

## Pak Sheung Chuen: In Search of a Glyph (for Hong Kong)

Yam Lau

Number 122, Spring 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/91358ac>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

### ISSN

0821-9222 (print)

1923-2551 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Lau, Y. (2019). Review of [Pak Sheung Chuen: In Search of a Glyph (for Hong Kong)]. *Espace*, (122), 90–92.

bouteille/organe semble s'autosuffire. Déposée directement au sol, cette sculpture révèle aussi un intérieur et un extérieur grâce au ruban bleu qui la traverse, une forme/organe à la fois ouverte et fermée.

Dans cette exposition de Dufaux, même s'il ne délaisse pas tout à fait l'usage de l'électronique, il mise davantage sur la sensualité. Celle-ci est marquée par l'utilisation de différentes textures, tissus et matières, tant organiques qu'artificiels. Le tapis de poils longs donne envie de prendre place à travers les sculptures qui sont elles-mêmes liées entre elles. Les paillettes de bronze de la plateforme qui supporte les *Singularités* suscitent la curiosité puisqu'il est possible d'y passer la main pour modifier leur direction et leur couleur. L'artiste intègre également des sabliers de miel qui ajoutent de la volupté à l'ensemble. Cette matière, produite d'une collaboration insecte et plante, permet de mesurer le temps, un temps liquide et sucré qui s'écoule en un mince filet.

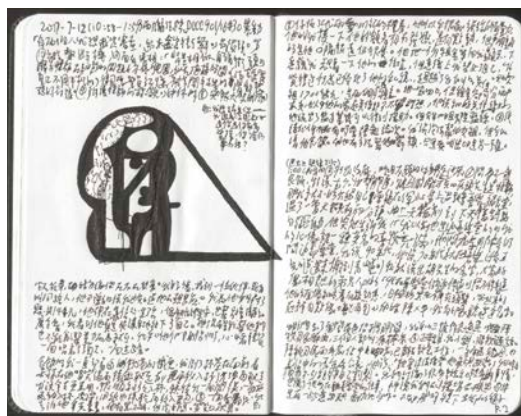
Ce qu'il faut retenir de *Détections de contours et surfaces délicieuses* est qu'à travers ce nouveau corpus, l'artiste matérialise ce que représente la collaboration croisée entre deux espèces, il évoque la façon avec laquelle des entités, avec leurs propres spécificités, peuvent cohabiter, se contaminer positivement, s'hybrider, passer de l'une à l'autre, s'imbriquer, s'associer. Une réflexion individuelle qui doit se poursuivre et nourrir ce qui se crée en parallèle (et inversement) avec le duo Wendt/Dufaux.

Manon Tourigny est commissaire et auteure. Elle s'intéresse à la vidéo, à la photographie, à la performance et aux pratiques artistiques qui s'inscrivent dans l'espace public. Elle a rédigé de nombreux articles et textes pour des revues spécialisées en plus d'écrire des opuscles pour différents organismes artistiques. Depuis plus de 15 ans, elle s'implique activement dans le milieu des arts visuels, notamment à VIVA! art action et au RCAAQ où elle siège au sein des conseils d'administration. Elle travaille actuellement au Centre CLARK.

## Pak Sheung Chuen: In Search of a Glyph (for Hong Kong)

Yam Lau

**STREET, COURT AND PRISON**  
**GB AGENCY**  
**PARIS**  
**DECEMBER 1, 2018 –**  
**JANUARY 12, 2019**



Recently, I made a change to my professional biography, restating my place of birth not as Hong Kong (hereafter HK), but as British Hong Kong. This change is intended to signal my solidarity with the citizens of HK, who in recent years have suffered a significant loss of cultural, political, and economic autonomy, owing to political interference from the mainland Chinese government. In 2014 and 2016, deep social and political discontent erupted into the two largest grassroots protests in the history of HK: The Umbrella Movement and the Mong Kok Civic Unrest. It is in the aftermath of these failed public protests, and in response to the mood of despair and apathy that ensued, that HK artist Pak Sheung Chuen developed his current body of work, which was first exhibited as *Street, Court and Prison* at Para-site in HK, then recently reshowed at the GB Agency in Paris.

Pak became known to the HK population around 2004, primarily through a weekly newspaper column he authored in which he reported on his playful exploration of the city through a range of performative activities. Another well-known work of this period consists of solitary walks in foreign cities. Upon arrival, Pak would buy one of those bound, book-form maps of the city that tourists often purchase. Opening the book to a random page, he would then use the gutter that ran between pages as the axis along which his amble would unfold. The solitary walks he would undertake as he traversed these virtual gutters were intended to deliver new vectors of engagement with the unfamiliar landscape. The artist would report the various sights and encounters en route with photography and textual commentary. Especially



touching are the off-handed quotations from the Bible that Pak, then a devout Christian, would intersperse throughout his reports. I feel these solitary walks are pilgrimages of sorts. They are simultaneously a form of prayer and a voluntary personal trial in which the artist entrusts himself to the world unconditionally, fully aware of the potential perils he may encounter. A similar sense of spiritual longing and ambition to situate the minutiae of personal experience within a more encompassing political and spiritual frame is apparent in Pak's exhibition at GB Agency.

Deeply affected by the aforementioned crises in HK, Pak went through a prolonged period of self-doubt and apathy. I imagine he might have felt that his past work, once so in-sync with the temperament of the city, had become irrelevant when viewed against the background of a much darker and oppressive socio-political climate. Then one day, almost by chance, he walked into a courtroom and attended the trial case of an HK activist, someone who had participated in the recent civic protest. What he saw on that day prompted Pak to start regularly attending such trials during which he would also draw and take notes. The court transcriptions, notes, drawings (doodles), subsequent research, correspondence with imprisoned activists and street actions provided the material for the four interrelated sections of the exhibition. Respectively, the four sections are: *Seals (enlarged doodle)*, *Nightmare Wallpaper*, *Sacred Objects* and *Manuscripts*. The work comprising *Seals* and *Nightmare Wallpaper* was developed from the notebook drawings. In *Seals*, the doodles are enlarged into architecturally scaled emblems or totems. In *Nightmare Wallpaper*, they are multiplied and tiled into

wallpaper patterns that function as a part of the architectural environment. *Sacred Objects* and *Manuscripts* are composed from miscellaneous items (correspondence between Pak and imprisoned activists, a brick picked up from the street of Mong Kok Civic Unrest, etc.). Every item is indexed to a factual event via a didactic panel, which includes the appropriate court case number. Taken together, the four sections compose a scene where factual events and evidentiary materials are entangled with and transformed by artistic manoeuvres. It is a scene of refined sentiment and foreboding. In order to convey some of the power and import of this complex work I will focus on *Seals (enlarged doodle)*.

*Seals* are enlarged from doodles made during court sessions. The doodles are "automatic" and thus oblique responses to the court proceedings. The resultant *Seals* are "figurative" in the sense that each seems to be composed of myriad iconographic and symbolic traits precipitated over the course of the sessions. Pak usually provides reference points in the notebook to anchor these configurations in the content of the sessions. There is something urgent and powerful in these graphic forms, even if they do not directly address immediate socio-political realities. The *Seals* emerge as a sort of alternate "record" of the court hearings. But these doodles and the accompanying notes serve less to transcribe the sessions than to capture their fundamental affect. They are not pinned to the time from which they arose and they report nothing of urgent consequence about it. They "seal" the moods of the moment. I regard them as glyphs, signs unhinged from the intentions

that originally animated them, but acquiring, in that very departure, a capacity to sublimate the tumultuous period they depict into a series of archetypes, transmuting that tumult into mysterious totemic forms. *Seals* crystalizes a terrifying time in HK's history. At once provoking and resisting interpretation, it conveys a deep sense of emotional and physical unease.

Is Pak not performing something like the role of a shamanistic scribe here, channelling and scripting from the court hearing a sort of mythological account of the present? Yes, but the channelling runs both ways. The *Seals* re-embeds Pak's spiritual quest in the destiny of contemporary HK. This desire to root private spiritual aspirations in the particularities of a specific time and place is central to both Pak's practice and his way of life. Here, the scene is an entanglement of a present time with its mythology.

In HK Taoist monks commonly observe a practice of channelling spiritual energy through writing automatic, quasi-calligraphic glyphs. Undertaken in a trance-like state, the glyphs are only partially legible. This act of channelling through writing/drawing has the dual purpose of at once summoning the spirit and sealing its energy in the gestural

glyphs. Inscribed on paper, these glyphs are strategically placed in a household as magical amulets. I believe a sort of parallel can be drawn between this cultural practice and Pak's *Seals*.

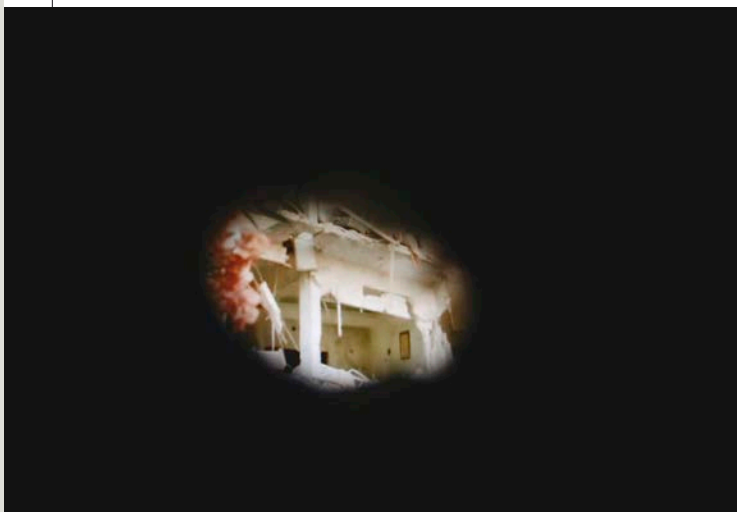
To conclude, when Pak's doodles/glyphs were enlarged into wall scale graphics at GB Agency, the totemic, "extra-aesthetic" dimension of the drawings became even more evident. Are they not amulets of sorts? If so, what sort of spell will they cast on the Parisian viewer?

Born in British Hong Kong, Yam Lau is an artist and writer based in Toronto, where he is currently an Associate Professor at York University. Lau's creative work explores new expressions and qualities of space, time and the image. His recent works use video and computer-generated animation to create spaces in varied dimensionalities and perspectives. A recipient of awards from the arts councils of Canada, Ontario and Toronto, Lau has exhibited widely in Canada, mainland China and Europe.

## Leila Zelli. *Terrain de jeux*

Sarah Ève Tousignant

**GALERIE DE L'UQAM  
MONTRÉAL  
11 JANVIER –  
23 FÉVRIER 2019**



À travers son exposition *Leila Zelli. Terrain de jeux*, présentée à la Galerie de l'UQAM, l'artiste montre le quotidien de Syriens vivant en zones de conflits armés. La guerre opposant l'Iran et l'Irak, entre 1980 et 1988, a constitué la toile de fond où Zelli, née à Téhéran, a grandi. Dans sa pratique, elle questionne la relation que le public entretient avec les images diffusées par les médias. À l'ère des fausses nouvelles, elle souhaite pointer nos interprétations fragmentées d'une même réalité et démontrer la subjectivité inhérente au regard dans les processus de création, de diffusion et de réception des images. En proposant de saisissantes juxtapositions de scènes de la vie quotidienne et d'environnements marqués par la guerre, elle révèle que la beauté et l'horreur peuvent coexister en un même lieu.

L'exposition se déploie dans deux salles contiguës reliées par un mur troué, comme criblé de balles. L'environnement sonore transforme la galerie en une cour de récréation où des enfants jouent au ballon. La première pièce propose une série d'installations vidéo couvrant le mur du sol au plafond. À l'avant-plan, on voit, battant au vent, deux toiles noires fixées à une clôture grillagée. Elles sont perforées, comme transpercées par des plombs. Au loin, des bâtiments aux allures de bunkers s'érigent contre l'horizon à la lisière du ciel et d'une plaine désertique. L'endroit apparaît comme désolé et rappelle un chantier de construction. Pourtant, il s'agit d'un terrain de jeux au camp de réfugiés Zaatari, en Jordanie, où des jeunes filles jouent au football.

L'exposition est composée d'extraits de reportages produits par de grands médias et disponibles sur Youtube. Ces vidéos sont dépouillées de leur fonction première – éducative, informative, etc. – et de leur