

“Yes, I admit. I’m wishing for pure emotions.”

Tseng Yu-Chin

Poet, writer and video-maker Tseng Yu-Chin, a leading figure on the emerging Taiwanese art scene, creates images that are at once poetic and disconcerting, where the innocence of childhood counters the assumptions of the adult gaze. Tseng re-examines moments of joy, sorrow and confusion – emotions that in a space somewhere between daydream and memory pervade his adult existence. From fugitive images (“actual feelings like dancing movement in my mind”) that he captures and brings to life in a form transcending specific recollection, Tseng Yu-Chin recreates a child’s world where time is permanently suspended. “I believe in bringing intuition into my creative process, the transfer of a cognitive intuition and processes to images onscreen. This is the most important part of my practice.” < <

Over the past few years Tseng has been prolific, producing an eloquent body of video work, creating stage designs, and publishing poems and a novel that have earned him several awards. In 2007 he represented Taiwan at *Documenta 12* in Kassel, where his works were acclaimed. Since the early *Who’s Listening?*, composed of five video segments created in 2003 and 2004, Tseng has worked almost exclusively with children – school kids ranging in age from five to twelve. “I like working with children,” says the artist, “they listen and respect, they’re simple and direct. With them there’s no second take. It’s all in the first reaction.” *Who’s Listening?* opens with a shock effect: one by one, a group of schoolchildren, boys and girls, have milk or yoghurt flung in their face. Ingenuously, the children go along with the artist’s game, staring at the camera as they wait to be splattered by the liquid – an experience that could be offensive but that makes most of them smile. In just a few seconds, we are shown a magnificent range of subtly suppressed emotions. First, there is the passive wait before the camera, vulnerability, the surprise and the shock of the liquid, and then the embarrassment as it drips down their faces, relief mixed with a certain uneasiness: sad smiles, nervous laughs, stifled sniggers. < <

In the chaos of existence, Tseng Yu-Chin has chosen to explore the innocence of early experience, when a child starts to leave one world and turn towards another, when the fusion of sensation and emotion triggers the process of “becoming-other” (Deleuze). In making *I Hate Assumption* (whose original title,

I despise presumptions. But if I could at the very beginning, perhaps I could save a few offered more insight into the subject of the work), Tseng filmed children getting ready for school, mouths open, eyes closed, heads flung back, riding like little sleepwalkers on the school bus. Tseng sets a scene without developing a narrative. The stories carried by his video works are open-ended. Closing one's eyes in the heat of a brilliant light whose intensity traverses the lowered eyelids, an enveloping light that comforts and numbs, is a way of abandoning oneself to a single instant, of suspending time in order to hold onto one moment, one sensation, one emotion. *I Hate Assumption* expresses regret. "Really – If I really could, if I closed my eyes at the beginning – Like a game of trust – Let it guide me – Let air, let body warmth, let sounds – Feel ... When I'm still clean... Really – If I really could – Perhaps, maybe – I can save something." < <

With each of his creations, Tseng revisits the emotional space of the work via literature, in the form of a number of poetic "artist's statements." These texts add another level of meaning to his vision. Is the child concealed behind the curtain in *Quietly, I Have Five Minutes* playing hide-and-seek, or is he simply trying to enjoy his candy in peace? This more "cinematic" work, Tseng explains, explores feelings of isolation and solitude, the sense of being invisible, as well as alluding to the work of one his favourite Chinese authors. *Quietly, I Have Five Minutes* contains the seeds of a reflection that Tseng has pursued in his recent creations, including a piece made during a residency at Location One, which features New York children hiding under their beds, where they will perhaps fall asleep unless someone comes looking for them. < <

LOUISE SIMARD

Following the Chinese convention, the artist's family name, Tseng, precedes his given name, Yu-Chin. Some of the remarks by Tseng Yu-Chin reported here were recorded during a work session I had with the artist on Thursday, February 21, 2008, at Location One in New York City (where over this past winter the artist has been filling an international residency made possible by a grant from Yageo Tech-Art); the remaining quotes come from an interview given by the artist to Ying Shang (see www.ontherundesign.com/Artists/Tsen_Yu-Chin1.htm). The poetic texts are excerpts from *Who's Listening?* and *I despise presumptions. But if I could at the very beginning, perhaps I could save a few*. The artist himself translated the original Mandarin texts into English.

**I despise presumptions. But if I could at the very beginning,
perhaps I could save a few**

I hate presumptions, really
About every aspect

Actually, I forced myself
What is there to be regretted? Yes, it's another equal sign.
Presumption and regret to me are equal, absolute.
Because I forced myself

There's no use to this word "regret."
Nonetheless, it's no use.
He can't change anything in the body. Cannot turn, cannot clean
Or is it the so-called wisdom?
The presuming tone always being shown as know-it-all
I don't know, but at last
I cannot presume
I wouldn't allow myself

But at that evening, that person's back, a few smells
The body warmth flew over
I feel pain. My skin stuck with the organs and it was painful.
Difficult to breathe smoothly

Really
If I really could, if I closed my eyes at the beginning
Like a game of trust
Let it guide me
Let air, let body warmth, let sounds
Feel
– Beginning, the so-called beginning
Is when things are in their most tortuous state
When I'm still clean, when everything about myself
When the body is still pure white
Really
If I really could
Perhaps, maybe
I can save something

...
At that evening, that person's back
A few snoring sounds
I see a white wall that appears to be grey due to darkness
Suddenly
I see myself in a moving bus

I'm sleeping with my eyes closed
Sounds passing through. Sun passing through. Air passing through



Born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1978.
Lives and works in Taipei.

Biobibliography

An asterisk (*) indicates a publication.

Principal solo exhibitions

- 2005 *Oxy – A Solo Exhibition by Tseng Yu-Chin*, IT Park, Taipei.
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei.

Principal group exhibitions

- 2007 *12th Biennial of Moving Images*, Centre pour l'image contemporaine Saint-Gervais, Geneva.*
Documenta 12, Aue Pavilion, Kassel.*
Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid : Nouveau cinéma et art contemporain, Paris, Berlin, Madrid.*
- 2006 *Parallel Realities: Asian Art Now*, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery, Blackburn.
- 2005 *3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial*, Fukuoka.*
10th Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards (IFVA), Hong Kong.*
Con-temporary citizens, Lan-Zhou Police Station, Taipei.
InDPanda International Short Film Festival, Hong Kong.*
- 2004 *CO4 Taiwan Avant-Garde Documenta II*, Taipei.
The New Identity Part 5: Tracing Self, Mitsubishi-Jisho Artium, Fukuoka.*
The Whimsical and the Fantastic: An On-line Exhibition of Taiwan's Media Artists, Taipei.
Taily High Film Festival, Taipei Film House, Taipei.
- 2003 *Random-ize Taipei International Video Art Show*, Eslite Art Space, Taipei.*



Program

Who's Listening? 1, 2003 7 min 55 s

I Hate Assumption, 2005 6 min 59 s

Who's Listening? 4, 2003 1 min 29 s

Quietly, I Have Five Minutes, 2006-2007 5 min 53 s

The works are screened one after the other in a program lasting a total of approximately 23 minutes, repeated continuously throughout the day.

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Photos: Cover: image taken from *I Hate Assumption, 2005* (with kind permission from the artist)

Inside: image taken from *Who's Listening? 1, 2003* (with kind permission from the artist)

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