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Hong Kong artist Oscar Chan Yik Long talks demons, horror films and his big move to the City of Lights



Samsara by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Ink and acrylic on canvas, 178 x 148 cm, 2018.
Courtesy the artist.

香港藝術家陳翊朗談魔鬼、恐怖電影以及他將移居巴黎

在中環德己立街一家咖啡館裡和陳翊朗聊天，你很難想像眼前這位陽光開朗、穿著活潑圖案襯衫的藝術家，生活中卻一直被鬼魅纏繞。

陳翊朗1988年在香港出生，畢業於香港浸會大學視覺藝術學院。他在很小的時候腦海中就植入了一種對魔鬼「抽象」的恐懼，這也極大影響了其日後的繪畫風格。

他越恐懼越排斥，就越被其吸引。在他的藝術裡，尖叫的骷髏、不成形的野獸還有那些令人毛骨悚然或流淚或流血的生物佈滿在牆上或油畫板上。「我要給恐懼一個形態」，他如此說道。

他的作品呈現出一派混沌與不加掩飾的懺悔感，一種徘徊在恐懼、厭惡而又為其吸引的糾結的內心寫照。

C & G 藝術單位所舉辦的《「最」大展》開幕當晚，我們和陳翊朗一起坐下聊天，本次他有一件作品展出。

你的藝術中充斥著恐懼，你是何時開始產生恐懼感的？

我七歲的時候非常害怕鬼魂和吸血鬼。那時我和父母和兩個姐姐住在公屋裡。你知道香港的公屋都有長長的走廊，不論何時有人走過都會出現回音。我和父母睡一張床，但爸爸總出差，媽媽也要工作到凌晨才回來。所以每當我感到害怕時便會圍繞床走動。還有一段比較深刻的記憶是10歲時。那是暑假的第一天，我頭痛欲裂就趕去了醫院。檢查後發現我大腦裡有跟血管爆了，形成了一個雞蛋大小的血塊。之後我不知道發生了什麼，只記得頭暈想吐。到了第七天，我終於能爬下床照鏡子了。我看見自己的額頭

上有一排釘子，看上去就像科學怪人。如果我換到現在做手術，感受就會全然不同了。

為什麼感受會不一樣？

小的時候，我只知道我會在眨眼之間失去一切，就彷彿站在懸崖邊上。而如今，我把死亡視作過程中的一部份而非終點。以前我很容易焦慮，現在也是。在機場安檢時我還是會驚慌。2015年廣州個展，臨飛前的那個晚上我去了10次廁所。

你在繪畫中描繪的是個人的恐懼還是普遍的恐懼？兩者有什麼區別嗎？

我畫的是我的感受，從來都不是說「我就害怕這個東西所以我把

它畫出來」。恐懼本身是非常抽象的，我自己常常試著找一個實物去給養它。

對我來說，藝術於是種治療方法。我需要與恐懼共處。在某一刻，我還想著和它交朋友，但我發現這只會讓我更焦慮，因為我無時無刻不想著它。學著和恐懼相處，這個過程對我來說早已是種轉化。

為什麼要給養它？

因為我一直和恐懼共處，我不知道怎麼才能不這麼做？

所以恐懼是一種動力？

可以這麼說，但我也在想或許可以用快樂來替代。或許我移居巴黎可以有所改變。

Chatting with Oscar Chan Yik Long at a coffee shop on D'Aguilar Street, Central, it's hard to imagine that the sunny artist, decked out in one of his trademark vibrantly patterned shirts, lives his life haunted by demons.

Born in Hong Kong in 1988, Chan studied at Hong Kong Baptist University's Academy of Visual Arts but it was an "abstract" fear of demons, planted in the artist's mind when he was still a young boy, that weighs most heavily on his paintings.

As much as he fears and is repelled by fear, he is also drawn to it. In his art, screaming skeletons, amorphous beasts and ghoulish, tear- or blood-shedding creatures fill walls and life-sized canvases. "I need to give fear a form," he says.

Chaotic and unabashedly confessional, they're the portraits of a tangled mind that vacillates between fearing and repelling these creatures, and being drawn towards them. We sat down with Chan on the eve of C&G Artpartment's *The Survey Exhibition*, where he is exhibiting a work.



Awful things happen in every apartment house by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Acrylic on found objects, 89 x 40 x 40 cm, 2017. Courtesy the artist.



The Lord of The Mountain by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Ink on rock, site specific, 2016. Courtesy the artist.

所以這是你去巴黎的原因，為了快樂？

不全是。我從沒在國外住過，所以想嘗試下，便於找到看事物的新角度。但我還會對魔鬼的話題做更多研究。

做研究？

是的。尤其是恐怖電影裡的魔鬼。我一直在看余允抗的《凶榜》，它的主旨是說恐怖遍佈在日常生活中。波蘭斯基也是我非常感興趣的導演，同時我還想進一步瞭解不同宗教如何看待惡魔。

你信教嗎？

我不信教，我只感興趣的是宗教把信仰當成結構：宗教操縱恐懼的方

式。儘管宗教與靈性相關，後者將我們置於一個更高的層面，但宗教故事和其規則卻都是由人書寫的。我相信在這之外一定存在著某些東西，我信人事輪迴還有因果報應。我不會依奉某個宗教，因為我可以從每種宗教中獲取某些東西。我的信仰不是停滯的，相反它們一直在改變在轉化中。

你的藝術極具個人特色，是否曾害怕被人評頭論足？

我一直相信一句話：「你所抗拒的是你自己。」別人總告訴我要變得更堅強，但如果我不堅強就不會存活至今。我的意思是，我為什麼要被這些困擾？我爸爸會叫我不

哭，但哭能釋放壓力，並不是懦弱的表現。

這次你展出的作品《The Most Misplaced Worry》由一堆煙頭構成，背後的靈感是什麼？

作品關於我的男朋友。他吸煙的時候我也有點害怕，害怕他會因此得病死去。這些香煙象徵了我對失去他的恐懼。即使他不吸煙，我還是會因千百種方式失去他。所以這不是關乎他做了什麼，而是關乎我如何應對自己的擔心。

許多香港藝術家會通過藝術來回應香港的政治和社會現狀。藝術和政治的關係是什麼樣的？

Christie Lee: There is so much fear in your art. When did you start feeling fear?

Oscar Chan Yik Long: When I was about seven, I was really scared of ghosts and vampires. I lived in a public housing estate with my parents and two older sisters. You know Hong Kong public housing estates have these long corridors, and whenever someone walks past, there'd be an echo. I shared a bed with my parents, but my dad was away for business all the time, and my mom worked until the wee hours, so I'd circle the bed whenever the feeling of fear overcame me.

Another memory was when I was 10. It was the first day of summer. My brain hurt like mad and I was rushed into surgery. It turns out that a blood vessel had burst in my brain, forming an egg-sized clot. I had very little idea what was happening. I only remember feeling very dizzy and nauseous. On the seventh day, I managed to climb out of bed to look at the mirror. There was a row of staples on my forehead. I looked like Frankenstein's monster.

If I'd had the surgery now, I would have felt very differently.

CL: How would it be different?

OCYL: When I was younger, I

only knew that I'd lose everything in the blink of an eye, like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff. Now I consider death as a part of a process, not an end point.

I used to get anxious very easily, and I still do. I still panic during security screening at the airport. I went to the toilet 10 times on the night prior to my flight to Guangzhou for my solo show in 2015.

CL: Are you portraying your own personal fears in your paintings, or fear in general? Can the two be separated?

OCYL: I paint what I feel, but it's never as direct as "I'm scared of this particular thing so I'm going to paint this thing". Fear itself is very abstract thing, and I find myself constantly trying to find a tangible object to feed it.

For me, art is a kind of therapy. I need to live with this fear.

At one point, I thought of befriending it, but I realised that it only added to my anxiety as I was always thinking about it. The process of learning to live with it is already a kind of transformation for me.

CL: Why do you need to feed it?

OCYL: I have always lived with fear. I wouldn't know how to not to.

CL: So fear is a kind of motivation?

OCYL: You can say that, but I'm also beginning to think it can be replaced by happiness. Maybe my move to Paris will change that.

CL: Is that why you're moving to Paris – to be happy?

OCYL: Not exactly. I have never lived abroad so I'd like to try, to gain a new perspective on things. But I'd also like to do more research on the topic of demons.

CL: Research?

OCYL: Yes, particularly demons in horror movies. I've been watching Dennis Yu's *The Imp*. It's basically the idea that horror exists in everyday life. Polanski is also a director that I'm very interested in. I'm also interested in learning more about how different religious see evil.

CL: Are you religious?

OCYL: No. I'm not as interested in religion as in belief as structure: the way that religions manipulate fear. Although religion is connected with spirituality, and spirituality supposedly puts us at a higher level, religious stories and rules are written by man. I believe that there is something out there. I believe



Just another sunny afternoon by Oscar Chan Yik Long, Ink on canvas and wall, 500 x 1200 cm, 2017. Courtesy the artist.

我不可避免的會受到周遭的影響。當你打開報紙，你讀到的都是不好的事情，不管是香港還是其他地方。不安永遠存在。但如果我直接回應，我不會以藝術的方式。我的意思是，我是個同性戀者但我不想讓我的藝術帶著這個標籤，從而使得我的作品和我自己被簡單歸類。

你最會想念香港的什麼？

一定是美食，還有便利。在香港凡事都更便捷，雖然偶爾也會有不盡人意的地方。有一年聖誕期間我要列印一大堆明信片，列印店的人12月24日半夜打電話給我，告訴我說我的文件出錯了。我不介意他半夜打給我，但他為什麼聖誕夜還在工作？許多香港人以這種便捷為榮，我媽媽就是其中一個，但這背後的代價是什麼？

我的男朋友沒有電視機，只有一台收音機，而且還堅持買雜誌。這是

種截然不同的知識消費方式，焦慮少。如果一個香港人在海邊，他/她可能會想：「我是不是該看書或讀點什麼東西？」香港這個地方有著許許多多的欲望，還有許許多多實現這種欲望的方式。如果無法立即實現，人們就會感到不安或恐慌。這是個惡性循環。

假想如果不以恐懼為創作源泉，你覺得會是什麼樣？

或許我就不會做藝術了。我想，這是個過程。有時候我覺得自己平靜下來的時候便能畫畫。2015年為了我在咩事藝術空間的個展「自由落體」，我把自己關在那18天。沒有電視，沒有電話。開幕前，我買了很多藥和水，彷彿到了世界末日。在最初幾天，我驚慌失措。但10天後，我開始習慣。沒有人問你有沒有工作，沒有人問「你今天做了什麼？你是否覺得今天效率很高？」諸如此類的問題。我在四

面牆上畫滿了直線，寓意是我在颶風（黑線）眼中——那個最平靜的地方。

in reincarnation and karma. I don't just follow one religion, as there something I can take from every religion. My beliefs are not stagnant, either; they are always changing, transforming.

CL: Since your art is so personal, do you ever fear being judged?

OCYL: I always believe in the saying, "What you resist, you resist in yourself". I'm always told to be stronger but if I weren't strong, I wouldn't be here. I mean, why would I even bother? My dad would tell me to stop crying, but crying is a form of release. It's not a show of weakness.

CL: *The Most Misplaced Worry*, your work at the C&G Artpartment, comprises a stack of gutted cigarettes. What is the inspiration behind it?

OCYL: It's about my boyfriend. I also fear when he smokes, as it is a sign that he could get sick and die, and the cigarettes symbolise my fear of losing him. Even if he weren't a smoker, I could still lose him in a thousand ways. So it's not about what he does, but how I handle my worry.

CL: Many Hong Kong artists are responding to what's happening in Hong Kong politics and society through their art. What is the relationship between art and politics?

OCYL: It's inevitable that I'd feel affected by my surroundings. When you open the newspaper, all you see is the bad, in Hong Kong or elsewhere. The anxiety is always there. But if I were to directly respond, it wouldn't be through art. I mean, I'm gay but I don't want to label my art as gay art, as it'd pigeonhole my work and me.

CL: What will you miss most about Hong Kong?

OCYL: Definitely the food. And the convenience. It's just easier to get things done here, though that's not always good. I had to print a batch of postcards around Christmas one year, and the guy from the print shop rang me past midnight on December 24 to tell me that there was something wrong with my file. I didn't mind the call, but seriously, why was he even working on Christmas Eve? Many Hongkongers take pride in this convenience, including my mother, but at what cost?

My boyfriend has no television, only a radio, and he still buys

magazines. It's a completely different way of knowledge consumption. There is less anxiety. If a Hongkonger is on the beach, he or she might think, "Should I be reading a book or something?" In Hong Kong, there are many desires, and many different ways to fulfil those desires. If they aren't fulfilled immediately, one feels anxious or scared. It's a vicious circle.

CL: Could you imagine making art without that well of fear to draw from?

OCYL: Perhaps I'd stop making art altogether. It's a process, I think. Sometimes I feel I could paint when I'm feeling calmer. For my solo show at Things that can happen [*Soliquid*, 2017], I trapped myself in the art space for 18 days. There was no television, no phone. Before the exhibition, I bought a lot of pills and water, like it was the end of the world. I felt panicky for the first few days, but after 10 days I started to get used to it. There was nobody to ask if you are productive, no questions like "What did you do today? Do you feel you were efficient today?" I covered the four walls with straight lines. The idea is that I'm in the eye of this hurricane [of black lines], where it is most peaceful.