

Interview: Lee Kit to Show All New Works at Venice Biennale

Language

English, Hong Kong



Courtesy Lee Kit and Shugo Arts

Lee Kit "Men look good here, with their suits on. It befits them." (2008-12) acrylic on fabric, sewing, dimensions variable.

by Zoe Li

Published: April 22, 2013

HONG KONG – A solo exhibition titled “You (you).” comprising of all new works by [Lee Kit](#) will be shown at the [Venice Biennale](#) 2013.

The Hong Kong artist, born in 1978, is known for subtle works that meditate on the everyday, using painting and ready-made objects in his installations, navigating the enigmatic zone between the public and the private.

Although Hong Kong does not have a national pavilion, the [Arts Development Council](#) (ADC) has been supporting and selecting Hong Kong artists to show at the [Venice Biennale](#) since 2001 and the exhibitions have come to be seen as representative of the city. Past artists include **anothermountainman**, **Amy Cheung**, **“Frog King” Kwok Mang Ho**, and **Pak Sheung Chuen**.

This year, ADC is working with [M+](#) to bring Lee’s work to Venice. The artist won the Art Futures Prize at the **Hong Kong Art Fair 2012** with his installation [“Something in My Hands”](#) and is now one of our most exhibited artists overseas.

After relocating to Taipei last year, Lee admits he has made some breakthroughs in his work, which we anticipate for his Venice show. “I feel like I have been saying the same sentence over and over, with just minor changes in my tone of voice,” says Lee. “This time I will keep my own tone of voice, but say something completely different.”

“You(you).” will be an installation with performative elements, ready-made objects, as well as works in video and sound. Through the recollection of personal moments the work reflects on the construction of memory, time, and place. “His personal memories are also the collective memory of Hong Kong people,” says co-curator **Yung Ma**.

We caught up with Lee Kit before he flew off to Venice to find out how Taipei has changed him, what exactly we’re going to see at the biennale, and how he thinks this show is no big deal.

Can you explain the title “You (you)”?

“You(You)” is about looking into a mirror. There is the “you” in front of the mirror and the “you” that is reflected. They are both the real you and both not the real you at the same time. Your actions, thoughts, words about others is just a reflection of yourself. If you call someone a bitch, you are the biggest bitch.

I always see meaning in mundane objects. The mirror is an ordinary object; it is something that we all look at at least once a day. You are in the mirror, but not entirely.

I’m trying to capture this feeling of existing. For example, sometimes you are alone at home, sitting at the dining table, that is the moment when you feel neither happy nor unhappy, neither empowered nor restless. In that moment I feel that I really exist. But I’m not making an existential statement either. That stuff is too big for me.

So what can we expect to see?

The space has two rooms next to a courtyard. I just bought one of those typical booths for security guards in Hong Kong and I’m going to put it in the courtyard. I can’t really explain why.

The whole thing will be an abstract living space. I’m going to put ready-made furnishings, typical of Hong Kong’s middle class. The room will be quite empty and you will have the feeling that something has taken place there recently. That something could be a small and domestic action, like someone just vacuumed.

It won’t be as subtle as my past works. I create work according to my emotional state. If there was a scale with “love” and “hate” at either end of the spectrum, my past works would always fall somewhere in the middle. But now, I want to create works that fall at either end of the scale.

Did moving to Taipei make you more emotional?

I moved to Taipei because Hong Kong made me angry all the time. The socio-political situation here makes me murderous. That anger can be confusing. I moved away so that I could gain some distance and clarity. Now I feel more focused and my emotions are more clearly defined.

I realised that I shouldn't be thinking about what makes up the Hong Kong identity. I should just let it be. It is like, if you are a man, why bother discussing the fact that you are a man? I'm very aware that my installation at Venice could be seen as "so Hong Kong" but actually I'm trying to avoid this "Hong Kong" label. What I'm trying to say doesn't just apply to Hong Kong after all.

It's hard to escape being seen as representing Hong Kong officially though.

Yes and I don't intend to escape it really.

Is it somewhat of a burden?

No it isn't, and I feel kind of sorry for the team as they have to deal with my stress-free attitude. But my approach to the Venice Biennale is that it is just another show. I am not doing it to compete for the prizes, otherwise I would have chosen my so-called best works and I would not have created this new work.

How has your creative process changed since moving to Taipei?

In Hong Kong I used to lock myself in my studio all the time. I felt that I needed to do that, because when I walked on the streets I was lost. In my studio, every action became an artistic statement. Even if I was cooking or cleaning, I was performing art, because I was aware that my lifestyle was against the grain in Hong Kong. I was inefficient but productive.

In Taipei, this disappeared. Now, when I'm cooking, I'm just cooking. It's no longer a statement. My life has normalized and I have learned to channel the tension to the right place. Making art no longer consumes my whole life, which is good as that was unhealthy.

Have you become less political then?

I feel that my art practice is very political. For example, the life that I used to live in my Hong Kong studio was overtly anti-social.

Some of my peers have jumped directly into the political milieu. Chow Chun Fai ran for a seat in a functional constituency last year, and Pak Sheung Chuen starting appearing on television in a program called "Make a Change." Even Wilson Shieh has become more political. The climate of the times has forced us to respond to our inner urge to get involved.

But I have decided to leave Hong Kong to gain clarity in my life. I see it like this: if you compare the man who is shouting and throwing stones at a rally to the man who is crouched in a corner, silent and unwilling to budge, the silent man is just as political as the loud one. They are using different modes of expression.

"You (you)" Lee Kit, June 1 to November 24, Castello 2126, Campo della Tana, Arsenale, www.labiennale.org