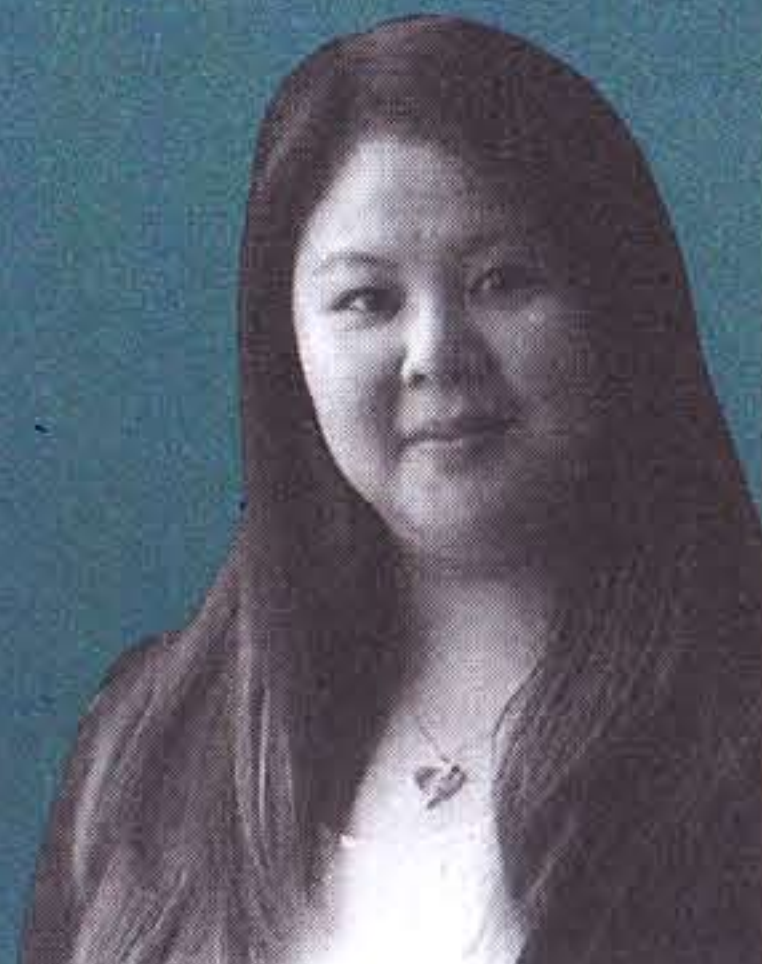


CULTURAL INDEX

The arts at a glance

BY  
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The first time I met Choy Chun Wei, he was about to head to Hong Kong's Art Basel 2014 for a solo showing with Wei-Ling Gallery — presenting a work named *The Human Landscape*, developed specifically for the fair. I remember how difficult it was to know where and how to begin deciphering the visually complex collage.

A conversation with gallery owner Lim Wei-Ling comes to mind: “With Chun Wei’s work, you can stare at it for days and still find something to process...”

Fast forward to last week at Wei-Ling Contemporary in The Gardens Mall, where Choy is having his sixth solo exhibition, *Tectonic Traces*. The same vibrant, textured and at times cacophonous visuals are still arresting at first glance. This time around, armed with a sense of familiarity and the realisation that Choy’s work is not only to be visually enjoyed from afar, but scrutinised up-close like a coded mind map for its subliminal messages, I find a new sense of clarity in the 11 artworks.

It might have something to do with the evolution of the artist’s creative process, as he admits, “In the past, I would be more impulsive and ... instinctive, but now I have sorted it out a bit more. I wanted to have categorisation and sub-themes in my editing...in order to expand the possibilities and capacity of the collage genre.”

Nonetheless, there is more than enough for the viewer to chew on. The message in *Tectonic Traces* is cohesive, yet each work stands alone, with its own struggle and sense of closure, even as the visual symbolism and patterns form an invisible thread that ties them together.

At their heart, the works are an expression of struggle — a central element in Choy’s art — and a response to the digitalised world that has fundamentally reshaped the DNA of our existence. He contends with these new external governing structures by first examining them, while critiquing the implications through a physical process.

“It is also about propaganda versus real facts, the corporate versus what is organic. We are now governed by structures — like Facebook and Google — which although they may not be exactly the same as corporations before, are still essentially the same. It is just more subtle, yet more effective,” he says.

However, he insists that what is intended is not condemnation, but a reflection and “processing” from the inside. Choy represents that contrast of external force and internal response through the materials and symbolism of each piece, from light and dark colours, to organic materials versus structured ones and in his signature typography.



Left: *City of Buttons*



*Forgotten Facts*



*Corporate Machine Age II*

# ARCHITECTURAL THOUGHTS

An artist’s physical reflection on today’s virtual reality



SAM FONG/THE EDGE

**Choy: In the past, I would be more impulsive and ... instinctive, but now I have sorted it out a bit more**

The simplest example is probably the one video installation in the show, which retains the characteristics of a collage, albeit with movement. Named *Draw Primitive*, the right half of the screen sees a loop of typography words Choy has put together to form sentences. On the left are the handwritten receipts he collected from his local mamak restaurant, much to the staff’s initial bewilderment. “It’s so simple, but I’m so drawn to it. They are not common anymore, these

handwritten receipts,” he says. They reflect his desire to “go back” — a broad term for a yearning that he does not elaborate on, but evoke the conflict he finds within the fast-paced world that seems to offer no respite.

This conflict is manifested in the symbolism in each piece. In *City of Buttons*, he deals with the relationship we have with electronics and gadgets, the “buttons” exemplifying how much our lives revolve around “clicking” on digital buttons. On the collage, they look like ripples that permeate the entire surface; with chosen bits of text like “zoom” and “take your supplements” highlighting how wired we are to technology. Interspersed with the circular patterns are square “ladders” or stacked frames, which can read like screens or, more abstractly, the idea of image and climbing to success.

In a similar visual piece, *Urban Noise: Corporate Ladders*, he uses numbering as a critique of how we are increasingly losing our individuality in a world of digital influence. Empty speech bubbles is another symbolism used to comment on communication and bombardment of media messages in today’s world.

In *Future Stars*, Choy addresses the culture of commodifying and commercialisation through football, an interest of his. Again, the numbers appear, with cut-outs of weight, height and other statistics found on packaging boxes. Slight-

ly different is *Functional Identity: Until Stock Last*, which contains abstract figurations labelled with what seem like paint names and their product codes.

Gradually, the underlying theme comes to the surface — while Choy’s works have few figurative elements, the inanimate reversely highlights the human factor at the centre of the artist’s works - the fading of the person and, in turn, repercussions on the concept of community.

Perhaps the least opaque is *Forgotten Facts*, which harks back to the style of his previous series. The large triptych contains personal information written by visitors to his booth at Art Basel Hong Kong, which he initially used to create a different work on the spot.

“The information is also facts and statistics — measurements, height, weight ... but there is a real contrast here, that is the sense of existence as a person, as an individual, despite the facts conveyed,” says Choy, who adds, “These are people whom I really met.”

***Tectonic Traces* is on until Nov 30 at Wei-Ling Contemporary, RT-1, 6th Floor, The Gardens Mall, Lingkaran Syed Putra, KL. Opening hours are 11am to 7pm (Tues-Sun). Call (03) 2282 8323 for more information.**