

The Human Body: Measure and Norms

Curatorial Statement

“My body: it is the place without recourse to which I am condemned.”

- Michel Foucault, *The Utopian Body* (1966)

The human body does not only reflect a reality: its symbolic and imaginative dimensions are also even more substantial. When dealing with measurement and norms, it appears rapidly that the body is easily reduced to its own image, to an object of survey and comparison. Statistical evaluation of human activities, eye tracking, the graphic representation of presumed “deviant” behaviour... all these new kinds of knowledge are constituting new forms of power that scrutinize, anticipate and potentially govern how we act, see and think. This exhibition highlights and questions the social constraints imposed on the body as a physical, social and political entity, by playing on scales and masses, lines and space.

It deals with the body as a marker of territories, both physical and psychic, as the ultimate reference from which to define oneself and the others, and from which an idea of normality can take shape.

Beyond this, it explores the possibilities of freeing the body from these representations to bypass norms, and, eventually, to move away from anthropocentrism.

Tackling the topic of the body requires physical involvement of the audience. At the entrance, visitors are given white laboratory coats of a Hong Kong standard size: an immediate way to compare oneself with the average individual from the territory.

Spanning video and photography documentations and sheet of performance from past performances, performance artist Isaac Chong Wai’s works engage in interaction of human scales and bodies, and highlight the subjectivity of norms and standards where the body is rendered as marker of physical territories. In sketches and drawings by late artist Antonio Mak, the human figure unfolds as biomorphic forms where objects or other bodies can merge, imposing disorder on the observer’s gaze. Clémence Torres’ sculpture installation fits to the artist’s body measurements and to which the visitors must adapt, challenge the legitimacy of all norms.

Probing into one’s perception of the human body, Otto Li Tin Lun’s engraving on optical glass, LED unit and soundtrack features an engraving of the body structure mimicking x-ray imagery. The work calls into question the methods through which a normality can be defined with an increased use of technologies. Ho Sin Tung’s portraits of dancers with multiple limbs defy common conceptions of physical abnormalities, hinting at a creature not conforming to this world. Angela Su’s video narrative explores social and political norms as evidenced in individual control through psychiatry, while her hair embroidery suggests a morphing of the human body and other forms that transgresses all norms and opens paths to new dimensions. Ho Siu Kee’s video documented performance featuring wearable sculptures, and his installation and performance with sand raise the viewers’ awareness of the limitations of the body to free oneself from them.

The exhibition implies an evolution from the simple awareness of the limits of physical body to the body as a tool for setting norms and founding discriminations. It finishes with an attempt to transgress these norms and, convening spirituality, to find a form of freedom beyond the body’s limitations.

“The Human Body: Measure and Norms” is part II of a Hong Kong trilogy: bestiary, body & soul.