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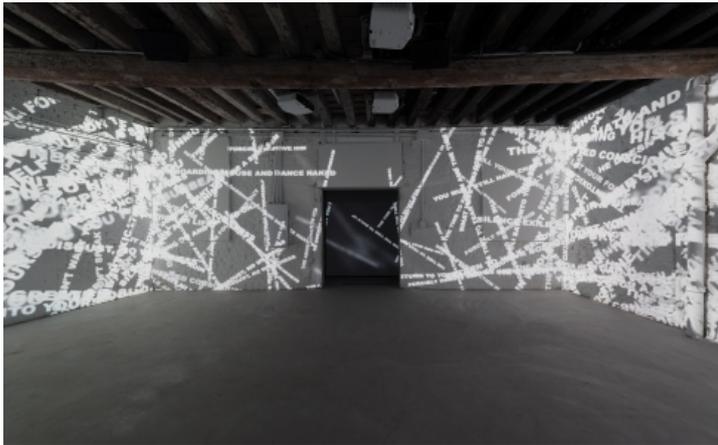
Endless possibilities await Hong Kong artist at Venice showpiece

Tsang Kin-wah is representing Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale with an exhibition of moving images inspired by the infinity of space and time

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A section of Hongkonger Tsang Kin-wah's exhibition, 'The Infinite Nothing', at the Venice Biennale contemporary art show in Italy. Photo: SCMP Pictures

For many artists, the Venice Biennale is the Olympic Games of the art world, but Hongkonger Tsang Kin-wah says it's simply another chance to share his philosophies on life.

Tsang's moving-image installation, 'The Infinite Nothing', is Hong Kong's offering at the 56th edition of the biennale, a contemporary art exhibition held every two years in the northern Italian city.

For the second time, the West Kowloon Cultural District's visual culture museum, M+, is in charge of Hong Kong's installation along with the Arts Development Council. Together they have provided HK\$10 million for the event.

"Certainly for a lot of artists this event is a chance to put yourself on the world map, and I respect people who do that," Tsang told the South China Morning Post in Venice.

"But as an artist, if your work is good enough, people will pay attention to you anyway and naturally they will be interested in where you come from."

Tsang's solo exhibition opened to the public on Saturday following an opening ceremony last week officiated by Chief Secretary Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, who is also chairwoman of the West Kowloon Cultural District.

Tsang's exhibition takes viewers on a journey through an enclosed pitch-black space where they become immersed in powerful projected moving images, including a flowing river and text-based visuals accompanied by mystical sound effects. It is spread over two rooms and a courtyard and includes four "independent but interconnected" visual projections.

Tsang, who worked on the show with an M+ curatorial team led by the museum's chief curator Doryun Chong and learning and interpretation curator Stella Fong, says 'The Infinite Nothing' is his largest and most complex show to date.

"The whole exhibition is one single work. Each room is connected with each other. After going through the rooms, you return to the starting point," he

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Tsang Kin-wah has gained fame showcasing his art in Venice.

says.

The idea was inspired by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence, which suggests that the universe has been recurring in a similar pattern an infinite number of times across infinite space and time. Tsang says these ideas echo those held by Buddhism regarding reincarnation and cause-and-effect.

"This pattern occurs constantly in my life and my art," Tsang says.

Born in Shantou in 1976, Tsang moved to Hong Kong when he was five. He graduated from Chinese University in 2000 with a degree in fine arts. Three years later he earned a master's degree from the Camberwell College of Arts at the London Institute, now called the University of the Arts London.

The award-winning artist is widely known for his text-based visuals presented in the form of paintings and moving image projections, including his ongoing series The Seven Seals. In 2005, he was awarded the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, and in 2007 the TDC Prize at the Tokyo Type Directors Club Annual Awards. His work can be seen in private and public museums both locally and abroad.

Tsang says he moves back and forth between images created with text, and images created with visuals, but says every creation is different.

"No one can step into the same river twice," he says.

The last Venice Biennale featured work by fellow Hongkonger Lee Kit and earned the artist international acclaim. Tsang says Lee's success has not brought more pressure for himself, and he is happy to focus on his work rather than looking at the past.

"Lee Kit, Pak Sheung-chuen and Frog King [otherwise known as Kwok Meng-ho] were all shown in Venice before. But it's difficult to compare them because our works are all very different," Tsang says.

Showcasing his art in Venice has brought Tsang notoriety and the spotlight of the international art world, with overseas galleries and curators keen to meet him.

West Kowloon Cultural District board member and art collector Adrian Cheng Chi-kong threw a lavish dinner party at the Belmond Hotel Cipriani to honour Tsang and entertain guests from the art world, an event said to have cost HK\$7,000 per head.

"But I don't think about if my solo presentation in Venice will change my career," Tsang says. "Certainly there are a lot of key figures from the art world visiting Venice from all over the world and it's a great opportunity to show my art, but I don't want to waste time contemplating things that might or might not happen."

Tsang, Lee and Pak are among a young generation of Hong Kong artists who have established a following internationally, but Tsang says there is a lot more to Hong Kong art.

"I'm not certain what represents Hong Kong, or what being from Hong Kong means," he says.

Cultural infrastructure in the city has improved and offered opportunities for many young artists in their 20s, but more efforts are needed to give local artists the boost they deserve, he says.

"Hong Kong has produced a lot more artists in recent years, and perhaps in the future, when their works mature, there will be more opportunities for them," he says. "But whether you can succeed depends on the quality of your work, and of course, your luck."

The Venice Biennale runs until November 22. An exhibition of Tsang's work for the show will be staged in Hong Kong next year.

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as Endless possibilities await HK artist at Venice showpiece



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