased and the alive on physical and psychological levels. There is a trait to face loss, failure and adversity in life. The hopefulness of the being after death heals the hopelessness of the loss. Moving on to the future may only be possible with the reminiscence of the past; facing death is essential for living a more purposeful life.

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Although I consider myself an atheist, lately, because of 'away', I force myself to meditate on my late mother: Would she still grumble about my messy room? Would she be happy about how I live my life? How were she doing now? Then, I look at her picture hanged at the dining room, imagining her sitting on a stool, reading newspapers in a quiet, sunny afternoon, like any other ordinary day. Finally, my fading feelings were reactivated. I verified that my memory and emotion on my late mother is preserved. Or, is *this* actually she?

| Artists' Statements |

Yip Kai Chun

Incomplete Finale

Five years ago, since my mother was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, I put a recorder beside her whenever we met to inscribe every instant of the limited time. The recording became a documentation of my mother, myself and my family in that period. Unfortunately, this has also become a record of cancer and death.

The process ended with the death of my mother and lasted for a year and a half. Over three hundred recordings accumulated are the most genuine legacies of my mother. She would live on in these recordings undyingly.

In 2012, I put the edited few-hour long recordings into an empty room, which was exhibited with the title *Incomplete Finale*. I hoped to express the unspeakable feelings and emotions of the death of my mother. For this exhibition, the recordings are edited chronologically into a six-hour track – same as the opening hours of the exhibition – and put into a tin, re-enacting the dying of my mother. It is preserved with a rite like body and all the other legacies for remembrance.

Amanda Cheng, Soul House (Paper Art) Design Studio

Ash to Wish

In Chinese culture, paper offerings that copy daily goods are burnt in funerals to ensure the deceased a happy and prosperous afterlife. Among my paper offerings, I have selected the two most memorable offerings to me. They are *To Myself 100 Years After* and *Come Back*.

To Myself 100 Years After is a gift for my own funeral. It is a paper house I designed and crafted for myself after my death. As a paper craftsman, creating a unique paper craft for me is the best gift I could give myself. I wish I would live in my own house peacefully in another world.

Come Back is a paper key custom-made for a client. I believe that the bereaved hopes that the deceased would be able to return home with the key. The key replicates the shape of the key of the deceased's home. As curves and details are challenging in paper craft, I had to think about possible ways of creating it.

Each custom-made paper craft contains wishes and blessings of the alive and the trace of the deceased. The paper crafts are the most visible and concrete link between the deceased and the alive.

Jolene Mok

You Know Where to Find Me

This piece is dedicated to my late Grandpa.

Home is a concept that is embedded firmly inside of me even though I am far away from it in terms of physical distance. I do not want to surrender to the trap of staying at home without first trying to figure out if it is the best option for me. So I consider my decision to be on itinerant since 2011 as a commitment in searching for a truer definition of home.

By relocating myself in alien territories, I am an anonymous foreigner who is not grounded, without a socially prescribed life to live up to, and far enough away so that I can distance myself from the burden of home and from overwhelming relationships.

And yet as an itinerant artist, I could not invest too much energy in the idea on missing people, and/or places, as it is exhausting and energy draining. Instead of missing someone or some places, I go visit – and revisit – them whenever possible.

Meanwhile I carry them with me in my heart, as in my work.

Foon Sham

Vessel of Hope

The *Vessel of Hope* is an installation I made for my mother who died of cancer. The media of the artwork are wood, paper and tea leaves. The long wooden vessel is a metaphor for her journey to go somewhere peaceful and quiet. I used tea leaves as symbols for cure and a cone form to resemble candle flames. Tea leaves contain antioxidants that are supposed to prevent cancer.

Other viewers who wanted to share my feeling could write their messages in black on the paper boats that I provided. These messages were about their loved ones who have suffered in cancer or hoped for cure in cancer. The piece is about sharing, healing and hopes. After two exhibitions, there were over 800 paper boats representing over 800 individuals forming a collective voyage. I like to share their thoughts and words in this coming exhibition and invite your participation again.

| Profiles |

About Yip Kai Chun

Born in 1984, Yip Kai Chun is an artist and curator, living and working in Hong Kong. He was trained in Critical Inter-Media at the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, and studied Cultural Studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He was awarded the Emerging Artist Grant from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council twice, in 2011 and 2013. He has been part of the team of Microwave International New Media Arts Festival since 2011.

Yip Kai Chun's interests encompass local culture, history, urban environment, society and politics, linking these themes to his personal experience. His curatorial practice is experimental and process-oriented and draws on theories and methodologies from diverse disciplines, aiming at unravelling the taken-for-granted and neglected, and re-imagining alternatives and possibilities. As an artist, he employs media that 'extract reality' – sound, video and photography.

Together with Chow Yik, Yip Kai Chun recently formed 'case-open-close', a curatorial initiative gathering emerging artists from Europe and Asia. Their first event 'Level Note one two' (June 2015) featured a movable exhibition, performances and screenings on various rooftops.

About his curatorial approach, Yip Kai Chun says: 'I am interested in mixing: between different art forms, between art-making and curation, between art and other domains and disciplines, between old and new, between established and emerging, between different spaces and times... I strongly believe in inter-disciplinarity in practice. I think blurring the conventional boundaries fosters

dialogues and possibilities inside and outside art. While engaging in media art and public & community art for years, I have a personal interest in tradition – be it culture and art forms. I believe that the so-called tradition and the new are not exclusive; rather, they are always in negotiation and can yield unexpected result together.’

About Amanda Cheng, Soul House (Paper Art) Design Studio

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Amanda Cheng had not initially thought of pursuing a career in paper craft design. She studied Management Information Systems in Taiwan and worked in Mexico and Nicaragua in non-design sectors. Rekindling her passion in art and design, she returned to Hong Kong in 2007 and obtained diplomas in various areas such as interior design, commercial design, and photography.

Cheng realized the importance of paper craft offering to the deceased, which serves as a condolence to the bereaved, after experiencing the emotional feelings herself. She then founded Soul House (Paper Art) Design Studio in 2010, providing tailored paper craft installations for wedding venues, shop displays, exhibitions and offices. She has explored the value of the Chinese paper craft offering culture and hopes to conserve this precious Chinese tradition by adding a touch of modern style and techniques.

About Jolene Mok

Born in 1984 in Hong Kong, Jolene Mok is an itinerant experimental artist, who takes video art and experimental film as her major creative platforms. Mok received her M.F.A. in Experimental & Documentary Arts at Duke University in 2013. She has been exposed to an interdisciplinary learning and working environment since her undergraduate education in the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, through her major in the Critical Inter-Media Laboratory (2003-2007).

Jolene Mok takes both practical and theoretical components as interconnected aspects throughout her creative process. She is open and always ready to play with and incorporate emerging situations or technologies in her artistic pursuits for the generation of unexpected, meaningful outcomes. Since 2006, Mok’s works have been exhibited worldwide. Some of her digital creations have been presented in academic conferences in Finland, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Brazil, and US. From 2011 onwards, she has been on itinerant, taking part in artist residency programs, and she has a particular interest in undertaking artist residency programs in remote locations.

About Foon Sham

Born in Macao, raised in Hong Kong, Foon Sham is a sculptor based in the U.S.A. He is a professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, U.S.A. Sham received a BFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1978, and a MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1981. Since 1980, he has had 28 solo exhibitions and has participated in over 115 group exhibitions in galleries and museums in the United States as well as other countries including Canada, Norway, Mexico, Australia and Hong Kong. Wood has always been Sham’s primary medium in his sculpture and installations. He has sawed, cut, laminated, stacked, carved and assembled a multiplicity of

soft and hard wood into organic and geometric forms from small to massive pieces. His art echoes his personal feeling to nature, disaster, and the particular environment. In his recent installations, he invited visitors to participate and share their thoughts and ideas.

Foon Sham has received numerous awards including the Virginia Commission of the Arts (1996), the Nordic Artists' Centre in Dale, Norway (1999), a Residency Grant from the National Endowment of the Arts (2001), and recently the Franz and Virginia Bader Grant in Washington DC (2009) and the Strauss Fellowship from the Art Council in Fairfax County, Virginia (2009). His work is in public collections including the Nayatad Sculpture Park in Hungary (1995), the Gallery Place-Chinatown Metro-rail Station in Washington DC (2000), the Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia (2003), the Museum of Contemporary Arts of Yucatan, Merida, Mexico (2005), and the Hong Kong Museum of Art (2008).

Mur Nomade's Open Call for Young Curators 2015

Willing to encourage and promote new curatorial ideas, Mur Nomade launched at the beginning of 2015 an open call inviting emerging independent curators living in Hong Kong to submit exhibition proposals involving artistic exchanges. The program aimed at mentoring and accompanying the selected curator in the preparation of the proposed exhibition, and ultimately presenting it at Mur Nomade's space in the Summer 2015.

The winner was selected by an independent judging panel of art professionals including Caroline Ha Thuc, art writer and curator; Nuria Krämer, Head of Connecting Space Hong Kong; and Kingsley Ng, interdisciplinary artist and lecturer at the Hong Kong Baptist University Academy of Visual Arts.

Mur Nomade is an art space in Hong Kong, operating both as a curatorial office and a gallery. Our name is the French translation of 'nomadic wall'. We present site-specific projects in selected venues all around Hong Kong, in addition to regular exhibitions at our gallery space in the up-and-coming South Island Cultural District. We work closely with local and international artists, curators, art writers and teachers to imagine and conceive exhibitions and programmes such as collaborative art projects, performances, workshops and residencies.

Mur Nomade focuses on projects encouraging cultural exchanges and creative encounters. We like bold ideas and we are convinced that cultural exchanges support creativity, stimulate emulation and encourage experimentation.

***away*, curated by Yip Kai Chun**

Exhibition dates: July 11 – September 19, 2015

Mur Nomade, Unit 1606, 16/F, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 12pm – 6pm. Closed on public holidays.

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