

## WILSON SHIEH IN FIVE IMPERFECT FRAMES

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In this short essay I attempt to throw light on Wilson Shieh's artistic production by looking at it from five different points of view. I wish to see what dimensions of meaning I can uncover by trying five frames of reference against his work. Although some of the frames are related to each other, and I hope there will be an accumulation of insight along the way, I'm also hoping that the variety of the frames will serve to illuminate different aspects of his work. I'm not expecting that these five perspectives will even begin to exhaust interpretation of Shieh's art.

### The inventory

In recent years Shieh has often favoured an inventorizing mode in his art. Against a bare background with little or no indication of spatial depth, images are arranged diagrammatically across a surface. The neutral emptiness in which they are disposed simply serves to conceptually suture the various discrete images off from one another: there is no equivalence between positive and negative space, such as is often found in European modernist painting, nor do the intervening voids have any of the living resonance of the empty white spaces so characteristic of Chinese ink painting. A list-like additive arrangement is often favoured, with analogous images being disposed in linear series as if to invite us to compare and contrast. Difference is foregrounded by this strategy, and the meticulous recording of detail which Shieh offers gives us confidence that we are being presented with all the information we need for our work of comparative scrutiny.

Frequently the differences on display in Shieh's inventorizing works are discovered to be a matter of clothing, and thus are devalued in importance since dress is both literally something to do with surfaces rather than essence, and also in popular thinking is often considered as something superficial, a mere matter of passing fashion. Difference begins to collapse into sameness, being somehow devalued as consisting of little more than the assorted implements for a strategy of disguise or for projecting a borrowed allure. Bodies are unmasked behind or beside the clothes which are used to cover them, and dress is revealed as rhetoric, as a claim to glamour or power which the naked human form may be unable to sustain on its own. Sometimes a figure in underwear is included to aid with the process of distinguishing body and clothing, but on other occasions it is just a question of our comparing different outfits (as with *Four Seasons (Women)*, colour pencils on paper, 2010). In some works, for example *Four Seasons Summer* (ink and gouache on golden cardboard, 2007), transparency of dress helps aid the viewer's ability to discriminate between clothing and the body beneath it.

The theatricality or artificiality of fashion is further underlined in a work such as *Maggie Cheung's fitting room* (colour pencil and collage on cardboard, 2009) where the clothes are those of an actor, belonging to particular roles that she has played in well-known movies and thus not necessarily expressing any

truth about the person who wears them. An even further level of foregrounding of clothes is attained in a related work, *Maggie Cheung's fitting room (In the Mood for Love)* (colour pencil and collage on cardboard, 2009) since in that particular well-known Wong Kar-wai movie the Maggie Cheung character, Su Li-zhen, stands out for her constant changes of costume, and her wearing of elegant tailored dresses is only highlighted by the minor nature of the tasks she puts them on to perform.

The concern with changing appearances, and especially with the dress of media stars such as actors or singers (*Anita Mui in the 1980s*, colour pencil on cardboard, 2012, is a further example), ties in with contemporary preoccupations such as cosplay, a subcultural arena in which self-conscious play with the look of characters from mass-media narratives is also found. Amongst cosplay enthusiasts there is, as in Shieh's images, a great concern for accuracy of detail, and it is in dress above all else that a character is replicated, with exhaustive effort often being expended by the cosplayer in the preparation of their chosen character's costume. At the same time, though, Shieh's images also recall less explicitly contemporary practices, and particularly those to do with childhood. While children nowadays may be growing up in an almost wholly digital environment, those of us from earlier generations may be more likely to recall magazines which included diagrammatic representations of clothing items which the reader was invited to cut out and add onto a similar cut-out doll figure. Images such as *A woman in four seasons* (acrylic on canvas, 2010), which depicts a single female figure in underwear surrounded by a selection of alternative dress items to scale, particularly recall such childhood play items.

While such play with paper dolls and their array of alternative clothing might have been coded more as feminine, a sort of image-based equivalent to dressing up in adult clothing, to be observed by boys more than participated in, Shieh's inventory-like images can also recall more male-coded items from childhood. I am thinking of those sets of fact-based children's books which offered comprehensive item-by-item treatment of particular topics, and also of the collectable cards which were structured around the desire to complete a series. (1) In both play and in the classroom that fact-collecting approach to knowledge was often dominant, with its comforting illusion that one day you could have the whole set, that knowledge is a simple array of discrete facts that could, in principle, eventually be fully mastered.

While Shieh plays along with that search for completeness to some extent (for example by creating an image depicting in series all the British colonial governors of Hong Kong in *The twenty-eight British Hong Kong Governors*, colour pencil on cardboard, a set of four panels, 2012), in other cases the selection appears more personal and subjective, dependent on the particular perspective from which it is being assembled. This is the case for instance with *Taiwan popular singers that I knew during my childhood* (colour pencil on archival cardboard, 2011), where the selection of singers is reliant on the specifics of the artist's own biographical experience, and is not derived from some intrinsic taxonomic principle capable of organizing the entire field of popular singers in Taiwan. In this more subjective or biographic work childhood comes in directly through the content of the images, as the organizing vantage point of the data it contains, and not simply by means of the connotations of the list-like format of the images as in other works. An overtly biographic dimension of certain works was emphasized further when they were included in the show *Wilson Shieh ... Somebody* (Osage Kwun Tong, Hong Kong, 22 March – 22 April 2013), which was biographic in orientation at the curatorial level, and which because of its retrospective

nature – it looked back at Shieh’s artistic production from 2008 to 2012 – was also like many of the works it contained structured as an array of images.

By relying on the list or inventory as the ordering principle for his work Shieh seems at first to be allying himself with a Structuralist understanding, which seeks to uncover some underlying ordering principle behind a kinship structure or other cultural phenomenon. However, by pushing that organizing logic to its limits, or allowing through humour and irony some distance from the materials being visually organized, he ends up coming closer to a Post-Structuralist position, which also looks to a larger context to understand meaning, but sees that larger context as ultimately untotalizable, as never subject to closure. Shieh never openly deconstructs categories by revealing internal inconsistencies (unlike the famous taxonomy of animals quoted from Jorge Luis Borges in the Preface to Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* which includes such contradictory headings as ‘belonging to the Emperor’, ‘embalmed’, ‘tame’, sucking pigs’, ‘sirens’, ‘fabulous’, and ‘stray dogs’), nevertheless one can be left with the feeling that the inventory-drafting process has not succeeded in having the last word.

### Chineseness

Shieh’s earlier work was commonly characterized by commentators as ‘Chinese’ in style or medium, and more specifically his meticulous brushwork was often described as exemplifying a *gongbi* technique. Certainly his detailed and painstaking approach does link him to the more realist tendencies within the vast and diverse field of Chinese painting, rather than to the more summary and expressive *xieyi* mode which is commonly associated with the literati or gentleman-amateur tradition. Sometimes Shieh has been picked out as a poster boy for Chinese ink painting by those who wish to encourage revival of a medium which was once employed by many of the most advanced modernist artists in Hong Kong, and which is thought by some (in accordance with what can only be characterized as essentialist thinking) to somehow be more purely ‘Chinese’ than art produced by Chinese artists who employ media such as oil or acrylic. (2) Such a binary thinking concerning the artistic production of artists working in China (including Hong Kong) has been common for a long time, but it doesn’t really hold up to detailed scrutiny, and Shieh has confused and confounded those who wish to confine him with a label of ‘Chineseness’ by shifting in recent years towards a much less ethnically-coded style.

Indeed, many of his recent works can read as not just lacking in marked Chinese characteristics but as actively mobilizing ‘Western’ traits. (3) Whereas earlier works were characteristically paintings he now also produces many pencil drawings, and this helps signal a clear difference from his earlier style. The use of silk as a surface for painting, which was common in earlier works such as *Leaf-shaped plate in Ge glaze* (ink and watercolour on silk, 2002), has now largely given way to paper, cardboard or canvas, and the intimate scale of Shieh’s earlier works is now less the norm, with some pieces (for example *Eight modern Chinese political leaders in school*, colour pencil, crayon and collage on paper, 2012, a set of eight, each 220 by 75cm) being of a much larger size. While smaller pieces can still be produced, these might be found grouped together in some form of installation, a characteristically contemporary method of display not found in his earlier phase.

This shift from the Chinese brush and from silk feels more like a consciously chosen break with his earlier work than an organic evolution from it, as if a reversal of polarities has occurred, perhaps in response to criticism that his art was becoming trapped in a particular idiom, or in order to escape being typecast as a representative of 'Chinese' painting. Coloured pencils also enhance the association to childhood in his work, since that medium has a strong overtone of the classroom to it. A faux-naïve quality introduced at the level of the medium is further emphasized by the deliberately unsophisticated nature of the written inscriptions Shieh has taken to including in his images, an effect also found in certain works by David Hockney- see *We two boys together clinging* (1961) for instance.

Shieh has admiration for Chen Hongshou, a Chinese painter of the seventeenth century (1598-1652) who is both canonical and yet markedly eccentric, and that artist's highly individualistic approach to figure painting may be one of the points of reference for Shieh's own engagement with the human body, even in his more recent, less overtly Chinese work. More generally, Shieh may be inspired in his prioritization of dress over representation of the body behind it by the tendency in many Chinese brush paintings to deemphasize bodily mass in favour of drapery. (4) Such an openness to influence from the art of much earlier times seems much more common amongst artists with a background in Chinese painting media than those who work only in 'Western' media – the latter often being locked into a 'contemporary' frame of discursive reference which disregards history as a resource. (5)

'Chineseness' has appeared in Shieh's works as a subject matter reference as well as a stylistic influence. His 2002 exhibition *An Alternative Antiquity* was entirely given over to images in which figures engage playfully with valorized collectible Chinese items such as a Yixing teapot. This kind of distanced and self-conscious relation to tradition, however, is something quite different from an attempt to place oneself seamlessly as a successor to it. In addition, the irreverence involved in using a piece of ceramic art as an umbrella or a paddle boat, as Shieh's figures do, has more in common with Duchamp's suggestion that a Rembrandt could be used as an ironing board than anything in pre-modern Chinese artistic practice. While not as directly iconoclastic of tradition as Ai Weiwei's destruction of a piece of antique Chinese pottery, documented in his photographic piece *Dropping a Han dynasty urn* (1995), it does parallel Ai's repainting of Neolithic vases in bright colours with modern industrial paints.

In any case such an overtly Chinese theme as *An Alternative Antiquity* enjoyed is not paralleled in Shieh's more recent work. The closest Shieh has come in the last few years to direct engagement with China's artistic past is perhaps his contribution to the *Market Forces* exhibition (Osage Kwun Tong, Hong Kong, 16 May – 23 August 2012) where he set up a studio in the gallery itself which mimicked the working space of a nineteenth-century Canton export artist. This was not the first time he has introduced such a performative dimension to his work – again taking a step away from a 'pure' engagement with traditional Chinese media towards the dominant genres of contemporary art practice – and the paintings which resulted from the time he spent in this improvised studio space were installed as if they were goods for sale. While we can take Shieh's intervention in *Market Forces* as an engagement of some kind with the history of Chinese art, it is clearly not one which serves to reinforce the idea of that art as a unified tradition. Cantonese export art, in which Shieh had long had an interest, has tended to be excluded from essentialist narratives of Chinese art on account of its address to foreign patrons and

its hybridity of style. Foregrounding it serves to work against the idea of Chinese art as an autonomous tradition, and celebrates impurity and cultural mixing.

As with Macau-based artist Konstantin Bessmertny, who also has an interest in Qing dynasty trade art and the early development of oil painting in southern China, part of the attraction for Shieh may be a perceived similarity between the market-orientated era in which that art was made and the present one, which has seen Hong Kong emerge as one of the world's three most significant sites for art auction, and one of the three chosen locations for the Art Basel fair. Even if Shieh doesn't specifically mimic the style of China trade painting (unlike Bessmertny in works such as *China Trade: Vista da Praia Grande*, 2009, which was featured in his exhibition *China Trade!*, held at Amelia Johnson Contemporary, Hong Kong, 15 May – 6 June 2009), he seems aware that – as with his earlier counterparts in Canton and Macau – he is making art on China's southern fringes for sale to buyers who are often from elsewhere in the world.

### **Hong Kong identity**

One reason for Shieh's move away from an overt Chineseness in his recent art is surely that the language of Chinese ink painting is too tied up with national cultural narratives. When an artist uses it they almost inevitably find they are speaking themselves as 'Chinese', and that is a major reason why Chinese painting media has become less popular amongst experimental artists in Hong Kong since the 1980s, an era in which many artists have felt a need to express local, Hong Kong-centred meanings. Shieh's more recent works have become more directly concerned with Hong Kong issues than his earlier work was, and he has found a way to mobilize Hong Kong signifiers through an engagement with both the city's architecture and its popular culture, such as its music or film.

Architecture has a particular importance in Shieh's art. He himself studied architecture briefly between 1989 and 1990 before changing his course to begin art training at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, so there is a personal investment with it and knowledge about it that may not be shared by other local artists. That said though, it is important to realize that many Hong Kong artists have engaged with architecture as an available local signifier. Just as Shieh has engaged with Hong Kong skyscrapers in works such as *Victoria city (left piece)* (ink and watercolour on silk, 2006) and *Famous modern architecture of Hong Kong before 1997* (ink and gouache on paper, 2011), so for instance has photographer So Hing Keung in images such as *Central, Hong Kong* (1999). Both these artists are taking a critical stance towards the forest of tall buildings which has sprung up on the Hong Kong skyline in recent years, and (more importantly, perhaps) to the ideology of material progress they serve to carry. So's strategy is one of direct attack, with a rage entering the normally detached world of the photographic image in the form of scratches to the negative which read as an assault on the buildings shown. Shieh by contrast takes a more playful approach, subverting the familiar towering structures by turning them into items of clothing for a sequence of female figures.

This conflation of architecture with clothing (already mentioned as another of Shieh's interests) has parallels with Kacey Wong's performances and photographic images from 2000 onwards in which he wears a skyscraper 'costume' in various settings both in Hong Kong and (later) other locations. (6)

Specific to Shieh's work though is the introduction of a gender binary, with the phallic male rhetoric of the skyscrapers being undermined by a feminization, a not dissimilar strategy to that employed by Shanghai artist Liu Jianhua in his ceramic installation *Inverted Reflection in Water* (2002-3), which melts the phallic forms of the tall buildings of the Pudong skyline by representing their reflections in the Huangpu river.(7)

Shanghai and Hong Kong are both engaged in a competition(which also involves other cities such as Dubai) over size of buildings, where taller is taken as more modern or better, and in both cases the emphasis on upward-thrusting contemporaneity is meant to divert our attention away from something else. A backward-turning historical gaze is eschewed because in Mainland China that could lead to consideration of the deaths of 4 June 1989 and other traumatic moments of the nation's modern history, and in Hong Kong it could bring up reminders of the colonial era which state ideology wishes to mark a move beyond. For this reason architecture and public space have become key political battlegrounds in post-colonial Hong Kong (where lack of true democracy devalues legislative politics in favour of direct action on the street), with the collusion of government and big business in creating an amnesiac cityscape through demolition and new construction being subject to frequent popular attack. Heritage structures, even those with colonial era associations such as Queen's Pier, have been valorized as signifiers of local collective memory, and large-scale protests have occurred when they have been threatened with destruction. (8)Shieh, who lived in a pre-war low-rise townhouse in Kennedy Town during his childhood years (and also went to a school housed in a building of historical status, King's College), has recalled his memory of that time in one of the biographic wall boards he included in *Wilson Shieh ... Sumbody*. By focusing on this structure associated with his childhood Shieh allies himself with the pervasive local turn towards heritage architecture as a privileged site for the construction of a sense of Hong Kong identity, revealing his concern with memory as having more than a purely biographic dimension.

While architecture works well as a subject for an artist concerned to engage with Hong Kong issues, giving both something local to identify with in a positive way and something alienating to attack, film, music and popular culture in general also provide many opportunities for play with local signification, and Shieh often makes use of this opportunity.*Anita Mui in the 1980s* features a figure involved with both film and popular music, while *A Better Tomorrow* (colour pencil, paper cutout collage on cardboard, 2009) – one of a sequence of images concerning actor Chow Yun-fat - features film alone, recalling Chow's most well-known Hong Kong movie. Both these works have a focus on clothing and its transformations, with the use of collaged paper figures of Chow in *A Better Tomorrow* recalling the paper doll source for Shieh's work mentioned earlier. That image also brings the topic of architecture into playonce more - the relative spatial compactness of Hong Kong allows reference to particular buildings as iconic personalities that will be personally familiar to local people in a way that may not be paralleled elsewhere. Music and film are again both referenced in *Angkor Quartet* (ink, watercolour and gouache on dyed silk, triptych, 2004), which depicts film director Wong Kar-wai and stars from his movie *In the Mood for Love* as a band playing the song 'Quisas, quisas, quisas'. The connection between that song and Hong Kong is of course that the Nat King Cole version of it is featured prominently in the

soundtrack of that film, and this provides evidence of the difficulty of constructing a sense of Hong Kong identity, the need to rely on materials borrowed from elsewhere in order to fabricate it. (9)

More precise in its belonging to a particular moment than most high art, simply because its obsolescence makes it work as a marker of a specific time, popular culture can thus evoke memory in a stronger way. This may be a reason why Shieh and various other Hong Kong artists engage with it, but film's prominence as a dimension of the city's culture, both locally and as it is represented overseas, may partly account for the particular attention it has received from artists. Ho Sin Tung, for instance, devoted a whole show to film by fabricating material from a fake film festival in *Hong Kong inter vivos Film Festival* (Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, 13 March - 10 April 2012), while Chow Chun Fai has made a great many paintings which deal with scenes from films and their Chinese and English subtitles.

## Politics

Although a concern with Hong Kong architecture allows comment on issues that are politically contentious, on occasion Shieh has addressed Hong Kong political issues more directly, for example when in an image displayed in his studio at Fotan, Hong Kong on 7, 8, 14 and 15 January 2012 during the Fotanian 2012 Open Studios he commented on an incident where then Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Stephen Lam was pelted with dog biscuits when arriving to attend a forum concerning the Government's plans to scrap Legislative Council by-elections. Shieh's approach to that subject was humorous, focusing on the topic of dogs rather than analyzing the specific political issues at stake in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's attempt to roll back the already limited democratic freedoms in Hong Kong to prevent another by-election as de facto referendum from occurring. Such emphasis on the comic suggests a parallel with Oscar Ho's *Stories around town* series of images which were executed around the 1997 handover period, and of course the dog biscuit throwing incident is evidence that comic or carnivalesque strategies are common in Hong Kong's political arena itself, and not just in artistic representations of it.

Many artists in Hong Kong have produced works which deal with current political events and personalities, especially in recent years, and there has often been an attempt to actively engage with social movements and moments of activism, rather than simply to comment on politics from within the established institutional spaces of the art world. (10) Such attempts to engage openly with the domain of the political, Shieh's included, face a difficulty that art produced to respond to a particular local situation can become illegible both to those from elsewhere not aware of the specifics of Hong Kong's public debate and even to many local people once an individual event or issue has faded from memory. There is no perfect solution to this problem since a step away from topicality towards a more widely applicable statement can risk blunting the critical edge of a work. Picasso's *Guernica*, for instance, comes across more as a generalized anti-war statement than an effective indictment of Spanish fascism.

Hong Kong politics often finds it difficult to articulate a clear positive vision, in part because the commonly-available forms in which post-colonial identity are conceived are national ones, and thus belong to a narrative of Chineseness. Such a nationalistic narrative is one which the state is clearly in a

privileged place to claim ownership of and utilize against the more fragile narratives that wish to emphasize local autonomy. It is for this reason that memory plays such a significant part in narratives of Hong Kong-ness, and there is so often a looking back to the past for symbolic resources of identity, whether that may be a colonial era building under threat of demolition or a colonial era flag (such as have been carried by protestors at many recent demonstrations). A danger in this is that one could be left in a position not too far from that of nostalgia, a potentially infantilizing frame of mind which might allow some critique of the present but not offer a full-blown viable alternative to the status quo.

### **Sexuality and gender issues**

That a conscious concern with childhood is one of the hallmarks of Shieh's art has already been suggested by discussion of his works which allude to paper doll images, and one can point to other examples which not only deal with childhood but which can be described as consciously infantilizing in tone. One would be his image of Hong Kong artists inscribed with the title *Hong Kong artists infant house* (a further example of his use of the inventorizing mode produced in 2012 as part of his contribution to the *Market Forces* exhibition), which depicts each artist as if they were a naked baby, albeit with a portrait likeness of their grown up face.(11)

In works by Shieh which approach the issue of sexuality or the relations between men and women there is also often, at least implicitly, a juvenile or pre-pubescent emphasis. One of the wall boards for *Wilson Shieh ... Sumbody* notes that his interest in the female body, such a major theme of his art, began with his fascination with his primary school sports teacher at age 7, and many of the female protagonists in his work are girls rather than women. School uniform is often being worn as an indicator of this, as for instance in *No boys at girls' school* (ink, watercolour and gouache on dyed silk, 2007). In other cases where the figures appear more adult their interaction, while connoting sexual encounter, seems to partake of a fetishistic displacement or remain within the arena of foreplay. One example would be *Double Bass* (woodblock print on paper, 2009, from the 'Music Families' series), which offers a distant echo of a more overtly erotic image, Balthus's *The guitar lesson* (oil on canvas, 1934). Balthus is one of the artists referenced in Shieh's *World artists from A to Z* (acrylic on canvas, 2009), represented by one of his sexualized images of young girls. Alongside him Shieh includes Yoshitomo Nara, whose work also frequently features a young female protagonist, and Allen Jones, represented by his *Chair* (1969). Jones's leather-clad woman-as-chair has multiple milder echoes in Shieh's work, such as in his 'Duo Clubs' series of 2002 which is composed of images of figures seated on figures such as *Sailor Club* (ink and gouache on golden cardboard, 2002).

In both Jones's *Chair* and Balthus's *The guitar lesson* it is a female figure which plays the submissive role, but in Shieh's work women are most commonly the dominant gender. Images of male submissiveness to dominatrix figures appear in paintings such as *Butterfly the ninja* (acrylic on canvas, 2008, from the 'Lady Killers' series), which shows a small male figure trussed up at the woman's feet. Immobilized, this male victim's diminutive scale when compared to that of the woman connotes not just lack of power but



also immaturity. We are with the theme of infantilization again: he is like a baby trapped in swaddling clothes, or almost (the title, inscribed on the image, encourages this reading) like an insect in a cocoon.

Female and male energies are rarely if even in balance in Shieh's art – clearly his goal is not to offer some utopian vision of a possible world where gender inequality has been vanquished and yin and yang dance together in dynamic harmony. While one might want to see his reversal of the characteristic inequalities of the two genders as in some sense in alliance with a feminist politics, as for instance when the phallic male skyscraper forms in *Famous modern architecture of Hong Kong before 1997* are reduced to clothes worn by women, even those demure and elegant figures seem unlikely models for a liberatory feminist discourse, let alone such effortlessly dominant women as Butterfly, or the violent schoolgirls that feature in *No boys at girls' school*, with its castration-invoking theme of male beheading. If anything it is female power, not its male equivalent, which is being anatomized and thus to some degree tempered by the numerous works which analyze the rhetoric of female dress, although some images, such as *A Man in Four Seasons* (acrylic on canvas, 2010), do undress male subjects too.

Such schoolgirl assassins as those depicted in *No boys at girls' school* recall the character Gogo Yubari from Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* or (to trace that American movie back to its sources) the many sword-wielding girls to be found in Japanese manga and anime, further evidence of Shieh's interest in popular culture, including film. Mobilizing the stereotypes of such popular cultural sources to expose them to view is already a kind of work on them, but Shieh is not choosing to push his play with such popular cultural material to a point that could be taken as openly deconstructive of its codes, as sometimes happens - for instance - in the work of Japanese artist Aida Makoto (see for example his *Harakiri school girls*, acrylic on holographic film and print on transparency film, 2002). Although gender relations may ultimately be the biggest topic that Shieh's work addresses, he holds back from offering any final grand statement about it. We certainly have some sense that there is a problem in that field of human relations, but not of where to look for any solution.

Notes:

1) A concern with childhood and its specific visual culture can also be found in Ho Sin Tung's engagement with the boardgame, Cluedo. For the *Market Forces* exhibition in 2012 she presented *Kluedo*, a Hong Kong art world-centred parody of that well-known game. Shieh's concern with inventorizing also has parallels in Ho's art, as well as in certain paintings by Macau-based artist KonstantinBessmertny, such as *China Trade: Vista da Praia Grande*, 2009.

2) An ink-centred view of Chinese art has been actively promoted, especially in Hong Kong, by The Ink Society, an organization founded in 2003 whose board of directors includes many figures who have been prominent in collecting or dealing in art in that medium. One exhibition in which such an ink-centred view of Chinese art was proposed was *New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond*, guest curated by art dealer Alice King at the Hong Kong Museum of Art from 22 August to 26 October 2008. Shieh was featured in that show alongside artists such as Wucius Wong, LuiShou-kwan and GuWenda.

3) In his 'Music Families' series Shieh makes use of another markedly non-Chinese source, Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, collaborating with a Japanese print master based in Kyoto, Shoichi Kitamura.

4) I discuss attitudes to the body in Chinese art in chapter 3 of David Clarke, *Chinese art and its encounter with the world*, Hong Kong University Press, 2011.

5) For a subtle analysis of possible Chinese sources for Shieh's art within a valuable overall study of his art, see Tina Pang Yee-wan, 'Ladykillers and Music Families: A Hong Kong Art Story and the Story of Wilson Shieh', *Muse*, January 2009, p31-42.

6) Kacey Wong's skyscraper costume works are comprehensively showcased in his book *Drift City 10 Years 2000-2010* (Asia One Books, Hong Kong, 2010). I discuss the engagement of Hong Kong artists with architecture in David Clarke, *Hong Kong Art: Culture and Decolonization* (Reaktion Books, London, 2001, p152-167). The same study also includes some discussion of artistic response to fashion design (p167-175). In both cases I focus on a period prior to that in which Shieh became involved with those topics.

7) On Liu Jianhua's *Inverted Reflection in Water* see David Clarke, *Water and art: A cross-cultural study of water as subject and medium in modern and contemporary artistic practice*, London, Reaktion Books, 2010, p237-9. Inversion of the Shanghai skyline also occurs in Yang Zhenzhong's photographic work, *Light and easy* (2002).

8) See David Clarke, 'Contested sites: Hong Kong's built environment in the post-colonial era', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, p357-377, 2007.

9) The mention of Angkor is also a reference to *In the Mood for Love* (something of a touchstone for Shieh it seems) since the movie ends with Chow Mo-wan, the Tony Leung character, making a trip there. Latin music also appears in other works by Shieh from the 'Nanyang – Ocean of the South' series to which *Angkor Quartet* belongs, such as *Four Swimmers*, *Tristeza* (watercolour and gouache on dyed silk, 2004), even without a filmic source to occasion it. This can be explained as due to a popularity of such music in an earlier Hong Kong era, which both Wong Kar-wai and Shieh are trying to specify. On the 'Nanyang – Ocean of the South' series, which deals with Chinese cultural connections with South East Asia (again a theme treated in *In the Mood for Love*), see Bridget Goodbody, 'Wilson Shieh: Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps', *Art Asia Pacific*, Fall 2005, p63-67. On fabrication as a strategy in Hong Kong art, see my *Hong Kong art: culture and decolonization*, especially chapter 2.

10) For discussion of political interventions by Hong Kong artists see Leung Po-shan, 'Nation-state, locality and the marketplace: the multiple art worlds in Hong Kong', and Lau Kin Wah, 'Politics of a Bio. Hong Kong art from dissemination to usage', in Chang Tsong-Zung and Serenella Ciclitira, *Hong Kong eye: Hong Kong contemporary art*, Milan, Skira, 2012, p31-43 and p45-62 respectively, as well as Wen Yau, 'An awakening lingers at the periphery: the strangeness of Hong Kong's art and social actions', and Leung Po-shan, 'Between art and politics: Chow Chun Fai's graceful defeat', in *Leap*, April 2013, issue 145, p123-131 and p132-135 respectively.

11) In addition to depicting adult artists as children Shieh also notes (in the text included in an image concerning Michelangelo's *Bacchus* in his 16 panel biographic work *The Cultural Life of Wilson Shieh*, colour pencil and collage on cardboard, 2010) that he has a preference for studying 'works of art by artists at their young age'. *Eight modern Chinese political leaders in school* shares with *Hong Kong artists infant house* a concern with the childhood of adult figures, although here there is no infantilizing in the depiction, and it is only in the texts accompanying each image (written as if a first person narrative) that we learn about their schooldays.

The version of the text given here is the author's pre-publication version of the essay published as 'Wilson Shieh in Five Imperfect Frames', in Isabel Ching and Wilson Shieh (eds.), *Wilson Shieh ... Sumbody*, Hong Kong, Osage, 2013, p195-206. Please cite from the published version, which is accompanied by illustrations and a Chinese translation (p208-214).

